

LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 13 : 2 February 2013

ISSN 1930-2940

Managing Editor: M. S. Thirumalai, Ph.D.

Editors: B. Mallikarjun, Ph.D.

Sam Mohanlal, Ph.D.

B. A. Sharada, Ph.D.

A. R. Fatihi, Ph.D.

Lakhan Gusain, Ph.D.

Jennifer Marie Bayer, Ph.D.

S. M. Ravichandran, Ph.D.

G. Baskaran, Ph.D.

L. Ramamoorthy, Ph.D.

Assistant Managing Editor: Swarna Thirumalai, M.A.

Sociocultural and Ethical Concerns about SMS Discourse in Pakistan

Malik Naseer Hussain, Ph.D. Scholar

Abstract

The paper examines the sociocultural and ethical concerns of society about the negative and obnoxious SMS discourse in Pakistan. Parents, teachers, elderly people, the government, and media critics are worried about the unchecked negative uses of SMS discourse. Therefore, this study analyses the actual interpersonal SMS data of Pakistani youth.

The study uses both qualitative and quantitative methods and data. For qualitative analysis, the study takes 30 examples of SMS in the negative category from the 5000 SMS-Corpus of Pakistani texters. The qualitative results show that text messages transmitted by the young texters contain the socioculturally and ethically inappropriate material like sexual, filthy, and cheating SMS. The quantitative analysis is based on the opinions of 500 texters about the negative sociocultural and ethical impacts of SMS discourse. The results of this analysis also correspond with the qualitative data as 63% texters agree that some text messages conflict with sociocultural and ethical norms and values of Pakistan.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

13 : 1 February 2013

Malik Naseer Hussain, Ph.D. Scholar

Sociocultural and Ethical Concerns about SMS Discourse in Pakistan

In conclusion, the study relates that Pakistani texters are not the only youth on the globe who have been accused of obnoxious discourses. Under the universal impact of the globalized world, this is a universal complaint against the youth over the world that they use obnoxious and immoral discourses during their electronic communication. Therefore, to be good at character is not only the Islamic or Pakistani culture, rather this is the human culture as human beings are the crown of creatures, and the most intelligent beings on the globe. So we as educated, cultured, and intelligent beings should abstain from debasing our discourses through the immoral, sexual, dirty, deceitful and obnoxious talk.

Keywords: *SMS, text messages, discourse, communication, ethics, culture, Pakistan, youth*

Introduction

Short Message Service (SMS) of mobile phones has become a common tool of communication over the world. This service is universally used for relationship building and social interactions. Therefore, there is a common observation of the SMS discourse analysts that SMS discourse covers a wide range of communicative themes, and the themes are both positive and negative in nature.

In this regard, Hoflich and Gebhardt (2005) state that cell phone and SMS are flirt-machines. They state that these modes of communication are used for bullying, harassment, trapping opposite sex, teasing, spam, and invitation for friendship. Byrne & Findlay (2004) also maintain that cell phones and SMS are used for initiating romantic relationships and dating. While comparing the preference for SMS and telephone calls in males and females in initiating romantic relationships, they state that females are more likely to initiate the first move in romantic relationships using text messaging.

Concerning the various themes covered in SMS discourse, David Crystal (2008), in his seminal work on text messages titled "*Txtng: The Gr8 Db8*" wraps up the issue in a nutshell that relationships can be fostered as well as disturbed by using this service. According to him, where SMS discourse encompasses positive category messages at large, by no means all social messages are positive. He asserts that the "system is just as able to send insults, put-downs, accusations, and libels, and a great deal of concern has been expressed about the way texting has been used as a mechanism of bullying among young people" (p. 106).

Regarding the sociocultural and ethical concerns about SMS discourse in Pakistan, there is a general perception in the Pakistani society and especially among the elderly people

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

13 : 1 February 2013

Malik Naseer Hussain, Ph.D. Scholar

Sociocultural and Ethical Concerns about SMS Discourse in Pakistan

that SMS communication is negatively affecting the social, cultural, ethical and religious values of Pakistani society. This perception is so strong in Pakistan that the researcher of this study was advised during his PhD study by the Board of Advanced Studies and Research of his parent university that “*while making linguistic analysis of SMS in Pakistan the researcher should correlate the same with the ethical and cultural values*”. This concern about SMS discourse is found in many sections of the society in Pakistan.

In this perspective, Javid, Malik, and Gujjar (2011) assert in their research paper that mobile phone culture has affected almost every field of life and its effects are deep, multidimensional and multifarious. They claim that this magical device has completely mesmerized and hypnotized our young generation, and it has become an essential part of modern life by decreasing distances and increasing communication. They further claim that this device has done the work which was not even accomplished by great leaders and has caused the close relations of people. Comparing the positive and negative impacts of mobile phone on the learning of university level students, they conclude that this device has both positive and negative impacts on students. Therefore, they suggest and advise the university students to be sensible and careful in its use, so that with its wise use they may improve their education and construct a better future for themselves.

Javed Chaudhry, a renowned columnist and journalist in Pakistan, in a newspaper article titled “*is se pehle keh*” (The Daily Express, November 22, 2011) narrates a pathetic and heart touching story of the harmful impacts of mobile phone and internet on the young generation. He emphasizes that the pornographic sites on the internet, and the spread of the dirty material through mobile phone, is a big social issue of Pakistan. He commends the decision of Pakistan Telecommunication Authority to block those SMS which contain unethical words commonly used in SMS. He claims that he himself receives hundreds and thousands of such dirty and unethical SMS on daily bases. The numbers of obnoxious SMS given by him are an alarm for the deteriorating sociocultural and ethical trends of the society, in the backdrop of the speedy increase of modern communication technologies.

Some other Pakistani journalists and media critics have also shown their concerns about the hazards of the modern technological electronic modes of communication. Orya Maqbool Jan, another prominent columnist, in his newspaper article titled “*aik dharna – nafrat, ta’sab k khilaaf*” (The Daily Express, April 14, 2012) expresses his grief over the

violence spread in society through mobile phones, SMS messages, and social websites on the internet. Ali Moeen Nawasih, a young and fresh journalist, in his newspaper article titled “*SMS malumaat ka mo 'sar zaria—magar*” (The Daily Jang, February 2, 2012) states that SMS is a big source of information and communication but it is being used negatively in many ways. He laments on the negative uses of this mode of communication and emphasizes on the need to create awareness among masses to use this communicative tool sensibly.

In the context of the harmful impacts of mobile phone on the youth, the Provincial Assembly of the Punjab also passed a resolution, banning the use of mobile phones in all the schools and colleges of the province. The resolution was moved on January 3, 2012 by Raheela Khadim Hussain, an MPA (member provincial assembly) from Lahore, and was passed unanimously in the House. The said MPA maintained in the favour of the resolution that students keep themselves busy in texting during classes and hence they do not concentrate on their studies. Commenting on this decision, Sabir Shah (The Daily Jang, January 6, 2012) presented a very comprehensive and compact report on the harmful uses of mobile phones in schools in many countries of the world, and consequently the decisions of various governments over the globe to ban this service in educational institutes.

In short, the sociocultural and ethical aspects of the use of mobile phones, SMS, and internet have got attention of the masses. Parents, teachers, researchers, media critics, and governments are worried about the unchecked negative uses of these modern means of communication by the youth. SMS, being the most available, common, and economical source of communication in Pakistan, is creating unbelievable hazards for the sociocultural and ethical norms of the society. Therefore, the sociocultural and ethical aspects of SMS have been analyzed and highlighted in this paper.

Method

The present study involves both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Therefore both qualitative and quantitative data have been analysed. The first part of the study is the qualitative analysis. In this part, the qualitative analysis is made on the actual text messages collected from Pakistani texters. The focused analysis has been made on 30 SMS purposely selected from the SMS-Corpus of 5000 text messages (see Table 1). The said corpus of 5000 SMS was primarily prepared by the researcher for his PhD research, and is based on the actual interpersonal SMS communication of Pakistani youth, as more than 90% SMS were

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

13 : 1 February 2013

Malik Naseer Hussain, Ph.D. Scholar

Sociocultural and Ethical Concerns about SMS Discourse in Pakistan

collected from the youth aged between 11 to 30 years. This corpus of 5000 text messages provides the SMS source for this study.

The second part of the study is the quantitative analysis. In this part, the analysis is mainly based on the opinions of young texters themselves about SMS discourse from the sociocultural and ethical perspectives. The quantitative data for this part has been collected from 500 texters through a questionnaire. Out of 500 respondents of this questionnaire, 92.6% were aged between 11 to 30 years, and 88% of the total 500 were students. Hence, these responses may be well claimed to be representative of the Pakistani youth. The actual detailed questionnaire was designed for the PhD research of the researcher. In that questionnaire, a question was purposely included for the data collection of this paper. The said question is close-ended and deals with the sociocultural and ethical negative impacts of text messages (see Table 2). The question has been analysed in the quantitative analysis.

Results

As the study uses two types of data, and two approaches of data analysis, so the results are sub-divided into two parts. The first part presents the analysis of qualitative data whereas the second part presents the quantitative data analysis. Now in the next two sections, the results of both qualitative and quantitative analyses are separately presented.

Qualitative Analysis

Firstly, the study analyses the qualitative data of actual text messages taken from SMS-Corpus of 5000 text messages, originally compiled by the researcher for his PhD study. In the following table 30 examples of socioculturally and ethically negative SMS from SMS-Corpus have been presented to give a glimpse of the socioculturally and ethically negative uses of SMS in Pakistan. The researcher removed four extremely obnoxious SMS from the next table (examples 9, 25, 27, and 28). Even then, some SMS in the table may be offending to readers, but to support the argument with data it was needed to quote them.

Table 1

Examples of Socioculturally and Ethically Negative SMS from SMS-Corpus

Example No.	SMS No. in Corpus	Actual SMS from SMS-Corpus	Category of SMS
1.	146	Hey! I saw you in uni.. can we talk??	Sexual discourse
2.	154	I love u too anyways whoz this???	Sexual discourse

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

13 : 1 February 2013

Malik Naseer Hussain, Ph.D. Scholar

Sociocultural and Ethical Concerns about SMS Discourse in Pakistan

3.	160	aik assignment meray liye bhe chaap do yar	Cheating SMS
4.	165	Yr proxy laga dena	Cheating SMS
5.	167	GIRL FRIEND MSNG u.	Sexual discourse
6.	199	LPC, kamine.	Foul discourse
7.	253	O bhai, kdhr ha. Jaldi B.B.A point ponch. pundi hai. Hurry up.	Sexual discourse
8.	295	I mean ypu with <i>NAME</i> . How could steal my bf?	Sexual discourse
9.	369	<i>[extremely obnoxious SMS]</i>	Foul discourse
10.	617	Jaldi aa idhar, bachi ki jan chord y....	Sexual discourse
11.	626	Haha..... Yara sir ki portable hard drive sy sir k samny nikala or sir ko pata hi nai chala :))	Cheating SMS
12.	642	M srroy 4 disturbing 4 2 times ap k number pe galti se cl chali gai wase ak bt kaho?	Sexual discourse
13.	661	Oh acha..itna asan nai khana mjhe;-)	Sexual discourse
14.	721	Larki; Jan mujhe aise propose kro jaise aaj tak kisi ne nah kia ho Larka: Kamini kuti zaleel I love u, muj se shadi kar ke muje tabah kar de manhoos maari!	Foul discourse
15.	1228	Apjo koi bhi ho plz mere is num pe 20rps send kr do	Cheating/ begging SMS
16.	1354	Cme gjr LPC.	Foul discourse
17.	1391	Kuttey fone kyn nahin utha tah??	Foul discourse
18.	1402	Oye dallay tu kab tak aye ga??	Foul discourse
19.	1406	You son of a bitch just go to hell I really don't need you. You girls are like trains one goes and after a while another come.	Foul discourse
20.	1412	Oye harami sun meri baat....mai ney aik bchi pasahe hai kasmay!!!	Foul/sexual discourse
21.	1417	kal bunk krna hai. <i>NAME</i> ka period nhe atnd krna.	Cheating SMS
22.	1451	Yaar I was on phutta whole day. Any test for 2morrow. Aur ajj vo ai thi?	Cheating SMS
23.	1625	A Shazia@love jan *1*1* <i>PHONE-NUMBER</i> *50#	Cheating SMS
24.	1705	Gadhi kidr mar gai hai? ☺	Foul discourse
25.	1724	<i>[extremely obnoxious SMS]</i>	Foul discourse
26.	2098	O! harami khan hai. Ya nein reply fast.	Foul discourse
27.	2100	<i>[extremely obnoxious SMS]</i>	Foul discourse
28.	4563	<i>[extremely obnoxious SMS]</i>	Foul discourse
29.	4826	Kuttay kia hall hey!!! Sorry Dog!	Foul discourse
30.	4855	Us bhen chod ko samjhaha do warna mujhe samjhana aata hey	Foul discourse

Table 1 shows the negative and obnoxious uses of SMS by youth in Pakistan. Text messages in both Urdu and English languages have been given in the table. The given SMS have not been romanized, translated into English, and normalized in Standard English or Urdu since a person knowing Urdu and English languages can well understand them in their actual form. Moreover, there are some very hideous messages that their further elaboration, normalization, or translation may be disgusting for readers. Even some SMS in the category of “foul discourse” may still be abhorring and repulsive to the readers in sociocultural and ethical perspective.

The text messages in the table have been categorized into three broader categories that are “sexual discourse”, “cheating SMS”, and “foul discourse”. The sexual text messages are those where texters are discussing some sexual or romantic issue. In the cheating category there are text messages which involve some kind of cheating. In the category of foul discourse there are text messages where the obnoxious and dirty language has been used.

The text messages in the positive categories have not been given in the table as this study is about the negative aspects of SMS in Pakistan. No doubt, in SMS-Corpus of 5000 text messages compiled by the researcher, SMS in the positive categories were much more in comparison but those messages are not the goal of the study. On the whole, if any SMS corpus of Pakistani texters is analysed for various themes, most of the text messages will fall under the positive categories, but the present data exposes that the negative category SMS are like a black spot on the total body of SMS data of Pakistani youth.

Quantitative Analysis

The second part of the study is to analyze the quantitative data regarding the sociocultural and ethical concerns about SMS discourse in Pakistan. For this purpose the opinions of 500 texters were obtained through a questionnaire. The results of the analysis are given as under.

The analysis in this section has been made to determine from the opinions of young texters themselves whether SMS discourse in Pakistan is negatively affecting the social, cultural, ethical and religious values of Pakistani society. The question regarding this aspect of the awareness of the texters was a close-ended question with three options i.e. YES, NO and UNCERTAIN. The results of the responses are offered as under.

Table 2
Socioculturally and Ethically Negative Impacts of Text Messages

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	315	63.00%
No	93	18.60%
Uncertain	83	16.60%
Response not given	9	1.80%
TOTAL	500	100.00%

Table 2 shows that a major portion of respondents, that is 315 (63.00%) out of 500, reflects that SMS communication has negative impacts on the sociocultural and ethical values of Pakistani society. The responses opposing the majority opinion were only 93 (18.60%). These results correspond to the general opinion of the people of Pakistan about the negative sociocultural and ethical impacts of SMS mode of communication. The results are more significant because they are based on the data provided by the young texters themselves. This data shows that Pakistani texters themselves feel and admit that SMS discourse is violating the sociocultural and ethical norms of the society.

Discussion

Every nation, every country, and every religion proclaims and keeps a specific culture, and that culture becomes their identification. Pakistan is a Muslim country by its name (Islamic Republic of Pakistan) and character. It has preserved the Muslim culture for decades. For this reason, the free transmission of sexual, unethical, immoral, and filthy material on the mobile networks does not suit the culture of a Muslim country.

Pakistani culture, if seen in its ideological spirit, is indeed the Islamic culture and the nation needs to preserve it for the coming generations. About the distinctive culture of Pakistan as a Muslim state, the father of the nation, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jihhah once said to Mahatama Gandhi:

We maintain that Muslims and Hindus are two major nations by any definition or test as a nation. We are a nation of a hundred million, and what is more, we are a nation with our own distinctive culture and civilization, language and literature, art and architecture, names and nomenclature, sense of values and proportion, legal laws and moral codes, customs and calendar, history and traditions, aptitudes and ambitions: in short, we have our own distinctive outlook on life and of life. (Bolitho, 1954, p.149)

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

13 : 1 February 2013

Malik Naseer Hussain, Ph.D. Scholar

Sociocultural and Ethical Concerns about SMS Discourse in Pakistan

As seen by Jinnah, Pakistan was carved out of Indian sub-continent as a laboratory for Islam. This was proclaimed by Jinnah in his 1946 speech to the students of Islamia College Peshawar. He had then said that we do not demand Pakistan simply to have a piece of land but we want a laboratory where we could experiment on Islamic principles. But, in reality, the present Pakistani generation is incessantly drifting away from this marked standpoint of the Quaid, and is losing its stranglehold from the religion, its culture, and ethics.

If we study the Islamic culture, it is based on the teachings of the Holy Quran and the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet. It is against all kind of meanness, sexual perversity, and use of indecent and foul language. Moreover, these ethics are not only the part of Islamic culture; on a broader canvas, no civilized society does allow its citizens to be mean and vulgar. According to C. S. Lewis (1952), the decency in behaviour is not just the law of any religion or nation; rather it is the law of nature. But the problem with the human beings is that they do not stick to this law of nature. This failure to stick with the law of nature has taken humans away from the sense of real right and wrong, and in turn they devise their own personal and individual rights and wrong which only suit them. Ultimately, this phenomenon is disturbing the very fabric of human societies, and Pakistan is no exception to it.

This phenomenon of the personal right and wrong in the presence of modern communication technologies has got a multifold significance, as the new communication technologies like SMS are the entry and exit gates for such behaviours. In the case of SMS, on the one hand there is very positive use of this gadget in the form of verses from the Holy Quran, Hadith, good quotes, and pieces of advice, but on the other hand SMS discourse is filled with dirty jokes and immoral and unethical text messages. Here, all the people of Pakistan must remember that the Islamic culture does not allow any such material and it is the decline of the national as well as human image.

The analysis of the data presented in this study shows that the modern communication technologies like mobile phone text messages are violating the norms of sociocultural and ethical values of this country. Free-sex activities, flirts, cheating, teasing, trapping opposite sex, and foul talk through electronic modes of communication does not suit the image of Pakistan as an Islamic country. To the one hand side Pakistani youth are so religious that they burst in aggression and get inflamed when any blasphemous remarks about the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) are seen on the electronic media, but on the other hand they themselves

use the same media for their foul and filthy discourse. Is that not against the Sunnah, traditions and teachings of Prophet (PBUH)?

As a Muslim country, Pakistan should not be a country where free-sex activities, flirts, and foul discourses are commonly transmitted by youth through the electronic modes of communication. Our youth has to be considerate that their communication on the electronic mediums is the reflection of their culture and value system. The text messages related to romance, sex, cheating, and foul discourse as found in SMS-Corpus and shown in this study, are proofs that the sociocultural and ethical concerns of parents, teachers, researchers, and media critics about SMS discourse are justified.

Moreover, the discourse of any nation is representative of the value system of the nation. If the interpersonal communication of the youth of Pakistan contains the material related to free-sex and romance, cheating, and foul and filthy talk, it means that the value system of the educated youth of Pakistan at the social, cultural and ethical levels is at fault. There is no second opinion on the theory that the language and discourse of any nation present the culture and norms of the society. If the discourse is filthy and obnoxious, there is no doubt that the people who produce and transmit that discourse have filth in their hearts and minds.

In the end, it is also needed to state that Pakistani texters are not the only youth on the globe who have been accused of such obnoxious discourses. Under the universal impact of the globalized world, this is a universal complaint against the youth over the world that they use obnoxious and immoral discourses during their online or electronic communication. To be good at character is not only the Muslim or Islamic culture; this is actually the human culture which should be promoted by the youth anywhere in the world.

Finally, the present study is not just confined to analyzing the sociocultural and ethical aspects of SMS discourse. This study claims that human discourses represent the human cultures. SMS as well as other modes of modern online-electronic communication are the representative of the cultures of the people who produce these discourses, so we as educated and cultured human beings should abstain from corrupting and debasing our discourses through the immoral, sexual, foul, dirty, deceitful and obnoxious talk.

References

Bolitho, H. (1954). *Jinnah: Creator of Pakistan*. London: John Murray.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

13 : 1 February 2013

Malik Naseer Hussain, Ph.D. Scholar

Sociocultural and Ethical Concerns about SMS Discourse in Pakistan

- Byrne, R., & Findlay, B. (2004). Preference for SMS in initiating romantic relationships. *Australian Journal of Emerging Technologies and Society*, 2(1), 48-61. Retrieved from <http://www.swinburne.edu.au/hosting/ijets/journal/V2N1/pdf/V2N1-4-Byrne.pdf>
- Chaudhry, J. (2011, November 22). Is se pehle keh. *The Daily Express*. Retrieved from http://www.express.com.pk/epaper/PoPupwindow.aspx?newsID=1101383168&Issue=NP_LHE&Date=20111122
- Crystal, D. (2008b). *Txtng: The gr8 db8*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Hoflich, J. R., & Gebhardt, J. (2005). Changing cultures of written communication: Letter – E-mail – SMS. In R. Harper, L. Palen, & A. Taylor (Eds.), *The inside text: Social, cultural and design perspectives on SMS* (pp. 9-31). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer.
- Jan, O. M. (2012, April 14). Aik dharna – nafrat, ta'sab k khilaaf. *The Daily Express*. Retrieved from http://www.express.com.pk/epaper/PoPupwindow.aspx?newsID=1101498138&Issue=NP_LHE&Date=20120414
- Javid, M., Malik, M. A., & Gujjar, A. A. (2011). Mobile phone culture and its psychological impacts on students' learning at the university level. *Language in India*, 11 (2 February 2011), 415-422. Retrieved from <http://www.languageinindia.com/feb2011/mobilegujjar.pdf>
- Lewis, S.C. (1952). Mere Christianity. Retrieved from http://lib.ru/LEWISCL/mere_engl.txt
- Nawazish, A. M. (2012, February 2). SMS malumaat ka mo'sar zaria – magar". *The Daily Jang*. Retrieved from <http://e.jang.com.pk/pic.asp?npic=02-02-2012/Pindi/images/76.gif>
- Shah, S. (2012, January 6). Skoolon main mobile phone: Dunia bhar main tulba aur asatza k darmian aankh macholi. *The Daily Jang*, p.7. Retrieved from <http://e.jang.com.pk/01-06-2012/pindi/pic.asp?picname=520.gif>
- Note:** *The data in the paper is based on the author's PhD dissertation submitted to International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan*
-

Malik Naseer Hussain, Ph.D. Scholar
Department of English
International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan
maliknaseerhussain@yahoo.com

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
13 : 1 February 2013

Malik Naseer Hussain, Ph.D. Scholar
Sociocultural and Ethical Concerns about SMS Discourse in Pakistan