

RESISTANCE AND REINFORCEMENT: A FEMINIST CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF HASHTAGS AND DIGITAL CAMPAIGNS

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Abstract

This paper aims to develop a critical understanding of digital media in Pakistan and its contributions to the creation, reproduction, and reinforcement, as well as subversion, of gendered stereotypical identities through hashtag campaigns. Based on the analytical benefits of feminist critical discourse analysis provided by Lazar (2007), the current paper will explore the discursive means of digital campaigns to emphasize the discourses of femininity, masculinity, and gendered power relations. Twitter (X) and Instagram tweets were chosen by latent content analysis and analyzed in more detail by means of the ideological framing, linguistics, and intertextual analysis. The findings of the paper bring out the issue of a perennial conflict between feminist and antifeminist ideologies of description. Feminist hashtags support body autonomy, female agency, and gender-neutral performances, while counter-hashtags positively reinforce patriarchal standards by means of moral control and naturalization of masculine dominance. The paper argues that digital spaces act as a larger social structure whereby language is both reproductive and resistant to gender norms and values.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, hashtags have evolved into discursive tools with strong capabilities to shape ideological tussles in digitally mediated spaces, form collective identities, and coordinate popular opinion. Hashtags are symbolic summaries of complex socio-political conversations within such platforms as Twitter/X and Instagram, which enable networked publics to unite around shared grievances, experiences, and political positions (Bonilla and Rosa, 2015). Hashtags are not just technical tags, but they structure the visibility of issues, disseminate narratives, and provide a way of speaking and challenging the discursive. Papacharissi (2015) argues that hashtags on social media form so-called affective publics, in which

the mechanisms of political participation, emotional display, and communication methods converge to create networked discussions of shared concerns. Through this, hashtag campaigns indicate discursive spaces that are not only negotiated in terms of identities and ideologies but also

power relations but also the technological properties of social media.

Gender politics has become one of the most contentious aspects in the larger digital communication transition. Live debates about women's rights, gender equality, and cultural norms are being hosted on social media. The examples of hashtag campaigns like #AuratMarch

and #MeraJismMeriMarzi in Pakistan and the opposing hashtags protecting the traditional values prove that digital discourse is now a location of disagreements on femininity, masculinity, religion, nationalism, and morality (Batool & Malik, 2021). These conflicts over the internet do not exist in isolation as far as the greater institutions of society are concerned. Instead, they are influenced by long-held patriarchal values, socio-religious ideologies, and political rhetoric, which shape the manner in which gender identities are perceived and managed within Pakistani society. Consequently, digital platforms both constitute the feminist articulation space and the space of the reinstatement of patriarchal power through discursive resistance.

Hashtag activism has gained a lot of attention in the international scholarship on contemporary feminist movements. Research on such movements as #MeToo, Black Lives Matter, and other online movements demonstrates that marginalized communities can use the digital platform to disrupt hegemonic discourse, build collective awareness, and organize political action (Khan et al., 2025). Through digital platforms, people have a chance to talk publicly about their discrimination, harassment, and violence experiences to turn their personal stories into political demands. Online activism can assist in creating feminist counter-publics that disrupt institutional silence and patriarchal power structures through this process. Hashtags are a tool of collective storytelling, voice amplification, and solidarity among physically remote groups, where feminism is concerned (Mendes et al., 2019).

Although the body of research has continued to grow regarding hashtag activism, a lot of it is Western-centric. Such studies often prioritize measures such as virility, participation, and network connectedness, whereas little attention is paid to the linguistic and ideological aspects of online debate. Consequently, little attention has been paid to how gender meanings are discursively constructed in hashtag campaigns, especially in non-Western socio-cultural societies. Historians have started to understand that digital feminist action is affected by local political histories,

cultural accounts, and social inequalities, suggesting that assessment through Western paradigms might not help identify the most important contextual aspects.

The dynamics of online backlash and digital feminism are an emerging study in Pakistan. Naeem (2021) explains that the use of social media by feminist movements such as the Aurat March has been instrumental in defying the patriarchal discourse and demanding autonomy of the body, equal pay in the workplace, and legal rights. Equally, as seen by Shah and Jamil (2022), feminist hashtag campaigns often provoke a strong backlash in the digital space, where activists are claimed to spread Western values or weaken religious and cultural traditions. Through these discussions, it can be seen that online feminist action in Pakistan is empowering and contradictory ideologically. However, most past studies tend to concentrate on the social trends or patterns of online participation as opposed to examining the discursive processes of how gender stereotypes are produced, reproduced, and challenged in these discourses.

The dynamism of these dynamics requires analytic methods where language is perceived as a very important factor in the process of constructing social meaning. Gender stereotypes are not only held personally, but they are also socially constructed representations, based on communicative practices. The Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) discussed discourse as a form of social practice that replicates and/or signifies power relations within the society (Risman, 2004). Through language, linguistic tools such as lexical choice, metaphor, modality, and framing can normalize inequities and make ideological beliefs appear rational. Van Dijk (1998) emphasized that discourse plays a significant role in perpetuating a sense of dominance since it influences the process of portraying social groupings, categorizing them, and evaluating them in social communication. Gender representations are often portrayed as inferior, emotional, or morally controlled objects that support masculine authority as reasonable and acceptable in gender contexts.

Whereas CDA provides useful instruments for the analysis of the relation between language and

power, feminist scholars argue that the issue of gender requires more analytical coverage. Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) is an extension of CDA since it focuses on patriarchy as a form of structural system being applied in discourse (Lazar, n.d.). FCDA stresses the fact that language is not neutral but socially rooted in the gendered power relationships that predetermine communication of identities and social roles. FCDA seeks to determine the ideological mechanisms that ensure and accept gender inequalities by exploring the ways speech constitutes femininity and masculinity. This is of particular use when assessing digital conditions when short textual forms, including hashtags, compress complex ideological positions into symbolic representations.

Although there is a growing trend in the application of FCDA to media and political communication research, little empirical investigation into activism through hashtags in Pakistan has been made using the framework. When studying Global South feminism, contextual analysis gains even greater significance when it is conducted. Critics like Mohanty (2003) have criticized the Western feminist discourse for homogenizing women's experience in the Global South without considering the differences in history and culture that define gender relations across cultures. According to the de-colonial theorists, including Lugones (2007), colonial rule imposed rigid gender structures that have continued to be reflected in the institutions of contemporary society. These strategies suggest that feminist talk can never be perceived through the universal constructs but must be reviewed in terms of the political, cultural, and historical contexts through which it is produced.

The gender conflicts in Pakistan are closely intertwined with the national identity, religion, and postcolonial cultural politics. The feminist activities are often depicted by critics as an alien or Western influence that is undermining the local culture and morals. These charges reflect more general concerns about cultural authenticity and national sovereignty in the postcolonial cultures. Consequently, the issue of digital hashtag disagreements is not only about gender equality

but also entails the clash of cultural meaning, ideological legitimacy, and political power. The virality of feminist hashtags such as #MeraJismMeriMarzi reflects how the worldwide discourse of bodily autonomy is localized in the socio-religious settings. Banet-Weiser (2018) posits that modern feminism often operates in the context of so-called popular feminism, where feminist concepts receive wide publicity and provoke backlash and criticism.

The digital arena in Pakistan, therefore, is a hybrid discursive space where global feminist discourse clashes with local discourses constituted by religion, nationalism, and patriarchal values. Such dynamics reveal the need to carry out studies that examine not only the existence of feminist activity on the Internet but also the discursive practices that create and challenge gender meanings. Such a study is especially good to use for hashtag campaigns since they reduce ideological thoughts into symbolic words that can be distributed far and wide through digital networks. In these attempts, linguistic decisions, rhetorical presentations, and intertextual allusions all aid in the creation of gendered meanings that resonate with popular perception and discourse in society.

Extrapolating on these concerns, this research paper examines how certain Pakistani social media hashtag campaigns form, reproduce, and disrupt gender norms in the online conversation. The paper relies on the theory of gender performativity introduced by Judith Butler and the Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis by defining hashtags as a recurrent discursive exercise that enacts and regulates gender identities. The theory that Butler develops offers a theoretical way of appreciating how gender norms are constructed through repetition and social practice, but FCDA offers analytical resources when studying how speech reproduces or challenges patriarchal power dynamics. The research methodology employs qualitative content analysis, which enables analyzing the postings connected with significant hashtag campaigns in a systematic manner and thoroughly evaluates the language techniques, ideological framing, and power relations in an online discussion. The paper is based on a theoretical and methodological approach to

examining the role of digital discourse in perpetuating patriarchal expectations and in making spaces of feminist resistance in the Pakistani socio-cultural context.

Research Questions

RQ2: How is feminist and anti-feminist discourse of hashtags negotiated, reproduced, and/or challenged in patriarchal relations of power?

RQ1: How do Pakistan's online spaces put women and men in opposing ideological discourses?

Theoretical Framework

Digital media in Pakistan forms and opposes gender stereotypes based on feminist and counter-feminist narratives. The gender performativity theory by Butler offers theoretical representations of how gender is developed, enforced, and dealt with by discursive practices (Butler, 1999). This paper has brought out that hashtags are not neutral indexing practices but are discursive actions that assemble identities and ideological stances.

Such repetitive discursive practices provide the illusion of gender being normal and predetermined. Language, in this perspective, is not only explanatory of gender, but it is also a productive, regulatory, and stabilizing factor in the generation of gendered meanings in social relationships. Nevertheless, according to Marwick (2021), in his speech act theory, hashtags not only show content but also bring out identity formation, political affiliations, and ideological structures. The entire process creates complex aspects of hashtags, in which there appear several sets of views on women's autonomy and gender equality, and counter hashtags supporting patriarchal norms and the acceptability of feminine values.

The social notion of gender is deeply ingrained in the Pakistani religious and cultural discourse. It is ever associated with the westernization of society. Feminist ideologies, on the other hand, emphasized the autonomy of the body, equality, and empowerment, and challenged existing moral structures. Once the hegemonic gendered structures are disrupted, the corrective speech emerges to reinstate the normative equilibrium, as

is stated in the concept of regulatory power by Butler (1990). Consequently, the hashtag arguments have turned into the place where femininity and masculinity are negotiated, challenged, and disciplined regularly. Gender is enacted multiple times in the context of crossing patriarchy, religion, and nationalism by way of repetitive digital practices.

This paper drew its conceptualization insights from the performativity theory by Butler (1990), which focuses on hashtags as discourse in the digital space. It is language that is used as power in these digital spaces to create gender-based subjective identities that are both challenged and made. As a theoretical strategy, post-structuralism enables the researcher to deconstruct discourses of hashtag movements in the media in a discursively varied way to appreciate how gendered relations of power are constructed, controlled, and destabilized within the digital spaces in Pakistan. Although Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) is a methodological process of analysis that is specifically applied, it is a sociologically guided analysis of the role that language functions as a medium to construct and communicate meanings, power, and social identities. Butler performativity is the ontological premise of discursive practices, but the epistemological insights of the hashtag discourses are unraveled using Lazar FCDA (2007).

Riding on these blocks of theoretical and methodological foundations, this study goes deep into exploring and analyzing how gender stereotypes are formed, created, reinforced, and challenged through the social media hashtags in the digital discourse.

Research Methodology

The research design used in this study is a qualitative, critically interpretive research design to explore the ways in which gender-related hashtag campaigns in social media create and negotiate gender stereotypes. At the preliminary steps, the latent content analysis allows the researcher to choose hashtag material and preliminary coding. Nevertheless, in later phases, the choice of content results in a methodological study of textual content, the recognition of

recurring patterns, and the conceptualization of explicit and implicit meanings in communication (Krippendorff, 2018). Hashtag posts, in the realm of the digital world, can be viewed as discursive texts, significant dialogues, settings of ideological positions, and transfer of social meanings relating to gender activism.

Poststructuralism serves as the ontological and epistemological premise of the study; thus, FCDA as an analytical tool allows researchers to assess, without any reservations, the aspect of how language is an effective instrument in hashtag campaigns to strengthen as well as challenge gendered power relations and patriarchal concepts on the social level in Pakistan (Lazar, 2007; Wodak and Meyer, 20). Furthermore, the intellectual contributions of Butler's constructs of gender performativity (1990, 1993) enrich the understanding of how gender identities are repeatedly enacted, regulated, and challenged through digital interactions, including posting, sharing, and hashtag use.

This paper is based on individual hashtag posts as a unit of analysis. A purposive sampling technique is used to select the hashtag posts to make sure that each of them is connected to gender debates, is highly visible, and has a discursive conflict. Each post is viewed as the language as it is used, where people share their ideas, define societal issues, and reproduce or create gender stereotypes. To guarantee these posts are publicly available, researchers make sure that the users are aged 18-40. It is estimated that they are the most prolific proponents of digital activism (Shah and Jamil, 2022), and they are mostly of urban, middle-class origin. Such hashtags as AuratMarch and MeraJismMeriMarzi, along with counter-hashtags Menofpower and StopAuratMarch, were included, as it is important to the discussion of the rights of women, masculinity, and the morality of society. The used hashtags represent feminist and anti-feminist messages that are being spread in Pakistani online communities.

Table 1: Selected Hashtag Campaigns Included in the Study

Hashtag	Narrative Orientation	Platform	Posts Included	Timeframe in
Final Dataset				
#Aurat March Instagram	Feminist activism and	Twitter (X), 20	gender rights discourse	Peak campaign circulation period
#Mera Jism Meri Marzi	Feminist autonomy discourse	bodily Twitter Instagram	(X), 20	Aurat March-related debate period
#MenOfPower	Masculinity Authority Narratives	and Twitter Instagram	(X), 20	Selected trending discussion period:
#StopAuratMarch Instagram	Anti-feminist	backlash Twitter	(X), 20	discoursePeak backlash periods

Such a data organization allows the juxtaposition of feminist and counter-feminist stories within a single digital discursive context. The discussion shows the way gender stereotypes are reproduced

and challenged in the Pakistani social media discourse through the combination of supportive and contradictory hashtags. The time-limited nature of the research focused on these trending

hashtags consisted of one to two weeks, and more posts were added until one month after the initial circulation. This timeline enabled the researcher to have the first look at the discourse and the following responses, arguments, and reinterpretations that are witnessed as the hashtag conversations mature with time passing by.

Manual data collection was done on Twitter (X) and Instagram, which are two of the most popular platforms of hashtag activism in Pakistan. The search of platform posts was conducted based on the platform search methodology, but with a prior focus on relevancy, originality, and discursive value. The hashtags investigated on a scale of approximately 200-300 posts were initially reviewed, and the posts, which were most closely connected to the subject areas of interest of the research, were selected. The ultimate dataset consisted of 80 posts on chosen hashtags, which was sufficient to cover the topic but at the same time provided enough depth. Only publicly accessible posts were used so as to maintain privacy, and the identity of the user was anonymized.

The systematic coding and theme content analysis approach was part of the analysis. The same posts were read multiple times to locate the tendencies in the use of the language and repetitive discursive elements. In the former, the linguistic characteristics, ideological positions, and discursive strategies, which are metaphors, modality, pronouns, and evaluative language, were noted via open coding during the first step. The second stage involved the use of axial coding to group these codes into broad thematic themes, including, but not limited to, women's moral regulation, feminist threat constructs, nationalism in framing, masculinity and authority, and the resistance stories.

The researcher incorporated the concept of reflexivity in the process of analysis to enhance the validity and credibility of the analysis. According to Finlay (2002), reflexivity was defined as critical reflection on the way personal perspectives, feminist positionality, and contextual facts might influence interpretation. The researcher has made sure that the findings were founded on textual evidence and not subjective assumptions by going

through the data multiple times and contrasting emerging interpretations with the overarching discursive system of Pakistani media discussions.

In addition to locating surface meanings, the study examined latent meanings present within posts and focused on how language indirectly delimited gender roles, authority, morality, and social expectations. The assessment of these latent meanings was subsequently performed through the prism of feminist critical discourse analysis, and the research was able to explore how digital language is reproduced, negotiated, or opposed to patriarchal norms. This interpretive phase examines the way hashtag campaigns are used in the study.

The analysis approach was iterative, where themes were reviewed to make them responsive to the study topics and theoretical framework. By integrating systematic content analysis with FCDA interpretation, the methodology can be applied to gain an in-depth insight into how gender stereotypes are created, undermined, and renegotiated within the contemporary Pakistani digital culture through the use of social media hashtags.

Data Analysis

In this paper, the primary analytical method is the Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA), which is utilized in order to explore how particular hashtags such as AuratMarch, MerajismMeriMarzi, MenOfPower, and StopAuratMarch create, support, and disrupt gender stereotypes in Pakistani online communities. In contrast to general CDA, FCDA directly focuses on patriarchy as a system of power-reproduced discourse (Lazar, 2007). Consequently, the study considers language a gendered location of ideological conflict, instead of an objective description. The discussion follows the approach to discourse presented by Lazar (2007), who discusses how discourse (1) constitutes gendering, (2) constitutes and authorizes gendered power relations, and (3) aids in either the maintenance or destabilization of patriarchal social order. The performativity concept introduced by Butler (1990) adds to the

perception of hashtags as repetitive discursive practices that determine gendered subjectivities.

1. A Discursive Policing of Feminine Respectability

Another theme that is evident in the dataset is the ongoing moralizing of women's bodies, behavior, and activism. Counter-hashtags, such as StopAuratMarch, are generally used to describe the activity of the feminist movement as a vulgar, immoral, or anti-Islamic activity. The perpetual application of possessive pronouns, e.g., our women, represents women as the ordinary property, associated with family respect, social righteousness, and national identity. One of the FCDA views, according to which such linguistic constructions are a strongly established patriarchal ideology, establishes the social value of women in large parts determined by issues of respectability, obedience, and adherence to moral norms (Lazar, 2007). This discussion establishes a dichotomous difference between the good woman (modest, submissive, and culturally aligned) and the bad woman (rebellious, Westernized, or immoral).

These are not mere depictions but are controlling. Counter-hashtags appeal to religious, cultural, and nationalistic authority to make the use of moral judgment, and they pose as epistemically superior, deliberately delegitimizing the voices of feminists. To illustrate, such words as “protect our culture” or “respect our traditions” are often present in posters, which depict female action as a threat to the social order. The slogans of feminists like #MerajismMeriMarzi are directly opposite to such logic because they state the independence of the body and the denial of the perception of women as property. According to the theory of gender performativity by Butler (1990), the repetition of autonomy in the articulations of femininity and honor is what threatens the normative linkage of femininity and honor, and in this sense, the performance of gender norms: by posting, sharing, and hashtagging, one challenges or confirms the gender norms.

FCDA insists that power operates by being normalized as opposed to being coerced. The moralizing wording of the data is used so often that it makes the assumption that women's

behavior should be based on socially accepted standards in order for the family, society, and the country to be stable. When women are depicted as frail dependents and as dangerous forces that can corrupt traditional or religious values, a magnificent paradox is created. This conflict demonstrates the conceptual weakness of the patriarchal arguments: the need to constantly condemn the demonstrations of the feminist movement shows that gender conventions are innate or fixed, but they are always supported by words.

Moreover, the moral policing of womanhood is supported by intertextual connections in the counter-hashtags to the religious texts, historical figures, or nationalistic symbols. These associations play an ideological role in addressing a sense of communal power, thereby relegating the feminist explanations. The review indicates that the digital space is a field where moral authority is always placed under test: feminist activism is met with defensive reactions, which support patriarchal relationships, and the cyclical dynamics between opposition and control produce gendered meaning.

2. Building Masculinity into Natural Authority

The second theme in the research is also the discursive construction of masculinity as something authoritative and reasonable. Hashtags such as the #MenOfPower spread stories that advance male power, leadership, and decision-making. Such typical phrases as “Real men lead” or “Strong men build strong nations” are used to define the limits of acceptable masculinity. “Real” is a policing term, which by implication strips men who fail to meet hegemonic standards of power, authority, and sanity. This follows the idea of Connell (1995) of hegemonic masculinity, where dominant forms of masculinity are culturally represented as universal, natural, and significant to the stability of society.

An FCDA point of view is that the language encourages patriarchal systems because it makes male authority seem standard, as women are relegated to the fringes of participating in the life of the state or even holding any leadership role. It is common to find posts depicting women in

authority as emotional, irrational, or culturally wrong compared to the allegedly rational and competent male leadership. Such a framing difference is a subtle form of discursive inferiority where authority is exercised by the use of language and social evaluation and not by the use of force. According to Lazar (2007), this approach continues the uneven gendering relationships by making them a part of the social fabric of the everyday discourse.

Intertextual allusions to nationalism advance this vision of the world by linking masculinity to general defense and national security. The country is socially constructed as masculine, and the strong men are supposed to uphold cultural, political, and religious purity. By framing the presence of male power as a need of patriotism, posts that depict male power as a normal quality of the social structure normalize the role of male power. Feminist counter-discourses critique these discourses by challenging the gendered assumptions that constitute leadership and power by revealing how hegemonic masculinity is constructed in society.

The opposition of dominant and resistive accounts helps to understand that digital platforms are places of ideological struggle. Hegemonic masculinity is in a continuous state of reproduction by repetitive symbolic movements, but when feminist hashtags are spread, the imperfection of such a process is revealed. By disturbing the status quo that leadership, reason, and political action are inherently masculine traits, feminist activists upset the available gender hierarchies. These mechanisms are identified by FCDA and prove how discourse forms and sustains unequal relations of power, and how possibilities to resist within digital networks appear.

3. Digital Resistance and Feminist Counter-Discourses.

The third theme is the rise of feminist counter-publics and internet opposition via hashtags such as #AuratMarch and #MeraJismMeriMarzi. These movements act as indicators of group identity, which enables women to share common frustrations, political needs, and other ways of

looking at the gendered social order. Such posts as Hum aurat hain, kamzor nahi challenge the existing preconceptions but, at the same time, recognize their existence, which shows the consciousness of the discursive environment. Lazar (2007) suggests that feminist speech not only reveals the patriarchy but also actively attempts to correct it through challenging the natural beliefs regarding the role of women, rights, and autonomy.

Nevertheless, the analysis of FCDA indicates that there are contradictions within the feminist discourse. Other empowerment discourses are based on personal strength or individual agency, or performative confidence, as a neoliberal model of empowerment that encourages visibility and assertiveness instead of structural critique (Gill, 2007; Banet-Weiser, 2018). These stories offer more opportunities to women to take up the space on the Internet, yet they can inadvertently conform to the market-driven concepts, which do not necessarily attack the patriarchal systems. This ambivalence stresses the contradiction of digital feminism that operates both inside and outside the limits of the already established socioeconomic and cultural power formations.

However, there is a discursive reconstitution of femininity when feminist hashtags are used widely. Digital practices rebrand women as rights holders and not ethically controlled dependents with a demonstration of bodily self-determination, consent, and political agency. The performativity paradigm by Butler (1990) helps to understand this process: every tweet, post, or hashtag is a repetitive performance, and these performances create alternative gender norms. These performances gradually break the seemingly natural ideology of patriarchy, clearing the way to novel views on gender, power, and authority.

Moreover, the feminist counter-discourses adopt rhetorical and linguistic practices in order to dispute the patriarchal discourse. Feminist views are justified, and reaction is avoided through the use of intertextuality, irony, humor, and intentional allusion to religious or cultural contexts. The results indicate that online spaces are both places of resistance and places of ideological negotiation: feminist hashtags disrupt

the hegemonic discourse, initiate the discussion, and demonstrate the instability of gendered hierarchies. FCDA lays stress on the fact that these conflicts are inherently political; they show how digital language forms power, identity, and social meaning within contemporary Pakistani society.

Discussion

The paper under discussion explored the role of Pakistani social media hashtag activism to create, reproduce, and interfere with gender stereotypes based on a Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) framework (Lazar, 2007) and a gender performativity theory by Butler (1990, 1993). To have a better grasp of how gendered meanings are translated, negotiated, and challenged in the digital space, the analysis will examine such hashtags as #AuratMarch, #MeraJismMeriMarzi, #MenOfPower, and #StopAuratMarch. The study reveals the interactive nature of reproduction and resistance in the digital discourse through examining the linguistic means, intertextual citations, and discursive framing. The results are the integration of the role of digital platforms as performative spaces where gender norms are negotiated, contested, and redefined continuously, which provides insight into the complicated Pakistani power, ideology, and identity dynamics.

The main observation of this study is the continued policing of the behavior, bodies, and activism of women in the counter-hashtag discourse on a moral basis. Feminist activity is often characterized as being vulgar, anti-Islamic, or against our culture, and the posts using the hashtag

StopAuratMarch frequently depict women as moral and cultural representatives and not actors. The constant repetitive possessive statements, such as our women, reflect what FCDA terms discursive tactics that authenticate patriarchal ideology (Lazar, 2007). These institutions are not just responsible for passing moral judgment, but they also actively control social behavior by establishing acceptable femininity. As Butler relates, these actions are some form of performativity where the identity of women is created as a result of discursive repetitions. This is

because the discourse establishes and polices the norms of gender by making the feminists sound immoral or Westernized, which leads to a dualism between the good woman (obedient, modest, culturally aligned) and the bad woman (rebellious, independent, politically active). Intertextual allusions to religion, nationalism, and historical traditions reinforce the binary by establishing morality as not only individual but also demanded by society.

These findings indicate that the patriarchal rhetoric in Pakistani internet forums works gradually instead of through coercion. Women must be models of respectability, modest, and obedient so that the stability of society is maintained. This is in line with the fact that Lazar (2007) notes that power in the patriarchal society is mainly exercised by the use of implicit and not explicit imposition of social norms. Counter-hashtags advance the illusion that the behavior of women can have a social effect, where the behavior of an individual is attributed to national dignity and the preservation of culture. Surprisingly, the analysis indicates ideological contradictions between such regulatory discourses. Women are described as feeble, needy, and frail, but they can also be morally or culturally corrupt. Such dual framing underlines the instabilities of patriarchal beliefs in power, which require continuous discursive support. This constant rejection of feminist action online is illustrative of the performative nature of gender norms: norms are never fixed or inherent and instead are maintained, opposed, and bargained for in any given language practice.

Moreover, the issue of moral policing of women on the web is indicative of bigger sociopolitical issues in Pakistan regarding the postcolonial identity, cultural authenticity, and religious appropriateness. Feminist slogans that assert body control, like the hash tag MeraJismMeriMarzi, challenge the connection between femaleness and the social dignity of the community. These slogans produce strong counter-reactions, as one can see the so-called regulatory effect of power: destabilized gender norms breed corrective discourse that is supposed to reinstate the semblance of order. This goes to show that

internet platforms are not neutral spaces but spaces where cultural, moral, and political power is questioned at all times. In this regard, the discursive policing of feminine respectability illuminates the processes through which gender stereotypes are reproduced in the Pakistani online media. Counter-hashtags advance patriarchal values through language use, intertextuality, and moralization and constrain self-expression by women. At the same time, the performative challenge of such norms proves that social media can be used as a place of active negotiation of gendered identities, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the ideology of patriarchy.

Another important theme that comes out of the analysis is that masculinity is discursively constructed as inherently authoritative, sensible, and patriotic. Such hashtags as “#MenOfPower” popularize such expressions as “Real men lead, and strong men build strong nations,” focusing on leadership, reason, and decision-making as masculine qualities. The word “real” is used as a control measure of the masculine identity, of which there are acceptable and deviant masculine connotations. This discussion is coherent with the concept of hegemonic masculinity by Connell (1995), whereby certain forms of masculinity identity are culturalized as normal and standard. The dataset under study demonstrates men as being reasonable, competent, and protective in contrast to the exceptional, emotional, and disruptive authority of women. This kind of asymmetrical framing reproduces the patriarchal hierarchies, making male dominance an image of common sense instead of a product of societal construction. FCDA helps to identify these minor processes of recreation of power, which means that the language perpetuates the gender imbalance not through direct coercion but through symbolic legitimization and normative expectations.

The intertextual allusions to nationalism and communal security support masculinity in stories of statehood and communal safety. Male authority is always related to the defense of cultural, religious, and national integrity in posts; strong men are shown as important to the existence of the nation. This symbolic process of masculinizing the nation helps prove that national identity is

symbolically gendered, as Yuval-Davis (1997) states that masculine traits such as protection, leadership, and reason are associated with the national identity. These discourse patterns make gendered power relations normal, and the dominant male leadership can be ethically and politically justified. Nevertheless, the results show that hegemonic masculinity is reliant and constructed. Feminist counter-hashtags reflect on why leadership and political power are gendered in the first place and the social and ideological construction of masculine domination. This dissonance of discourse highlights the process of gender norm negotiation: as the digital discourse strengthens the power of patriarchy by reenacting it, it can also be performed in a different way, as masculine or feminine. This process can be illuminated by the performativity paradigm by Butler: with repeated performances of the hegemonic masculinity, the norms that are challenged are reproduced and brought to light.

Moreover, the feminization of the culture of masculinity as a form of inherent authority relates to the moral policing of women, which shows the relationship between gendered relations of power. Male power is also not only authorized by the claim of reason or national applicability but also through the regulation of the behavior, movement, and even the morality of women. Counter-hashtags most often purport that the activism of women is a threat to male leadership, keeping alive the notion that gender hierarchies are necessarily related in that patriarchal masculinity relies on the policing of feminine action. Comprehensively, the construction of masculinity as natural power proves the perpetuation of gender inequality through digital discourse, as well as creating a performative space where these standards are tested. The combination of the FCDA and Butlerian theory demonstrates that hegemonic masculinity constitutes a discursive practice and that it is being performed, normalized, and disputed in daily Pakistani digital culture.

The third major theme is the development of feminist counter-discourses in the digital space. The hashtags, such as “#AuratMarch” and “#MeraJismMeriMarzi,” are used as a form of

collective identification as they enable women to articulate their shared grievances and political requests, as well as their alternative perceptions of gendered societal order. Bodily autonomy, consent, and political agency are often asserted by use of words such as “My body is not your honor and Hum aurat hain, kamzor nahi. These digitalized repetitions of performances challenge the normative connections between gendering, moralizing, and submissiveness, in contrast to the patriarchal control of counter-hashtag discourse. According to the performativity theory provided by Butler, those acts may be transformative: the enactment of gender is being performed discursively through repetitions and is not predetermined. Hashtags that are feminist are subversive actions that redefine femininity as politicized, autonomous, and rights-bearing. FCDA aids us in placing these behaviors into a structural power context, illustrating that digital language can be utilized as a tool of resistance as well as a means of negotiation.

Nonetheless, the research indicates conflicts and contradictions in feminist online discourse. Other blogs focus on individual resilience, strength, and choice, which is a neoliberal perspective where personal change is seen as more valuable than structural critique (Gill, 2007; Banet-Weiser, 2018). Although such stories have the positive effect of amplifying the voices of women, they might also be perpetuating unintentional validation of market-driven ideas of empowerment instead of structural patriarchal institutions. This illustrates the ambivalent positionality of feminist activism in Pakistan, which operates in both socioeconomic and cultural frameworks that empower digital resistance and simultaneously hinder it. In addition, the feminist hashtags apply linguistic and rhetorical tools to negotiate ideological distinctions. Humor, irony, intertextual relations with religion, cultural metaphors, and others are used to support feminist arguments without causing any reaction. This demonstrates that digital forums are not only zones of resistance but also zones of negotiation and that the boundaries of what can be said are challenged and redefined.

The proliferation of feminist counter-hashtags is a good example of Global South digital activism, whereby the local context influences how feminism articulates its demands. The Pakistani online activism has to transcend the postcolonial concerns, religious issues, and nationalistic discourse whilst having to participate in the global discussion of physical autonomy and gender equality (Mohanty, 2003; Lugones, 2007). Herein lies the importance of contextualized FCDA, which situates the digital discourse within the socio-cultural, historical, and political context instead of viewing it as a universal or neutral one. The integrated results indicate that gender in the Pakistani social media discourse cannot be said to be fixed and predetermined, but rather a dynamic outcome of current digital performances and interactions. Gendered meanings are produced, regulated, and challenged in hashtags. Counter-hashtags strengthen patriarchal regulations by using moral control and legitimizing men, whereas feminist ones weaken these regulations by adopting other gender identities. These results show the performative, repetitive nature of gender, which is suggested by Butler (1990) and analyzed with FCDA.

In this way, the digital discourse can be considered a domain of ideological struggle, where power is exercised not by institutional or coercive forces, but by the simple usage of language, framing, and referencing other texts. Hashtag activism demonstrates the fluctuating and bargaining nature of gender norms and the perpetual conflict in the status of social legitimacy, moral authority, and political recognition. The paper is also concerned with gender, nationalism, religion, and postcolonial identity in relation to complex interconnections in Pakistan. Moralizing gender and essentializing masculinity are not the sole methods of reaffirming patriarchal power; the appeals to collective identity, cultural authenticity, and national security play a role as well. Feminist counter-discourses circumvent these intersections, altering the global ideas of bodily autonomy and rights-based politics to the locally comprehensible structures that can attract the social, religious, and political sensibilities.

The conclusions contribute to the Global South feminist literature by emphasizing the situational nature of the digital feminist action. The paper is critical of Western-centered models of hashtag activism that often emphasize virality, participation, or digital affordance over ideology, cultural embeddedness, and discursive content. The research embraces FCDA to bring out the practicality of discourse-oriented methods in interpreting the relationship between language and ideology, as well as power on the Internet. In practice, the paper underlines the significance of feminist activists, online campaigners, and politicians being aware of the multisided performativity of hashtags. The knowledge on how gendered meanings are formed and challenged on the internet can assist in determining strategies on how to fight off the patriarchal backlash, build solidarity, and establish campaigns that are able to respect the nuances of local culture but pressurize the structural change.

To sum up, Pakistani social media hashtag campaigns are performative discursive platforms in which gender norms are challenged at all times. Counter-hashtags reinforce the culture of patriarchy by moralizing, essentializing masculinity, and appealing to cultural and religious legitimacy, and feminist hashtags disrupt these conventions by repeatedly asserting bodily agency, political agency, and other femininities. The dynamics of reproduction and resistance are a case in point of the dynamic, contested, and performative nature of gender in digital environments. Combining Butlerian performativity and FCDA, this paper can give a more sophisticated explanation of the functioning of gendered power in everyday discourse, especially in the non-western, postcolonial context. It underlines the repetitive, contextual, and bargaining character of digital activism by locating online feminist movements in the broader social, religious, and political settings. In this way, social media can be seen as not only the platform of expression but also as an extremely important terrain of ideological struggle, in which gender, authority, and identity are fought and reorganized. It is possible that future studies can expand this study by incorporating longitudinal

studies on digital activism, how discourses of hashtags change over time, and intersectional factors such as class, ethnicity, and regional diversity. This paper contributes to an emerging body of literature about the demonstration of feminist activism online in the Global South that is both contextually situated, performative, and politically meaningful, offering not only opportunities to empower but also obstacles to structural change.

Limitations

The limitation of this study is that it has concentrated on textual posts over a specific time period and does not cover the analysis of visual information, patterns of amplification through algorithms, or even the statistics on how they are received by the audience. As much as purposive sampling is suitable for qualitative depth, it has a drawback of generalization. Also, feminist interpretation lays the responsibility of the researcher; however, reflexivity enhances critical analysis and does not suppress it.

Future Implications

Conclusions of the study have great implications for future research, activism, and policy. Future studies can explore the phenomenon of hashtag activism in other Global South contexts and how local socio-cultural, religious, and postcolonial factors shape digital feminist rhetoric. The analyses can be further divided into intersectional analyses, where the concepts of class, race, and regional identities can be considered to show how various groups of people find and engage in opposition with gendered norms on the Internet. Longitudinal analysis would follow the development of hashtag stories, considering the platform algorithms, visibility, and network effects, to gain a better idea of feminist and anti-feminist content spread. Moreover, one should find a middle ground between personal empowerment stories and structural criticism to make sure that digital activism can deal with systemic injustices. These conclusions can assist policymakers, educators, and media professionals in promoting critical digital literacy, responsible internet use, and inclusive online communities.

On the whole, the paper highlights the possibilities of contextually based, discourse-oriented methods to enhance academic knowledge and practical approaches to defying the patriarchal standards and pursuing the feminist objectives in Pakistan and beyond.

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