The Role of X (Formerly Twitter) In Shaping Mobilization, Activism, And Resultant censorship it faces Within Pakistan's Network Society: A Case Study of the Aurat March

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I _____Sania Ahmed_____ hereby state that my M.Phil. thesis titled ____ The Role Of X (Formerly Twitter) In Shaping Mobilization, Activism, And Resultant Censorship it faces Within Pakistan's Network Society: A Case Study Of Aurat March _____ is my own work and has not been submitted previously by me for taking any degree from Pakistan Institute of Development Economics or anywhere else in the country/world.

At any time if my statement is found to be incorrect even after my Graduation the university has the right to withdraw my M.Phil. degree.

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ABSTRACT

This research will focus on exploring how Aurat March-a contemporary feminist movement-uses X (formerly Twitter) for mobilization, activism and the resultant censorship it faces online. Utilizing Manuell Castell's Theory of the Network Society and concepts like Networked Feminism,connective action and Affordances. I aim to contextualize these concepts within Pakistan and understand how the ban on X affects a movement which primarily uses online platforms for activism. Interviews with participants, organisers, and volunteers have been conducted along with analysis of X posts,Placards and newspaper articles to answer my research questions. This research shows that Aurat March was primarily formed online amidst the global rise of feminist movements like the MeToo movement and which gained traction among Aurat March supporters. My research relied on a qualitative methodology since I wanted to understand this movement from the perspective of my data sources and their lived experience of participating in the march. In agreement with Castell technology is not an autonomous force and there are multiple factors contributing to building a feminist consciousness where online mediums cannot be considered the sole factor behind Aurat March Islamabad sustaining itself. Participants shared multiple reasons for joining the March, while social media was not the primary reason for joining. Although organisers and participants agree that social media gives them broader reach, there is a general understanding that they do not want to over rely on social media and instead want to focus more on in-person mobilisation. Hashtag activism is quite common in both Lahore and Islamabad where they use different hashtags to share why it is important to march. Hate speech and online backlash against female participants and organisers is quite common, due to which they have to navigate online spaces with caution. The ban on X has affected both organisers and participants who used to be active on the platform, however, this has not impacted Aurat March significantly, as March organisers can use other platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and Tiktok. Most participants agree that this ban is reflective of the state crackdown against dissenting voices in physical spaces, which is why it is necessary to focus more on in-person mobilization as well.

Keywords: Aurat March, Networked Feminism, Network Society, Feminism, online hate speech

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In order to commemorate International Women's Day in Pakistan since 2018, women in Lahore, Karachi have been marching against patriarchy they experience not only in the public sphere but in their private lives as well. Since 2019, this March spread out to other cities such as Islamabad, Multan, Larkana and Hyderabad as well, however this since its start Aurat March has faced resistance from both state and right wing groups both in person and online. The movement which initially began with demands to end to violence and harassment has grown into demanding rights for transgender persons, putting an end to period poverty, and raising their voice for religious minorities in Pakistan etc. Often times, the March has been understood as an attempt to destroy family structures and to enable western imperialism in the country. The origins of the March can be traced to the rise of the #Metoomovement in Washington DC in 2017(Cheema, 2023).When during October the hashtag #Metoo started spreading on social media after actress Alissa Milano filed allegations against influential Hollywood producers Harvey Weinstein(Cheema, 2023). The actress gave a call to victims of sexual violence to responds with ''me too'' on her tweet. Within hours' millions of people especially women started exposing how widespread sexual violence's using this hashtag to post on social media.

One major sexual harassment case that shook Pakistan emerged during the #Metoo movement in 2018,when Meesha Shafi-a prominent Pakistani singer and songwriter – relaeased a ststement on X alleging that Ali Zafar, a male singer had subjected her to

physical sexual harassment on more than one occasion.While Ali Zafar filed a defamation lawsuit against Meesha Shafi for damages to his reputation(Cheema, 2023). This case set out to become a topic of debate for several months with activists engaging in heated debates with members of religious and right-wing groups. This case exposed the relationships and tensions between the state, body politics and social media. Prominent sexual harassment cases like these influenced how the legal system offers protection to perpetrators of harassment while women are subjected to systemic sexism and have led to women taking to the streets to demand their rights.

With four years down the line, the political outcomes of this movement are still not apparent. However, two aspects that differentiate it from previous movements is the inclusion of predominantly young leadership and to include sexuality as one of the discussion themes (Zia, 2022). By being completely volunteer driven and not being recipients of any backing from political parties and donor agencies, the movement is organic and independent of any external influence. Movement organisers especially in Islamabad have faced severe backlash from right wing groups. In 2020, a counter march was held at the same location where Aurat March attendees were protesting at. This led to a violent clash between the two groups with members of Haya March pelting stones and attendees of the Aurat March receiving threats of Acid attacks for participating(Asher, 2020). One of the most contentious slogans of the March ‘Mera Jism Meri Marzi’ –my body my choice- has been vehemently opposed both online and in mainstream media for presumably promoting sexual impropriety by justifying sexual freedom. March organisers have often times defended this slogan by labelling it as a call to resist sexual and reproductive coercion.

The use of social media has been instrumental for amplifying movements like Aurat March, who use social media for reaching out to more people. However, it has also had its limitations when organizers, supporters have to face challenges such as online backlash, doctored images, misrepresentation and state surveillance and censorship. A study conducted by Media Matters for Democracy in 2022 highlights how disinformation regarding the March is amplified on YouTube, with YouTube creators scandalizing the March by editing comments of attendees, using misleading titles on videos, and furthering the propaganda that the March is foreign funded (Ghani, 2022). A lack of sufficient regulations implemented for online abuse and harassment make social media a breeding ground for critics and vindictive forces to advance their misogynistic, oppressive narratives which rile up the public against Aurat March. Although social media provides a platform for March supporters to put forth their stance, the widespread disapproval, trolling, and threats towards them dilutes their voices.

One such platform is X (formerly Twitter) which has a different format compared to Instagram and Facebook, where the most trending hashtags on a particular day are shown. As International Women's Day approaches, X is flooded with hateful posts related to the march. Anti-march supporters are actively trying to make these posts trend, while the platforms and the government make no effort to remove them. The short-lived nature of social media might make people think that its impact is reducing overtime. However, disinformation online embeds misogynistic violence against organizers (Bolo Bhi, 2024). It is vital to study what significance online spaces hold for these activists and how feminist organizers are fighting these hateful and

exclusionary narratives. Since February 17, 2024 X has been banned by the government on the grounds of upholding national security. Such blanket bans aim to limit individual freedom and discourage dissent. In fact, Aurat March Islamabad's X account has the most following out of all its social media accounts[1], so this ban has a colossal impact on reaching users who follow their pages for updates. The organizing team of all three chapters - Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad - have signed a statement condemning the ban and calling for the restoration of X (Bolo Bhi, 2024).

The ban on X has severe implications on how activists, participants, and right wing groups interact with each other. Manuel Castells pointed out this shift towards network-based structures, in his book The Network Society where he characterized the Network Society as a social structure comprising of interconnected networks, which were powered by microelectronics-based information and communication technologies (Castells, 2004, pp. 3). In this society, networks are a set of nodes-interrelated points - where information comes together, these networks process flows of information by representing the transmission of messages or data within nodes over time and space(Castells, 2004,pp. 3). Communication networks like Facebook, Instagram. and X mirror these patterns to relay continuous flow of information. These networks often amplify the voices of those in power whether it be governments, corporations or bureaucracy(Castells, 2004). Since societies are inherently characterised by conflict power is often accompanied by counter power(Castells, 2004, pp. 34–35). Where social actors tend to challenge the institutions of society for

[1] 4,468 Followers as of 11th December,2024(@Aurat_marchisb Aurat March Islamabad, n.d.)

the purpose of claiming representation where social movements benefit from his concepts like space of flows and timeless time. Space of flows refers to the ability to engage in activities and interactions without physical presence, facilitated by communication technologies(Castells, 2004,pp. 36). The latter refers to the blurring of time in the fast-paced digital world, where events and actions take place quickly and can be shared instantaneously(Castells, 2004,pp. 37), allowing movements to react rapidly to emerging issues. Those who possess power in the Network Society are known as programmers and they have the capacity to program networks on which people's lives depend. Whereas switchers functions as links between different networks such as broadcasting channels in the political sphere and even X spaces to connect general public with influential figures such as politicians. Through the use of social media, social movements switchers can link different people and activist groups to hold the March in a public space. Social media is a vital tool leveraged by the organizers to share the purpose of the March and real time updates on activities of the march.

Statement of the Problem

In Pakistan, more than of half of the female population lacks basic education, along with lower health and nutritional standing, while many women are restricted to their homes and have no autonomy to make decisions affecting their decisions(Ejaz & Ara, 2018). On top of that women's mobility is restricted, the internet can become a meeting space for women to share, grieve, and express solidarity. However, using the internet comes with its own risks. Due to the rapid adoption of social media and video sharing platforms, Pakistan has more than 72 Million social media users according to

according to the statistics of Pakistan Telecommunication Authority(PTA) (*PTA Annual Report 2024*, 2024).According to statistics shared by PTA a significant gender imbalance exists among users of Facebook, YouTube, Tiktok and Instagram where more men are active on social media then women (PTA, 2025).To craft the Digital Gender Inclusion strategy, PTA conducted a public perception survey in four districts with the highest gender digital gaps in 2024 with 500 respondents, to evaluate perception of female internet usage(PTA, 2024). Women comprised 27% of the respondents, among them 16% females believed that women should not use mobile phones at all(PTA, 2024). The survey also revealed that men hold negative attitude towards women using technology, while majority respondents claimed that women's access to technology should be limited(PTA, 2024).

Women in Pakistan who do remain active on social media have to carefully navigate it due to increasing cases of gender based harassment (Fathma, 2021). Challenges range from creation of fake profiles, persistent and inappropriate direct messages from men along with the looming threat of cyber harassment[2], which contribute to their cautious approach to engaging on these platforms. . It is increasingly becoming common due to anonymity of perpetrators along with no fear of punishment. Pakistani society is deeply rooted in patriarchal beliefs, so a fake profile being made of a woman can cause her psychological trauma, she can face pressure to delete her accounts on public platforms, she can be subjected to abuse by her family, and in some extreme cases, she can become the victim of honour killing as well. Despite the

[2] Cyber harassment refers to unconsented behaviour, such as threatening or harassing via email/instant messages, or to post blogs or website entries on entities that only work to malign individuals(*Cyber Harassment | Dean of Students | Michigan Tech*, 2025).

risks associated with it, X has political relevance in Pakistan and with the restrictions on mainstream media channels and journalists many have turned to X to receive unbiased news and many actvists use it as a tool for political action through Hashtag Actvisim.Hashtag activism, a term implying the creation of discourse among X uses by using a particular hashtag followed by a themed word or phrase such as the #metoo movement (Goswami, 2018). Hashtag activism is convenient for some Pakistani females, who are unable to step out in the public sphere due to restrictions from their family members, to demand their rights by showing solidarity to feminist causes online. A qualitative study to determine attitudes towards feminist activists online has also revealed that women are reluctant to label themselves as feminists due to the fear of being judged and to avoid challenging masculinity(Khalid et al., 2023). As if the negative connotations associated with women labelling themselves as feminist weren't enough, women have to face opposition on the one day designated to celebrating their struggles. From being pelted with stones to the government giving permission to opposition marches to take place at the same time and place, resistance is multifaceted and involves many parties such as the government, police and right wing groups.

Despite its challenges, social media has helped the March achieve greater visibility, facilitated communication. and managed to motivate people to show up physically on Aurat March. According to Castell, grievance and availability can only lead to action if there is a communication process which allows the public to disseminate their sense of injustice, interact with other people who also feel hurt, form a collective identity, fine tune their analysis for finding the reasons and solutions to these injustices, and

plan appropriate courses of action (Castells, 2015).The state along with right wing groups have made every attempt to deter the public from attending the March, especially in the capital by getting police to block the usual route, place barricades near the entry point, and allowing the counter march to proceed to D-Chowk without any hurdles(Imran, 2024).

Aurat March marks a critical moment in feminist history where issues of sexual autonomy and agency are openly being discussed in both online and offline mediums.

Hence, I will be focusing my research on how X (formerly Twitter) is used by Aurat March activists and participants to influence mobilization, activism, and resultant censorship within Pakistan's Network Society. The relevance of the theory of the Network Society lies in its emphasis on how social media access can drive transformative changes in society. Hashtags on platforms like X (formerly Twitter) have cultivated in-person demonstrations, in some cases, to advocate for political and social issues. Despite Castell being one of the most prominent sociologists in the domain of analysis and interpretation of contemporary society as a Network Society, a gap exists in terms of applying his theory on social media networks to study gendered movements within Pakistan. Therefore, this research is focusing on the conceptual and practical ways the theory can be of significance for feminist movements in Pakistan by identifying whether X functions as a switcher for the movement by allowing march organisers to organisers to amplify the movements demands. Another aspect I will be looking at whether the impact of state resistance and right wing forces act as barriers to the free flow of information such as misrepresenting Aurat March slogans, online vitriol and hijacking of narratives. This

research will focus on X specially shapes the movement by looking at it from the lens of a mobilising agent and but also using Treem and Leonardi's framework to show how activists strategically use digital affordances to exert counter power, build networks of solidarity and deal with backlash(Treem & Leonardi, 2012).

Originally adapted from Gibson's concept of affordances which are distinct ways in which an actor or set of actors observes and uses an object.(Gibson, 1986). People can utilise the same social media platform differently while some may use it in a similar way based on four underlying factors:

1- **Visibility:** Social media offers users to make their behaviours, preferences, knowledge and network connections that were not visible or at least very difficult to view can be seen and accessed by others in their network.

2- **Editability:** Can be linked with the autonomous nature of social media where communication can be spread and relayed in the absence of others and asynchronously. It also refers to modifying and revising content already shared.

3- **Association:** These are established links between individuals and content or between an actor and a presentation(Treem & Leonardi, 2012,pp. 30).Social media allows for expanding reach by sharing recommendations according to its algorithm by recommending content and associations increasing social capital, allows for information to reach potential audiences..

4- **Persistence:** As communication can be saved, stored and searched for later uses, it remains accessible in its original form even after the actor has

presented something**.** This makes it easier to review content and provides a repository of conversations to better understand context.

Research Questions

1- **How does X as a Social Media Platform Shape Mobilization for Aurat March within the Network Society?**

X is one of the most followed social media platforms of Aurat March Islamabad and the organisers regularly share their stance on trending issues by reposting and quoting issues happening in Pakistan. Calls for volunteers and periodic updates on the day of the March are shared through the Aurat March X account. In order to mobilize protestors, Aurat March creates hashtags such as #marchtohhoga and #merajismmerimarzi so that X users can share their posts and express solidarity with them. X is also more relevant in the political arena as many political parties, progressive collectives in Pakistan are active on the platform, thus making it the platform of choice for this study. By analysing whether people engage Aurat March X posts and how much of an effect it has on influencing their participation for the march and whether these posts trivialise it for them.

2- **What is the Impact of the Right-Wing Force and State Resistance on Aurat March in terms of Free Information flow within the Network Society?**

Currently, the government has banned X in Pakistan which is a direct attack on free speech within Pakistan and which limits the free flow of communication. Under the garb of protecting national interests and reducing disinformation, this ban has

adversely affected many progressive movements who use X for spreading awareness. The government co-opts with right wing forces not only to stop Aurat March protesters from entering Islamabad Press Club but also creates hurdles for attendees by giving the space designated for the Aurat March to a counter protest called *Haya March* protestors. *Haya* is the Urdu word for Modesty and this protest is organised by women from Jamaat-e-Islami(JI),JUI-F, Lal Masjid and female students of various schools(Ahsan, 2023). While their demands remain ambiguous, Haya marchers gather every year to moral police Aurat March supporters by giving sermons and chanting slogans, questioning their purpose and labelling their activism as performative and only serving to appease western ideals. This can have an impact on the turnout and lead to more backlash for the March. In 2021, a blasphemy case was registered against Aurat March Islamabad organisers; under Pakistan's legal code, blasphemy is punishable by death (Jalil, 2024). Islamabad Press Club- the starting point for the march has a rich history of providing space for dissent in a place surrounded by government buildings that are not accepting of these narratives. Using this space to protest against societal norms that restrict their freedoms is an act of political resistance. Thus, Aurat March is subjected to state resistance not only during the march but before it as well by repeatedly being asked to change their location to a park instead of the Islamabad Press Club. Thus, it is vital to study how the state tries to censor the movement and what measures Aurat March has taken against this suppression.

3- **How the affordance of X as a social media platform shapes the shapes interaction and engagements among March organisers and supporters, whether these features can be exploited by opponents?**

Online activism has been one of the key factors that has helped sustain Aurat March since 2018. Organisers have not received any donor funding nor are they affiliated with any government entity. Thus, the question remains about how it is able to sustain itself despite the numerous challenges it faces. Before the March of 2024, a ban was imposed on X, however this didn't impede march organisers from sharing their stance as March organisers continued to remain active on the platform through Virtual Private Networks(VPN).[3] Several chapters of the Aurat March in major cities have signed a petition urging government authorities to stop this ban(Bolo Bhi, 2024). As social media blocking does not only limit free speech but also spreads misinformation online according to signatories. Despite this ban X users in Pakistan have started using this service to hide their actual location including Aurat March organisers(Bolo Bhi, 2024). Considering this platform has amassed a lot of followers its contribution to advancing feminist narratives in the offline and online space has been evaluated. These affordances however are dual in nature as increased visibility can lead to more backlash by opponents of the march online, thus both aspects will be looked at.

Research Objectives

[3] VPNs are networks that disguise location and IP addresses, by starting a remote server held by a VPN provider, while establishing a point-to-point tunnel that encrypts user's data (Microsoft, n.d.).

1- **To examine X's role in mobilizing Aurat March attendees within the Network society, utilizing characteristics pertaining to decentralization and autonomy.**

One particular criticism of online activism is that it is considered to be linked with tokenism [4]in nature, where people assume that by liking, sharing and reposting something, they are contributing to something substantial (Cooper, 2023).With individuals having the option to express societal or political concerns with a click of a button, they may choose not to participate in in-person protests because of costs and safety concerns. Thus, the impact of online engagement on participant turnout in the movement is an aspect I will look at in further detail. In the Network Society, modes of communication are considered to be becoming increasingly digitalized and interactive. Individuals are reorienting themselves from mass media towards more personalized tailor-made content available on the internet. These Networks minimize hierarchy by producing horizontal connectedness where content on social media apps is easily accessible to anyone and creators can be independent of broadcast companies and governments. Considering the March remains highly contested among government officials and right-wing political parties for promoting obscenity, social media is a tool where organizers can bypass this criticism. For this purpose, I will be analysing how march participants interact with X posts of march organisers and how

[4] Tokenism basically refers to including members of marginalized community in movements to portray an image of inclusiveness, while not actually addressing issues these groups face (Childress et al., 2024).

X has helped organisers and participants to reach a wider audience and highlight their activism.

2- **To assess the state and right wings anti-march sentiment pertaining to Aurat March and its impact on free information dissemination in the context of the Network Society.**

In the Network Society, communication technologies are considered to be more autonomous in comparison to broadcast media. However state repression has intensified around the world in recent years, as even self-proclaimed defenders of civil freedoms have launched crackdown on pro-Palestine activism,on the pretence of fighting antisemitism(Rich, 2025). In Pakistan, the picture is no different with governing authorities keeping a close watch on those criticizing the state apparatus. The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority(PTA) has undue control over banning websites and content that it deems as immoral and promoting obscenity (Kamran, 2022)Activist and participants have to carefully navigate online spaces to avoid allegations of obscenity and in some cases spreading beliefs viewed as un-Islamic, as right-wing groups have a large following in Pakistan. Furthermore, blasphemy is a serious accusation which has led to killings in the past, creating an unfavourable environment for female activists (T. Khan, 2021) Hence, it is vital to study how such claims affect the growth of Networked feminism in Pakistan's Network Society.

3- **To examine how affordances of X influence Aurat March supporter's engagement and the duality offered by these affordances**

In this study I have explored how the specific viss of X as a social media platform shape the engagement march organisers and attendees receive online and whether this

framework of focusing on visibility, persistence, editability and association enables march organisers to maintain a digital presence despite offline constraints. These features can act as a double edged sword as where posts intended to archive feminist resistance are subjected to circulate hate and discredit activists over time, as observed in the past.

1.1 Explanation of Key Terms/Concepts

1.41 Network Society

The network society encapsulates a new social structure which relies upon networks facilitated by microelectronics-based information and communication technologies(Castells, 2004). This structure follows a binary logic of inclusion and exclusion, in which nodes are interconnected and can reconfigure themselves, representing flexibility, scalability and survivability(Castells, 2004). In this society, communication and media play a vital role, and the culture is centred around electronic media.

1.42 Networked Social Movements

These movements, according to Castell, begin on the Internet through Social Networks and expand through wireless communication, from mobile media and the rapid exchange of content(Castells, 2015). Internet Networks have provided the impetus for a new type of political participation which is based on horizontal networks, lack of hierarchy, and political autonomy, and possesses groundless solidarity (Castells, 2015).

1.43 Networked Feminism

Networked Feminism is a feminist protest paradigm which replaces leaders, finances, and conventionally organised political forces with various media practices, digital and otherwise that are mostly grassroots in nature (Clark-Parsons, 2018).

1.44 Affordance

In the context of social media, outline the actionable possibilities a platform can offer to its users, which are influenced by both technical design and social context(Treem & Leonardi, 2012). The four fundamental social media affordance are visibility, persistence, editability and association.

1.45 Connective Action

Connective Action is characterised by a movement in which the goals are focused on individual preferences and protesters are mobilised by loosely organised organisations or individuals with personalised communication to address individuals rather than groups (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012).

1.46 Collective Action

Collective Action can be understood as a movement with formal organisation control, which relies on creating a collective identity to achieve stronger commitment (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012).

Chapter 2

2.1 Literature Review

In this chapter, I will be reviewing the literature related to this topic. This literature review has helped me develop the conceptual framework for my research. It has also highlighted the lacuna that exists in this literature and the gap I aim to fill through this thesis. This literature review will examine previous academic works, studies conducted by providing a synopsis of the existing literature related to this research topic while analysing the theoretical, and conceptual aspects of previous scholarship, and demonstrate its relevance to the current research.

For this research I will be conducting a narrative literature review which comprises of appraising previous literature to identify gaps and identify rationale for future research. Inclusion of articles will be on a subjective basis; hence systematic literature review cannot be conducted. This type of literature also allows to identify patterns and trends within existing literature so that researchers can work on the gaps in a body of knowledge (Unriddle, 2024). This leads to fine-tuned research questions that justify the need for research. The literature review will be divided into three parts, which will include a review of research studies to show how the momentum for this movement was built by looking at feminist resistance in Pakistan, history of contentious activity globally and the role of online activism within these movements, (Theocharis et al., 2015)from previous studies.

2.11. Social movements and X activism

A critical aspect of this research is examining the ability of X for mobilisation, this article by(Theocharis et al., 2015) looks at the mobilisation effects, coordination and political communication extent of social media by analysing protest related communication on X (formerly Twitter) during the Occupy Wall Street, Indignados and Aganaktismenoi protests in America, Spain and Greece. Two weeks X posts were filtered out for each movement using their hashtags and key words. In all three movements most of the X posts were related to information dissemination rather than explicit mobilisation, as less than 15% contained direct calls to action and fewer than 5% contained logistical coordination related content' s role was largely discursive within these movements where it functioned as a public platform for debate, solidarity messages and built a collective identity.So these anti-austerity movements mainly utilised social media affordances related to associations and visibility.

Another widely known movement that originated because of social media is the Black Lives Matter (BLM) Movement, aiming to end police brutality and racially motivated violence. This study focuses on the communicative functions of X posts, doing a content analysis spanning over four years, the author analysed the influence of X in sharing information, community building and promoting action (Edrington & Lee, 2018). Similar to the previous study this research shows that information dissemination was the most common type of communitive function. Community related content such as X posts showing gratitude, solidarity messages sustained relational ties while calls urging participation in particular demonstrations, online petitions escalated during peak hours.

In order to investigate the use of X and its role in shaping decisions, actions and responses to political turmoil, a content analysis of X was conducted. The authors analysed posts pertaining to the ouster of Pakistan Ex-Prime Minister Imran Khan due to a no confidence vote in April 2022 (Zaman & Abbas, 2022). The study found that due to this platform's unique format it is a preferred choice for voicing opinions and fostering discussions. A demographic shift was also observed; previously the platform was dominated by politicians and elites, whereas now educated youth are joining X as well. Although X may be not considered fully neutral and autonomous, it has played a pivotal role in raising public concerns and mobilizing people for political causes to craft messages without requiring institutional gatekeeping as in the case of mainstream media.

While discussing the Arab Spring Castells points out how images create a virtual environment of art and meaning on which the activists of movement could rely to connect with the youth at large(Castells, 2015, p. 109).Examining one of the significant events of the Arab Spring (Kharroub & Bas, 2016) carry out systematic content analysis of X images from the Egyptian Uprising. In order to evaluate their potential to mobilize viewers through emotional arousal(violence) and collective efficacy (crowds, protest activities, national/religious symbols).

The study revealed that social media patterns were different before, during and after the movement. During intense protest period, images that showed violence, bigger crowds and protest activities gained more shares. After Hosni Mubarak's ouster, images containing national and religious symbols were posted which the author

suggests was to place focus on shared identities and collective symbols for standing united in face of uncertainties. Violent content did not lead to more repost and instead users attributes such as their location and whether they were activists better assessed image share ability.

Within the context of Pakistan, Twitter has been used by Baloch activists and family members to highlight issues of enforced disappearances and mismanagement in their province. These issues rarely make it to national media and the issue of enforced disappearance in itself is considered a trigger for the state. (Kirmani, 2024) explores the various meanings social media, particularly X, holds for Baloch activists and family members of missing persons using interviews conducted with fifteen individuals who regularly tweet on the issue enforced disappearances. Respondents believe that Twitter gives them space to talk about their issues whereas mainstream media has completely censored their movement. It also aids them in political mobilisations and creating networks of emotional support across regional and national boundaries. However multiple risks are involved for speaking up online as threats from the state along with the gendered aspect of women violating societal norms by being vocal carries the burden of backlash from family members.

This section gives an overview of how X facilitates online activism, where most of the articles point out it its role as information disseminator rather than leading to mobilisation for on ground activism.The section also shows that content analysis is the major data analysis method for analysing X posts therefore I will be utilising content analysis in my research to study X posts, including placards. The next section focuses on whether social media facilitates feminist activism.

2.12. Networked Feminism and Online Activism

Digital platforms have changed feminist activism, by shifting it from formally organised demonstrations to episodic, networked interventions to disrupt prevalent narratives. Hashtag feminism-the combined use of narrative-driven X hashtags to highlight gendered inequalities-exemplifies this transformation. Often times these hashtags have evolved to in person demonstrations, and became trending on different social media platforms. To examine this (Clark-Parsons, 2016) investigated how the the #WhyIStayed[5] developed into a highly visible protest, using X posts and newspaper articles. The author argues that the structure of the hashtag is such that elicits first person accounts redirecting the question 'Why didn't you leave' into a collective testimony depicting the culpability of perpetrators and the experience of domestic violence victims(Clark-Parsons, 2016). Flooding X with posts supporting victims and celebrity endorsements amplified reach, leading many mainstream outlets to adopt feminist approach while covering domestic violence cases abandoning victim blaming coverage.

Another movement that focused on uplifting the survivors of sexual harassment utilising a hashtag that became viral online in 2017 was #MeToo.In order to investigate how digital feminism operates in online spaces Trott (2020) analysed the #Metoo movement to understand whether digital feminist movements can function as counter publics- alternative discursive spaces that challenge prevailing patriarchal and

[5] This movement started after videos showing American Footballer Ray Rice assaulting his then fiancée emerged online and in-response to the mainstream media focus on victim blaming, this hashtag started online to offer a counter-narrative to show why individuals remain in abusive relationships.

institutional narratives. Using discourse analysis and social network analysis her study draws attention to the intersectional struggles of the #Metoo movement by highlighting the power dynamics that exist within digital feminist movements, where marginalised voices are side-lined. Using X posts the author emphasised that despite this platform being free at the time, the analysis of posts revealed that #MeToo has disproportionately centred around white, middle-class voices reproducing the same hierarchies that black, trans communities and other oppressed groups have to face within the public sphere. Hence this study contradicts Castell's argument that social media allows for collective debate and decision making as gatekeeping occurs in online spaces as well(Castells, 2015).

While social media does not essentially lead to unfettered deliberation and coordination of action as stated by (Castells, 2015, p. 10), it has created space for marginalised groups ignored by mainstream media. For Dalit women in India- lowest caste in the traditional Hindu caste system- social media has allowed the group to challenge inherent biases and advocate for their rights(Oza & St, 2024). Where Dalit Women are subjected to 'triple marginalisation' by facing subjugation from upper-caste men, Dalit men and patriarchal societal structures(Oza & St, 2024). Traditional media has misrepresented and overlooked their narratives but digital spaces have given them the control to highlight their experience. Through social media Dalit women are sharing personal stories and articulating their struggles with the justice system and societal stigma. Social media in this case has empowered the community to leverage digital networks to escape the multifaceted marginalisation these women face in real life.

Social media has also been used in the past to highlight systemic issues within the criminal justice system on the basis of race, gender identity and right to self-defence(Fischer, 2016).When CeCe Mcdonald ,a black transgender movement was charged with second-degree manslaughter after defending herself from a racially, transphobically motivated attacker. A campaign was started by a transgender organisation through social media and the hashtag. Employing an ethnographic approach, the author tries to, to capture the real world limitations of social media activism despite being seemingly accessible. While CeCe's gender non-conformity was vilified by the state and media the CeCe's support committee used social media to create counter narrative. Creation of blogs in support of CeCe and Facebook would later lead to physical protest, people going to trials and fundraising for CeCe. These efforts proved fruitful role in bringing attention to her case at the local and international media whereby activists were able challenge mainstream media narrative and mobilise support for brining reform to an unjust legal system. But Fischer points out that in order to create meaningful change cannot rely on online activism alone and on the ground efforts are necessary to create robust social movements(Fischer, 2016).

Social media in some case has also been used to challenge authoritarian regimes which has been a subject of debate within academia. One event, which ignited such a debate was the Arab Spring, a pro-democracy protest, which started from Tunisia and spread towards five Arab countries in 2011. This study by Smidi & Shahin(2017) analyses scholarship published on the uprising in peer reviewed journals for six years. Most of the articles presented that with the advent of social media, citizens in

countries with low freedom of press had become better informed, facilitating activism and collective action. Significant number of articles (F. A. Ali & Macharia, 2013; Cattle, 2016; Radsch & Khamis, 2013) mentioned how women were the major beneficiaries of social media, due to cultural constraint limiting their participation in the public sphere. Similar to Pakistan where female mobility is limited due to socio-cultural norms. Social media provided women with the opportunity to debate with men, on policy alternatives which may not have been possible in real life. On the flip side, the authors present compelling evidence as to why social media cannot be considered the sole factor for instigating activism, since social, cultural, political and historical factors also play a role. Along with these factors, the influence of mass media should not be overlooked. Limitations of the impact of social media are also presented to show where platforms failed to generate a sustained impact in these regions.

A movement that was initiated online due to outrage against growing femicide cases in Argentina, using social media campaigns which eventually gained momentum and led to mass protests across Latin America(Diaz, 2021).Ni Una Menos which translates to Not One Less,started out as a slogan and turned into a viral hashtag to represent this movement. Where social media was a significant tool for outreach and organising there were quite a number of intersectional barriers that this digital feminist movement possessed(Spangler, 2024). Using a qualitative approach Ni Una Menos participants and non-participant were asked to complete surveys and interviews, deliberating their engagement and non-engagement with the movement

and questions pertaining to participation accessibility, their preferred methods and safety concerns(Spangler, 2024).

By engaging non participants this study is different in that way that it looks at the barriers that exist for those who are left out alongside it examines psychological aspect of protest participation by looking at safety and intimidation concerned. Intersectional issues related to caste, gender identity and race alienated many people from the movement. Access to internet and digital literacy limited participation, while those participants that primarily engaged online were sometimes dismissed as less legitimate as compared to those active in physical protests. New joiners and those not well versed in feminist lexicon felt intimated, while those experienced activists dominated both discourse and decision making, unintentionally leading to exclusion. This study shows that networked feminism while empowering at the face of it, is influenced by socio economic factors, digital divides and movement dynamics that make it less inclusive.

A study focused on nine feminist movements in Turkey was conducted to analyse the potential opportunities and limitations due to digital media at three levels namely visibility, solidarity and awareness raising(Şener, 2021). Using semi structured interviews and online observation with digital media moderators of feminist movements, the study concludes that algorithmic biases, the digital divide, social media commercialisation and state surveillance act as barriers to towards increasing visibility and engagement. The study states that online misogyny and the political repression of dissent further heightens the affordance offered by social media for feminist activism. Both Turkey and Pakistan are Muslim majority countries where

feminists have to carefully navigate space due to cultural taboos and religious nationalism.

2.13. Affordances of social media for activism

Little work has been done as to how social media facilitates in creating a collective identity for social movements, This article by Ronzhyn et al.,(2023) fills this gap by looking at Iranian women's right campaign page using textual and visual analysis. The author analyses post from a Facebook group called My Stealthy Freedom and delves onto how this group functions as a safe space for women to debate, articulate and discuss their experience with hijab laws. The author states categories that the aforementioned practices fall under affordance for discourse, where activist are able to collectively frame how this laws affects them and foster solidarity amongst themselves. The next affordance relates to performance whereby group members are visually and symbolically able to channel their frustration by posting photos without the hijab, allowing them to publicly perform acts of resistance and reclaim digital space in the network society.

The co-author of this concept wrote another study detailing the organisational impact using the affordance approach, while also reviewing existing scholarship on social media use and its impact on communication and knowledge sharing(Leonardi & Vaast, 2017). Through a narrative literature review the author identifies agenda for future research to finding how social movement use these affordances to bring about change in organisations.

The authors point out that the four affordance impact organisation activities such as communication, information dissemination and collaboration. They effect power

dynamics by shortening hierarchies, by building new forms of influence they exclude and dominate, may lead to uneven participation. Through flexibility offered by digital communication networks a new kind of workflow is created, but this can lead to information overload and increased visibility by tracking of work can lead to surveillance. All of these affordances are interdependent on the organisational context, such as leadership, values, goals influence how they are enacted.

Since my research looks at particular social media and its affordance to contemporary social movement, it is importance to look at previous research focusing on this theme. This book chapter investigates how X enables feminist activism through the #YesAllWomen campaign, which emerged after two misogynistic terror attacks took place in Isla Vista(Barker-Plummer & Barker-Plummer, 2017).The study aims to analyse X affordances as a platform for discursive social change, highlighting marginalised voice and challenging patriarchal narratives(Barker-Plummer & Barker-Plummer, 2017).

Using discourse and content analysis studied the dynamics of feminism activism within the #YesAllWomen X campaign. This hashtag was in response to the not all men phrase used to by men to defend themselves from feminist arguments(Grinberg, 2014). Using automated content analysis to shortlist X posts a qualitative discourse analysis and media content analysis to analyse patterns in language, themes. The campaign relied on increasing visibility by making private experience of everyday sexism available to the public. The use of the hashtag also allowed individual voices to participate in a collective, by sharing similar experiences creating a networked feminist counter public.

2.14. History of women led movements in Pakistan

The Aurat March was not born in a vacuum but came about as a result of a series of struggles faced by women in post-independence Pakistan. In this report published by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Dr. Rubina Saigol has comprehensively summed up the events that led to the recent feminist uprising, from which I have borrowed excerpts to give historical context for the movement. Muhammad Ali Jinnah had reiterated the irrevocable differences between Muslim and Hindus pre-partition to garner the support of religious clergy at that time(Saigol, 2016). Despite him taking a secular stance in his first address to the Constituent Assembly in 1948, the religious lobby had accumulated more support(Saigol, 2016). This strength manifested in the form of resistance to progressive legislation related to women. Despite setbacks, this did not deter women from demanding their rights in debates which disproportionately excluded them and in a move to secure economic parity women meetings began to place for addressing their economic concerns(Saigol, 2016).When the Shariat bill was omitted from the agenda of the National Assembly, female legislators became extremely outraged and took up this matter with the Muslim League Women's Committee(Saigol, 2016). Scores of women marched to the Assembly chambers chanting slogans, led by other women leaders. This proved fruitful and the Muslim Personal Law of Shariat (1948) became operational, which allowed women to inherit property.

Women leaders also started to demand political representation, by increasing the number of reserved seats for women from 3% to 10%. In 1954, the Charter of Women Rights Bill was presented by Jahnara Shahnawaz to further this demand,

however, the reserved seats continued to stand at 3% for central and provincial assembly(Saigol, 2016). In 1955, the All Pakistan Women's Association started a campaign against the then Prime Minister, Ali Bogra's second marriage(Saigol, 2016). This campaign led to the creation of the United Front for Women's Rights whose collective action compelled the Supreme Court to review laws regarding marriage, divorce, custody, and maintenance of children(Saigol, 2016).

Prime Minister Liaqat Ali Khan wife Ra'ana Liaqat Ali made a number of contributions towards advancing welfare and legal reforms and raising the issue of women's education and economic inclusion(Saigol, 2016). She led the All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA) to focus on female education, skill development, and income generation by establishing schools and colleges and organising markets to promote the products of women. She also formed the Women National Guard and Women's Naval Reserve, which imparted military training among women, however, they received backlash from religious entities and eventually came to a halt when Ra'ana Liaqat left the country(Saigol, 2016).

APWA also managed to have the Muslim Family Law Ordinance (MFLO) passed during the era of Ayub Khan's military dictatorship, which mandated that men had to take permission from their first wives for any subsequent marriage(Saigol, 2016). Although women were making strides in some spheres, a lot of barriers existed. When the sister of Muhammad Ali Jinnah decided to stand in elections against Ayub Khan, he managed to convince the religious scholars to side with him and declare that a woman cannot be the head of state of an Islamic country(Saigol, 2016). He ran a

smear campaign against Fatima Jinnah by accusing her of working for Americans, being unfeminine, and of not being a motherly figure(Saigol, 2016).

The absence of a vibrant women's rights movement or feminist struggle was one of the reasons why Ayub Khan was able to use religious scholars to declare that a woman could not be the head of state in a Muslim country. Ayub Khan's accusations that Fatima Jinnah was an Indian and American agent, and an unfeminine and un-motherly figure were not met with indignation and anger, unlike the effect of such accusations against Benazir Bhutto decades later, when they were met with scorn, anger, and uproar(Saigol, 2016). Ironically, in an attempt to remove Ayub Khan and gain power, the Jamaat-e-Islaami supported Fatima Jinnah and radically altered its earlier position that women could not become heads of state in an Islamic country.

During the brief time of democracy under Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, women representation in the political realm improved as two women became part of the constitution making committee. Women were also allowed to occupy positions in government services which lead to induction of many women in foreign services. After 1947 till Bhutto's rule ended in 1977, relation of the state and women's movement was devoid of confrontation and dispute as their demands were confined to traditional norms and they were primarily engaged in welfare initiatives. Women did not question military dictators as long as they achieved a few rights.

This changed during General Zia Ul Haq's dictatorship in 1978 during which there was a rise in restrictions imposed on both public and private sphere to strengthen the Islamic credentials of his regime. The Hudood Ordinance 1979 conflated rape with adultery and made it difficult for women to substantiate rape in the absence of male

witnesses. The Qisas and Diyat Law promulgated in 1979 aimed to privatise the crime of honour killing while the Law of Evidence of 1984 equated the testimony of two female witnesses to that of one man.

It was the Fehmida-Allah Bux case that set the precedent for altering relations between the state and women, as women felt extremely discriminated against and this led to the creation of the Women Action Forum (WAF). Female lawyers decide to march to the Lahore High Court to submit a petition against the Law of Evidence. WAF members joined them and were tear gassed and baton-charged but this protest managed to catch the interest of national and international press outlets. WAF members frequently resorted to rallies and protests against the fundamentalist regime of Zia Ul Haq. Women became creative in their forms of protest by utilizing poetry, literature, music, dance, theatre, painting along with films to resist the most brutal dictatorship they are had experienced. After Zia's tenure, female political representation was a major concern as it was necessary to restore the reserved seats for women in national and provincial assemblies.

In the 1980s, Pakistan experienced a mushroom growth of NGO's working for women's rights, with each having a significant influence in promoting the type of feminist agendas they wanted. Although WAF did not accept any donor funding and functioned primarily on personal donations, they slowly lost momentum due to loss of funds and a sense of urgency because democratic rule returned. Military rule returned in Pakistan in 1999 and during General Musharraf's dictatorship, the peasant protest was initiated against laws that gave poor working conditions, decreased wages, and evicted peasants without little notice (Syed, 2016).

Detention of farmers and peasants under false charges led women to take the centre stage of this movement. Women protested by raising their washing bats in the air called *Thaapa'* and whenever rangers attempted to block the harvest from taking place women would obstruct them using their *Thaapa's*. Women became the flagbearers of resistance and as a result literacy rate increased and their treatment within the public sphere became better.

In 2008 democratic rule returned to Pakistan, a culmination of the 10-year prolonged struggle of women to curb sexual harassment resulted in the parliament passing two laws against sexual harassment in 2010. Section 2(H) of the Protection Against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act 2010 comprised of an amendment to criminalising sexual harassment anywhere whileSection 3 of the Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act 2010 dealt with establishing formal mechanism of sexual harassment in the workplace. According to Dr Rubina Saigol, Aurat March differs from previous feminist movements as it challenges patriarchy prevalent in the private sphere along with mainstreaming oppressed gender identities and sexual expression(Saigol & Chaudhary, 2020) .

2.15. Historical research on Aurat March

In this section, I will be focusing the research on Aurat March by analysing social media interaction related to Aurat march along with hate speech and experience of participants.

How Aurat March came into to being

Before looking at research on Aurat March it is important to highlight that Islamabad has two marches every year Aurat March Islamabad and Aurat Azadi March.Aurat March Islamabad.Aurat March Islamabad marches for the subjugation of women in both the public and private sphere where it identifies as a cross class movement(Saigol & Chaudhary, 2020).While Aurat Azadi March is organised by members of Women Democratic Front to fight for economic, social and political liberation of women by following socialist feminism(Saigol & Chaudhary, 2020). The first march in Islamabad happened in 2019 and it was organised by Aurat Azadi March but over the year's ideological difference and persistent legal battles, blasphemy accusations made Aurat Azadi Maarch fearful of marching on the streets(Bari, 2025). These tensions eventually led to a split with the creation of Aurat March Islamabad as a separate collective and since 2022 both collectives hold separate events in Islamabad, where Aurat Azadi March organisers decided to hold a gathering instead of marching.

During the focus group discussion held with Aurat March Lahore organisers and volunteers, one organisers mentioned how she was inspired to bring Aurat March to her city by looking at the Facebook page of Aurat March Karachi's chapter in 2018.This motivated her to start a Facebook event for Aurat March Lahore and shared it within friends circle(*2018(Aurat March Lahore)*, 2018).After some people reached out to her, she decided to hold a meeting where the organising committee was formed to figure out arrangements for the march. Post 2018 the march has reached out to other feminist collectives such as Women Action Forum and in 2019 the march made official social media accounts for online presence.

Since its inception Aurat March has faced significant backlash for confronting the private patriarchy with their slogans, this criticism can hinder people from participating in the march consequences for march participation. With two thirds of the population of Pakistan aged 24 or below(Aman, 2024) , so their perception and participation in the March is a major determinant for whether it will be successful or not. The research titled 'Perception of Youth Regarding Aurat March in Pakistan: An Exploratory Study' explores the perception of youth regarding the movement utilising semi structured interviews, to check the overall sentiment of this demographic (Nadeem et al., 2024). While some may view it as a movement to challenge gender norms, others believe that it is against Islamic teachings and promotes vulgarity. Some also criticise the movement for being elitist, by not incorporating the concerns of less privileged women in economically disadvantaged areas.

Men's engagement with Aurat March is significantly overlooked in research as most research focuses on their role as facilitators of patriarchy. However, (S. A. Khan, 2022)explores the perceptions, motivations, and associations with the feminist struggles in Pakistan through interviews in an attempt to study men who participate in the March as volunteers and participants. His research points out that men believe that building alliances is vital for collectively dismantling the toxic masculinity that is prevalent in the Pakistani society. A respondent also pointed out that men should not hijack the movement and instead give women the space to organise and lead the movement. This research demonstrates how some men continue to resist patriarchal system through participating in such movements.

The role of print media in shaping ideological representation of Aurat March through agenda setting and linguistic framing has been looked in this qualitative study(Nishat & Hussain, 2022).Focusing on articles from the The Nation and Dawn for two years that is 2020 and 2021 ,the authors utilise theoretical frameworks from Michael Foucault and Ken Hyland to evaluate the concept of discourse[i] and meta discourse[6] within newspaper articles. Undertaking a qualitative approach, a comparative content analysis is conducting, three feminist themes have been devised related to patriarchy, violence and abuse and women rights.

This study focuses on English Language Media side-lining Urdu media despite having a high circulation('Pakistan Media Guide', 2023).Dawn adopted a pro-feminist stance focusing on women's right and emancipation from systemic patriarchy. Both newspaper use agenda-setting to narrate certain aspects of the march where Dawn frames at challenging patriarchal structures, The Nation highlights the march non-conformity with religious and cultural values. The polarisation is reflective of how media outlets deploy language to frame the march according to their ideological preferences.

Aurat March has often been portrayed as contradictory to Islamic teachings by deeming the slogans and placards raised during the March as immoral. A research focusing on evaluating Aurat March from an Islamic lens and justifies how the march imposes western agenda while challenging Islamic and cultural traditions (Al-Qawārīr et al., 2022). Using content analysis, slogans of the March such as 'Mera

[6] Meta discourse are commentary on discourse itself(Nishat & Hussain, 2022).

Jism,Meri Marzi' are discussed to be contradictory to Islamic teachings. Authors assert that Muslims cannot use their bodies according to their own will and provides backing with Quranic verses and sayings of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). It categorises the feminism of Aurat March as radical and blames Aurat March participants for blaming violations of women's rights on Islam. This study offers significant evidence for why right-wing groups label the March as disturbing the family system and crossing boundaries of Islam.

These sentiments are used by talk show hosts who tend to invite Aurat March supporters and religious clerics to go head-to-head with each other for more viewership (Ahmed, 2020).The biased media coverage of the Aurat March has led March organisers to release statements labelling them as unwittingly aiding hate speech against the March (Alam, 2021). A research by Tabassum et al., (2023) focuses on analysis of data from selected talk shows aired on news channels in Pakistan on whether media provides a balanced coverage of the March. However, results show sensationalism and presence of a biased narrative towards the March. From the selection of panellists to the type of issues that were discussed all factors were designed in a way to increase hate speech and polarise the public against the March.

Aurat March and Social Media

According to statistics published the PTA YouTube has the highest share of social media users after Facebook(*PTA Annual Report 2024*, 2024). Social media users tend to participate in the type of discussion that support their pre-existing beliefs, which in turn lead to polarization and clusters of opinion commonly referred to as echo-

chambers (Bessi et al., 2015). Using positioning theory, the author highlights how the participants discursively construct others in social media focusing on a YouTube video on Aurat March in 2019(Sadaf & Siitonen, 2022).The video which has garnered a lot of views describes the purpose of the March according to the creator. Comments from the video show that those who support the Aurat March are deemed as morally and culturally divergent. Traditional, heterosexual masculinity has a significant role in reinforcing a set gender ideology which gives power to men. Women are not allowed to participate in public spaces while men can participate in the public domain. These discriminatory practices are replicated in social media discourses as demonstrated by the commentators.

Facebook has over 60 Million users in Pakistan(*PTA Annual Report 2024*, 2024), therefore the platform is quite impactful in shaping narratives related to Aurat March, both favourable and unfavourable. To study this phenomena, Ameer(2021) utilised Critical Discourse Analysis on three randomly selected Facebook pages that shared content related to the March. Posts which had images of slogans and placards were used, and a lexicalisation tool was used to analyse slogans based on 4 themes related to vulgarity, slang language, untruthful and abuse.

The study found that lexical framing plays a major role in influencing public perception. Posters that are bold and can be interpreted in multiple of ways, were perceived as indecent and influenced by western values. Slogans related to bodily autonomy especially Mera Jism,Meri Marzi and other posters referring to menstruation were seen as inculcating foreign values rather than promoting women empowerment. Whereas placards that use milder language and focused on

improvement of education, safety measures were considered more socially acceptable. The author states that use of provocative language diverts attention from the March's aim and fuels propaganda to misinterpret the movement.

Print and electronic media vastly cover the March and shape the dominant socio-cultural ideologies of public while influencing power relations as well according to (Baig et al., 2020). Aiming to analyse the aforementioned phenomena within the context of Aurat March, Baig et al., (2020) analysed three print social media articles related to the March, using Critical Discourse Analysis. In the first two articles, the ideologies created by the media negatively described Aurat March whereas the third article pointed out the negative role of media in making the movement controversial and showed how placards which demonstrating the positive role of the march were side-lined and neglected. All three articles written about the movement utilising social cultural norms show that media can play a positive and negative role in shaping ideologies depending on the social context.

While ICT(Information Communication Technology) provides assistance to mobilisation and accessibility of women's activism, they also offer risks by anti-feminist discourses. To understand this struggle (Kamal, 2022) analyses the placards of Aurat March, which themselves are a site of contestation. The author asserts that Aurat March organisers while using networked activism to create a feminist consciousness and mobilising support, are also victims of networked misogyny where doctored images and online comments are used to reduce the credibility of the movement.

Language is a means of production and reinforcement of power relations and ideologies. Aurat March has continued to receive attention from social media platforms by challenging patriarchal norms. In the study titled ‘Language And Gender: A Critical Discourse Analysis Of Tweets And Hashtags On Aurat March 2021’ analysed X posts related to specific hashtags for Aurat March 2021 were analysed using critical discourse analysis to reveal power relation and socio-cultural norms in the selected corpus (Waqar et al., 2023). This study puts forth evidence that men were biased towards the march and women are discouraged from making decisions. Women are only given autonomy to make decisions as long as they conform to the male standards of what is considered acceptable. It also provides evidence that people doubt the legitimacy of the movement because it is mostly supported by women.

The review of literature provides ample evidence that Aurat March has not been looked at from the perspective of the Network Society and using the affordance approach. Applying these theories enables the reader to get a more granular understanding of whether the design and structure of X facilitate or hinders activism. By viewing the material constraints and features of this platform I aim to beyond treating this platform as a neutral tool and instead show that digital activism is not just influenced by human intent but it also vastly dependent on technological affordances and power structures embedded in the society. While previous research has studied the interplay between X(Twitter) activism and Aurat March it only looks at specific hashtags whereas the scope of my research is broader in the sense that it looks at all X posts from Aurat March Islamabad’s account which are filtered

according to their relevance to the themes. This research is also unique as it incorporates multiple units of data collection from semi-structured interviews to X posts along with placards at the March, using a combination of these methods. Furthermore, I volunteered for Aurat March 2024, in order to gain an emic perspective, which helped me build trust with the participants and organizers and provided valuable insights into the planning process.

2.2. Conceptual Framework

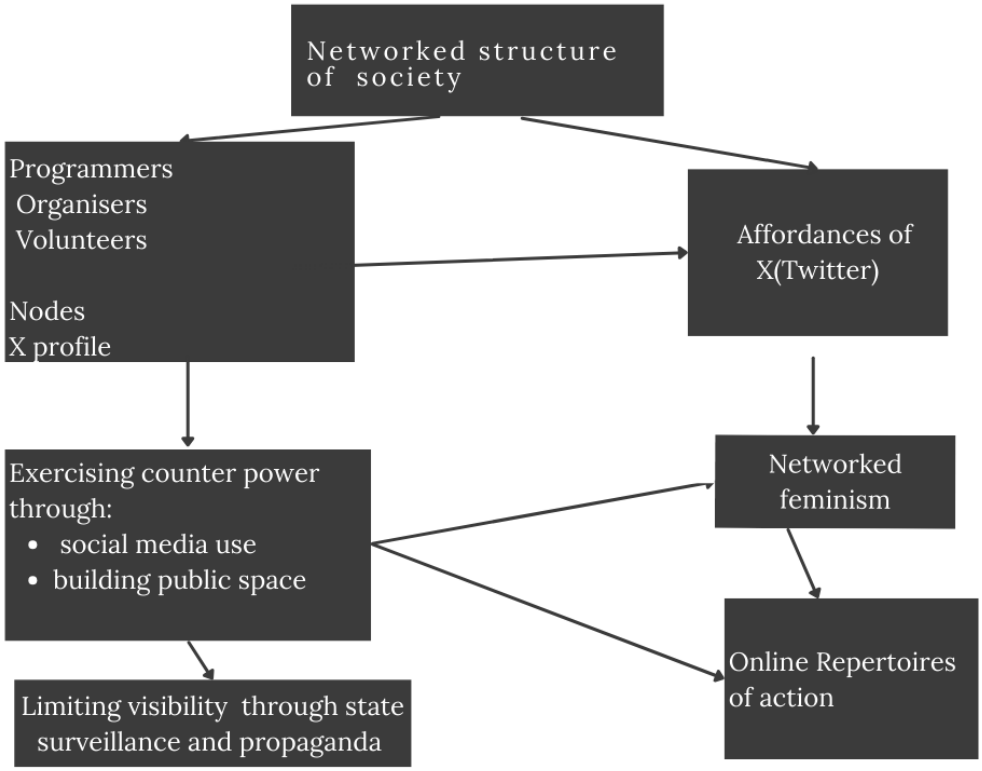

FIGURE 1: PICTORIAL REPRESENTATION OF CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.21. Networked Structure of Society

The Network structure of society encompasses a new social structure not defined by traditional hierarchies but by networks of information and communication technologies(ICTs)(Castells, 2004, p. 3). Networks consist of interconnected nodes and a node is where multiple flows connect. These networks do not have centres, and relevance of nodes can vary, depending on their capability to contribute to the networks goals. This however does not mean that some nodes are insignificant as all nodes are necessary for a network to function. Networks can restructure themselves when nodes become redundant by subtracting some and adding new nodes. ‘‘Nodes only exist and function as components of networks. The network is the unit, not the node”(Castells, 2004, p. 3).Networks are never static and are formed through the continuous flow information, without the constant flow of information, networks cannot exist. The ability of a network to survive hinges upon its ability to reconfigure itself as a result of new threats or opportunities.

Networks operate on a binary logic of exclusion and inclusion, where those included are able to communicate with others while those excluded cannot participate and be connected within that system. The X profile of Aurat March can function as a node in this case, as it is connecting followers to organisers of Aurat March and its where the demand, placards, videos are uploaded making it focal point for information dissemination.

Power is dependent on where you are in the network and how capable of effective other nodes. Castell believes where there is power there will be counter power(Castells, 2015, p. 5). The ways in which power is distributed and exercised are built into the fundamental institutions that govern how society operates particularly

the state.Since the state has monopoly over using coercion, intimidation is an essential tool used to impose the will of those controlling those societal institutions. However, the way meaning is constructed in people's minds is a more significant and more long-lasting source of power as people's thinking ultimately determines the future of these institutions, along with norms and values in which society functions. In the Network Society, power is multifaceted and is structured around networks programmed in each facet of human activity dependent on the interest and values of empowered actors. Networks of power apply their power by shaping the human mind mostly through multimedia networks of mass communication. Communication networks are instrumental sources of power making(Castells, 2015, p. 8). Nonetheless, communication network possesses the ability to construct meaning on which power is linked and the state functions as the principal network that ensures all other power networks operate properly. Castell suggests that power is distributed between those who can program and reprogram networks to attain their goals (programmers) and those who can link different networks to collaborate in achieving common aims (switchers)(Castells, 2004, p. 32). These distinctions cannot be limited to individuals but can represent network of actors as well. Thus, the potential to influence the apparatuses of communication and design processes of communication is a vital source of power in the Network Society. Individuals and groups can disrupt this power by reprogramming networks and using horizontal communication and mass media messages to share their narratives. Mass media is primarily controlled by the government; therefore, social media to some extent provides discursive autonomy.

However, Castell argues that in order for a movement to be successful it must become hybrid where it occupies physical space and aswell as cyber space, as shown here:

‘‘In our society, the public space of the social movements is constructed as a hybrid space between the Internet social networks and the occupied urban space: connecting cyberspace and urban space in relentless interaction, constituting, technologically and culturally, instant communities of transformative practice’’ (Castells, 2015, p. 10).

I will contextualise this theory within the Aurat March to show how X allows interconnected nodes within the March to exercise power using X as a tool of communication with relatively less surveillance than broadcast. Organisers and volunteers are the ones involved engaged in coordination and devising a plan for the movement so they function as programmers. On the other hand, switchers are entities that help forge links between Aurat March and other networks, this could be independent media centres, journalists and X activists.

These programmers and switcher rely on social media along with their networks to exercise counter power and motivate people to show their presence on the March. This is linked with connective action as sharing of personalized content on the internet allows organizers to galvanise support for their cause, since sharing of these posts is self-motivated and is different to traditional resource intensive methods of mobilization. These movements utilise personalised action frames as narrative templates that individuals to express their motivation for joining a movement and connecting with like-minded individuals(Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Contrary to more known collective action frames- created and disseminated by organisation, personal frames are user generated, combine movement themes with personal

narratives and demands, and they can be easily shared online(Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 744).

2.22. Affordance of X(Twitter)

Inspired by Gibson use of the term affordance where it refers to how an object utility may be perceived differently by individuals based on perception and use of the object.The same concept has been extrapolated to technologies by (Treem & Leonardi, 2012) who attempt to answer why some individuals might use the same technology for different reasons. After conducting a systematic review on how people interacted and collaborated within work environments, they identified the following four affordance as major drivers of digital communication environments.

1- Visibility: It refers to how practices such as behaviours, preferences and communication network connections which were very hard to see or not decvisible can now be visible to those people who have access to the system.In case of Aurat March 'X' offers a space to march organisers,particpants and supporters to share placard images, demands to the public at large.Greater visibility enables the spread of feminist discourse not restricted to physical gathering and contributing to agenda setting and debate. This enhanced visibility leads to state surveillance, moral policing and intense backlash from opponents as well.

2- Persistence: Communication is persistence if it remains available to users in the same original form as shared by the actor(Bregman & Haythornthwaite, 2003; Donath et al., 1999).While this feature allows to give legitimacy to the movement by demonstrating how the work Aurat March organisers engage in

throughout the year, it has also been used to target activists and supporters through smear campaigns.

3- Editability: Relates to the autonomy social media provides to craft and compose message before they can be viewed by others for better comprehension. As in the case of social media platforms including Framing demands and sharing stances on issues in a way that resonates with progressive forces is important to forge connections. Ensuring that posts are not misaligned with socio-cultural sensitivities and posts are not misinterpreted.

4- Association: ‘‘Are connections established between individuals, between individuals and content, or between an actor and presentation’’(Treem & Leonardi, 2012, p. 30).Association can exist in two forms the first one is referred to as a social tie(Treem & Leonardi, 2012, p. 30), where a person becomes friend with another person on a social network site. The second one is between an individual and content they have created or recognised. By recommending content based of a person previous patterns of use or information social media helps build more associations. By sharing their stance and aligning themselves with different causes online through reposting, quotes and commenting Aurat March aligns with multiple progressive causes on X.

n. On X, users are afforded opportunities to draft, modify, or delete tweets to manage their public messaging carefully. For Aurat March activists, this ability to curate content is critical for framing demands in a manner that is

both resonant and defensible, particularly given the political sensitivities surrounding feminist protest in Pakistan. Editability thus allows activists to strategically shape narratives, respond to controversies, and mitigate the risk of misinterpretation or legal repercussions, without fully insulating them from the broader dynamics of platform governance or cultural backlash.

While this concept was used to understand communication dynamics within an organisation, I have repurposed this framework to study how X provides a discursive arena by allowing them to negotiate meaning and make their narrative visible in patriarchal society. By incorporating these affordances within the overall theory of the network society this study highlights where technological features shape the communicative practices, dangers and relationship dynamics with in networked feminist movement.

2.23. Networked Feminism

Another concept utilised in this study is how Networked Feminism ‘‘a form of contemporary political action that is characterised by complex connectivity and which operates at the intersection of online and offline, and across campaigning activities, feelings, and people’’(Fotopoulou, 2016, p. 49).This concept underpins that emerging feminist movements are not confined to physical spaces and have a strong presence in the digital realms aswell. As I have observed how activists, organisers and participants of the march utilise X to disseminate information and engage in public discourse while arranging in-person demonstrations and events. This dual engagement and how it galvanises support for the march has been examined. Placards which are shared across social media comprise of the emotional components that are

both a site of contestation but also drive and sustain the movement. Aurat March utilizes social media to announce the location, route and timings of the march while also using social media during the march to share events that transpire during and after the march.

2.24. Online repertoires of action

These refer to the various set of digital tactics and tools that activists utilize to mobilize support, spread information and coordinate action. The protest strategies specifically employed on X such as doing spaces to engage with the general public, support and endorsing calls for protests, showing solidarity to different causes are just some of the ways in which Aurat march is diversifying to remain relevant in the digital landscape.

2.25. Backlash faced by the movement

Backlash faced by the movement is another factor that will be taken into account as religious groups and the state are critical of this movement and have created hurdles to stop it from taking place. From setting up a counter march in Islamabad to physically attacking Aurat March Islamabad participants, the movement has faced severe backlash. Digital propaganda is another issue where X posts of participants holding placards are doctored or taken out of context. State surveillance of digital platforms, especially the blanket ban of X and its ties to Aurat March growth will be analysed as well.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology

Research methodology refers to the specific approach used to gather, analyse, and interpret qualitative or quantitative date to address specific research questions. In this chapter, I have given an overview of the research techniques I have used along with their justification.

3.1 Research Strategy

This research has followed a qualitative approach since the research questions required detailed explanation and understanding of the respondent's experience of attending the March. (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Participant observation was also used to observe data in its natural setting on the day of the March rather than manipulating settings as in the case of quantitative research. The nature of the data being collected is in-depth and non-numerical, while immersing the researcher in the process without altering any setting. The sample I have taken is small as the aim was to collect rich data rather than a representative sample.

3.2 Research Design

The research followed a case study approach where Aurat March is the case being studied using multiple data collection methods such as interviews, focus group discussions, and X posts (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Since the research questions cannot be addressed through a single data collection method, various methods have been deployed. In case study research, the boundaries between the phenomena and its context are not clearly defined, hence data is context dependent. This limits the generalizability of the study but provides detailed insights into this specific case.

3.21 Triangulation of sources

According to Donkoh & Mensah(2023) triangulation is about studying a single phenomenon from various data sources, using different theories, methods and researchers. For my research I have compared data from several units of data collection namely interviews, participant observation, social media posts and newspaper articles. Through triangulation I not only have various ways of looking at the same phenomena, but each data set has its own inconsistencies that can be overcome by using multiple data sources(Konecki, 2008). Given the complexity of my research questions using only one data source might have led to gaining partial understanding of the phenomenon in question. Therefore, I used multiple data sources where X posts capture the kind of narrative Aurat March organisers want to build online and placards show how participants frame their demands and resistances. However relying on social media posts alone can lead to algorithmic biases[7], as I am doing research from my own account and it might only show those posts which align with my past interactions online. Also while compiling data,I came across many posts that had been deleted from Aurat March Islamabad X account which could potentially lead to some biases in sampling, Furthermore, these posts are from organisers and their opponents they do not reflect the opinion of mainstream media which has vital role in shaping public opinion(M. Khan et al., 2022). To overcome this gap, I have included newspaper articles to show how mainstream media covers the march by using articles from both English and Urdu Newspapers.

[7] Algorithmic bias is when an algorithm, although appears to be neutral in creation, systematically supports or opposes certain groups or viewpoints in its output.

While newspaper articles and social media posts capture real time data from organisers, activists and journalists, they do not offer a substitute for first-hand account provided from interviews. Interviews offer in-depth insights and provide personal accounts of the experience of March attendees and organisers. It is very important to link the vast data gathered from these aforementioned sources with on ground events and that is possible by doing participant observation. Whereby those aspects that may not be thoroughly captured through social media posts and interviews maybe observed and recorded real time such as resistances from security personnel, hindrances in march route.

3.3 Units of Data Collection (UDCs)

3.31 UDC 1: Activists and Organizers of Aurat March:

Since this research follows a qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with March Organizers to understand how X influences their activism and mobilization efforts. Interviews were carried out with activists and organizers of the March to understand their first-hand experience of organizing the March and issues they have faced. Focus group discussions were also conducted to identify how March organisers use social media to convene and what role X plays in mobilizing supporters. Since activists and organisers are mainly responsible for arranging the March and controlling social media handles, it was vital to take their perspective in this research. These interviews were then recorded and transcribed after receiving permission from interviewees. Since Aurat March Lahore and Karachi have a different theme in comparison to Islamabad, I have focused on attendees of the Aurat

March in Islamabad. Activists were shortlisted according to their role in organizing the March and of handling social media accounts. Participant observation on the day of the March was used to gain insight into the practices and interaction of March participants. By immersing myself in the same situation, I was better able to understand the backlash, the risk, and the societal expectations that the individuals central to the research experience (Balsiger & Lambelet, 2014).In order to record events taking place during the march field notes with time stamps were used. A vital aspect I took in to account were March participants, both male and female, since their experience of attending the March differs from each other. Additionally, their motivations for attending the March despite online propaganda and state resistance was a significant component of my research.

3.32 UDC 2: Twitter posts

Since the focus of this research was particularly on social media and the March's presence on it, X posts were collected from Aurat March Islamabad's account for Aurat March 2024 and 2023. Another reason for choosing X instead of other social media platforms is its popular and influential user base consisting of political, social, and religious leaders (Zaman & Abbas, 2022). Online platforms like X allow for manipulation of online spaces, due to inadequate moderation policies in South Asian countries, which creates a conducive environment for online harassment and abuse (Shahid, 2023). Thus, this section reflects on how Aurat March organizers respond to the repressive, misogynistic, and exclusionary narratives they face in online spaces. In order to explore why governments and right-wing groups consistently work to impede their growth, X posts and reposts from @Aurat_marchisb were collected since the

theme of the March for 2023 and 2024 was announced for Islamabad chapter and till one week after the march.For this UDC, I only focused on X posts from Aurat March Islamabad account as out of the three main cities, Lahore, Karachi, and Islamabad, Aurat March Islamabad faces significant hurdles from ideological rifts, opposing marches by right wing groups, and threats from the police.

Posts that have been filtered out according to their relevancy with the theme of the research were analysed.Posts where Aurat March organisers were called out for their selective activism, violation of religious cultural norms and being foreign funded were used. While X posts of Aurat March organisers that had a lot of engagement pertaining to placards, slogans and videos of the events that took place were used. Posts on X since the theme is announced that is January 30th,2023 and January 29th,2024 till one week after the march that is 15th March were analysed for both Aurat March 2023 and 2024. Castell notes that since the mass media is largely controlled by governments and media corporation's digital social media networks offer movements a platform to control their narrative and make their voices heard. ''Mass self-communication provides the technological platform for the construction of the autonomy of the social actor, be it individual or collective,

vis-à-vis the institutions of society''(Castells, 2015, p. 7). Discourse on social media is rapidly evolving in comparison to interviews, thus capturing these sentiments at a faster pace is possible through social media analysis. While interviews may help in understanding individual motivations, they may not fully represent the broader impact of digital activism (Wang et al., 2012). Aurat March Islamabad regularly uses X to comment on trending issues and issue statements; these posts also contain visual

campaigns March organisers use to issue call to actions so therefore I have analysed the affordance offered by X to march organisers.

3.33 UDC 3: Newspaper articles:

In order to gain understanding of how main stream outlets respond to the March newspaper articles in English and Urdu were studied as most right-wing groups get coverage from Urdu Newspapers (Bukhari, 2021). While the focus was of my study is on a social media platform it is important to analyse how Aurat March is represented by the mainstream media.To decipher whether social media is in fact different from mass media coverage of the march. By analysing the lexical and framing choices for the March, antipathy towards Aurat March from religious parties and right-wing groups from newspapers was evaluated.

3.34 UDC 4: Placards:

Placards were observed during the day of the March and recurrent themes were identified. Since placards serves as the main target for censuring the movement, it was vital to study the meaning behind them (Kamal, 2022a). These placards were taken from Aurat March X account mostly and Instagram. It is necessary to study placards as they provide this sort of permanence to the movement by archiving its narrative also they make it viral online(Uddin, 2022) stimulating discourse as to what the march stands for. Attendees at the March carry placards to challenge mainstream gender norms and gender roles by demanding autonomy, justice, freedom, and equality. Placards, therefore, play a part in the creation of feminist spaces by employing a combination of forceful slogans, testimonies, artwork, sarcasm, and humour as a kind of cultural critique (Kamal, 2022). Themes include ethnic and

sectarian violence, child and sexual abuse, gender roles, gaining access to public spaces, education, and healthcare (Kamal, 2022). These placards were only limited to Aurat March Islamabad and not to other chapters.

3.35 UDC 5 Events and Processes:

In order to obtain a contextual understanding of the March, I have used participant observation to observe events and processes that take place before and during the march. Each year, according to their theme, Aurat march organizers articulate their struggles in form of anthems, plays, and performances (Bari, 2025). Every year, according to the pressing issues of the time, Aurat March organizers prepare chants, speeches, performances. Events such as mobilisation drives,fundriaisng events and press conferences are all part of the agenda leading up to the march.They are unique in the sense that data from other UDC's was collected after the march.But since I volunteered for Aurat March Islamabad in 2024 I was able to experience first-hand how online efforts translate into increasing turnout for the March. The resistance experienced during the March is another topic that is not discussed enough. Huda Bhugri, an Aurat March Islamabad organizer, described how police officers attempt to dissuade women from participating in the March by stating that it is unsafe for them (Ghias, n.d.). Hence, observing these attempts to hinder the March from taking place were vital to this study.

3.4 Methods of Data Collection

3.41 Semi Structured Interviews

To allow for deeper exploration and follow-up based on participants' responses, I conducted semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted according to an interview guide which allowed for greater flexibility in comparison to structured interviews. Participants can provide, dispute, explain, elaborate, or reimagine understandings of socials movements based on prior interviews, documentary source, as such interviewing procedures are open ended (Klandermans & Staggenborg, 2002).

3.42 Focus Group Discussions

Coupled with individual interviews, I also conducted focus group discussions. Focus group discussions comprise of brining a small number of people together to conduct a moderated discussion on a particular topic (George, 2021). FGDs allowed for an analysis of how individuals frame group solidarity and collective realities within this movement. Unlike individual interviews, FGDs enable the researcher to observe the group dynamics that form the basis of collective action frameworks and collective identity formation, which are an essential component of social movements (Klandermans & Staggenborg, 2002). A total of two focus group discussions were conducted; one with Aurat March Lahore, online, and one with the Islamabad chapter, in person.

3.43 Participant Observation:

Participant Observation was used to study Aurat March 2024 in order to understand the meanings and symbolic aspects of the event including placards. This research method involves the researcher immersing themselves in the setting to record actions, interactions or events that are happening as they arise(Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). As Jorgensen(2020) notes participant observation is suitable in case study design, where the scope of study is limited. Since the I have chosen to conduct fieldwork taking Aurat March Islamabad as the case to be studied, my scope is limited make it an appropriate choice.

Doing participant observation through field notes by volunteering and actively engaging in events before the march gave me first-hand insight as to how mobilization was conducted prior to the march. Participant observation helped me understand respondent's perspective, reducing the need for extensive probing during interviews, as I was already acquainted with many of the events they shared. On the day of the march for instance, Aurat March Islamabad 2023 took an expected turn when police started baton charging protestors, who were chanting slogans against the police for blocking their rally (Correspondent, 2023). Such events make it imperative to take part in the same situation to comprehend the conflicts, the risks, and the societal conventions and dialogues that individuals taking part in the event experience (Balsiger & Lambelet, 2014).

3.5 Sampling

Sampling is the process of selection certain units of data collection to study a particular research topic.

3.51 UDC 1

UDC 1 involved organizers and volunteers of the March who were directly leading the role planning and conducting the March. I used purposive sampling among organizers as the purpose of interviews and FGDs was to study not only where the March is headed but also what role social media plays in this. Organisers from the Islamabad chapter had changed their hierarchal structure and function as a core group at the time this research was conducted; an interview with one member from the core group was conducted. Another activist who was involved in organising the March this year and last year as well was interviewed. Four male volunteers were also interviewed who mostly provided support related to logistics and security for the March. For the FGD of the Islamabad Chapter, the sample comprised of a total of seven females, which included five development professionals, one journalist, and a recent graduate of gender studies. For the FGD with the Lahore Chapter, a total of five women were in attendance, including one lawyer, one artist, two development professionals, and one research associate.

Participant motivation for attending the march and what role social media played in encouraging them to take part in Aurat March is another aspect I have looked at in detail. For this UDC, I wanted to include people from different professions. The table below shows the socio demographic profile of participants of individual interviews.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Profile of participants in Individual Interviews

Variable	Category	Frequency(n)

Gender	Male	7
	Female	7
Age Group	18-24 years	3
	25-34 years	5
	35-44 years	4
	44 years and above	2
Professional Association	Development Practitioner/Consultant	3
	Psychologist	1
	Student	3
	Film-maker	1
	Lawyer	1
	Investment Advisor	1
	Social media manager	1
	Political Activist	1
	HR professional	2

3.52 UDC 2

All X posts posted on Aurat March Islamabad's account after the March from Jan 30th ,2023 till March 15th ,2023 and for 2024 from January 29th,2024 to March 15th,2024 were filtered according to their relevance to the following themes:

- Charter of demands
- The theme of the March
- Responses to censuring the movement
- Agenda of the March

X posts for this year and last year were analysed, since the 2023 March gained widespread attention after a video of a police officer arguing with a participant went viral. Another video showing male police officers baton charging female and transgender march attendees also made the rounds online. It was important to cover both Marches to not only compare whether respondents thought state resistance and censorship had decreased but to also highlight what strategies organisers were taking to fight it. Hence, for UDC 2, I utilized purposive sampling to select posts relevant to the aforementioned themes.

3.53 UDC 3

News coverage for the March has been studied from the day the theme was announced till 1 week after the March to gain perspective of politicians, religious parties, and groups related to the March both before and after the March took place. Since the purpose of this research was to not look at the general coverage of the March in newspapers but the stance of right-wing groups and government officials, purposive sampling was used. Therefore, only those articles which reflected the

opinion of the writers and their perspective of the March were analysed, since general coverage does not display whether the writer opposes or supports the march.

3.54 UDC 4

Placards of the March are a widely debated topic in the media and have been misinterpreted to condemn this movement. Placards targeting gender stereotypes, testimonies of abuse victims, gender discrimination, and unequal access to education are widely present at the March. For this UDC, purposive sampling was used to analyse placards with relevance to the 2024 Aurat March's theme; Hope and Resistance.

3.55 UDC 5

Process and events such as speeches, performances and slogans raised during the March were also included. These events were purposively sampled and only those events that were of significance to the research such as police pushing attendees, cordoning of entry points, reaction of attendees to state resistance, and organisers chanting slogans were included. Since I was volunteering for the March as well, taking field notes was a bit difficult, however, I tried to keep track of what I could recall in my diary. Videos and images were also taken to have a repository with time stamps.

3.6 Analysis

In order to analyse textual data retrieved from interviews and focus group discussions I used thematic analysis to segregate data into themes and subthemes. Coding was used in order to break down the data into smaller, manageable bits that could then be

categorised and evaluated for patterns and themes. Coding is useful as it allows researchers to identify specific elements of the data that are relevant to their research questions, which allows for a better understanding of the concept and idea (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

For analysis of placards, newspaper coverage and X posts, content analysis was used. X posts along with newspaper articles were shortlisted from when the March theme was announced for both years till one week after the March. ConteNnt analysis helped condense data into categories and themes based on valid interference and interpretation. Content analysis following a deductive approach was used where newspaper articles posts and X posts, were identified and shortlisted.

An explanation of the unit of data collection has been given along with its link to the conceptual framework and whether it corroborates the study's theory or challenges it. Since the conceptual framework and research questions were formulated prior to data analysis, a directed approach to content analysis was followed (Wildemuth, 2017). A deductive approach was followed, which involved a coding scheme to conduct data reduction with initial codes consisting of hate speech, networked mobilisation, disinformation, and participant support to the movement. Data along these lines was filtered out to find patterns in the sample and triangulate it with the conceptual framework.

Content analysis helps in exploring discourse on issues of debate and public concern by tracking the frequency and dominance of specific ideas and helps studying the views and intentions of various subjects who may not be willing to participate in research(Macnamara, 2018). This type of analysis is used commonly to answer

questions such as what, why and how, and the similar patterns in the data are examined by utilising a consistent set of codes to classify text into themes (Heikkilä & Ekman, 2003).

Participant observation was carried out on the day of the March to gain insight into the practices and interaction of March participants for UDC 6. By immersing myself in the same situation, I was better able to understand the backlash, the risk, and the societal expectations individuals being researched experience (Balsiger & Lambelet, 2014). While the risk of distorting the setting that was being observed was present, I made a template to highlight events taking place on 10 minute intervals while also taking recordings and pictures of events that were happening.

3.7 Significance of locale

The research was limited to Aurat March's Islamabad chapter. For this research, X posts and placards were analysed and interviews of Aurat March Islamabad organizers were conducted. Since this chapter faces the most backlash every year, the decision was made to focus on collecting X posts and volunteering for this chapter only. Islamabad is the capital of Pakistan and Islamabad press club -where the march assembles - holds significance in the political arena as it is adjacent to Constitution Avenue, where major government buildings such as the Prime Minister House, President House, Supreme Court, and Islamabad High Court are located make the sight contentious itself. As stated earlier Islamabad itself holds political significance due to presence of government major government buildings making it a central authority. is adjacent to Constitution Avenue, where major government buildings

such as the Prime Minister House, President House, Supreme Court, and Islamabad High Court are located. Initially FGDs with organisers of the Lahore and Karachi chapters were also planned. However, despite contacting Aurat March Karachi team several times using social media and through different contact persons, a response could not be received. Therefore, only a FGD with Aurat March Lahore organisers was conducted online. This FGD sheds light what setbacks the movement faced initially as the first marches were held in Lahore and Karachi after which other chapters followed through.A major reason for including Karachi was that it draws quite a significant number of crowds every year and other chapters look up to it for guidance.

3.8 Researchers Positionality

Being a woman shaped my interest to work on this movement to a certain extent. Not only my gender identity but the conversation around this movement both online and in person made me want to explore the propaganda surrounding this movement. I applied as a volunteer to understand the whole process behind the movement and to build trust with the Aurat March Islamabad organising team. Volunteering allowed me to attend very exclusive events and meetings where the important debates related to the future of the movement took place. Building trust was a vital part of my study as Aurat March organisers are not very open to giving interviews and in recent years increased emphasis has been placed on maintaining anonymity of participants and volunteers to avoid backlash.

Exploring a gender movement like Aurat March necessitated discussing potentially sensitive and distressing topics, including instances of harassment and workplace

discrimination. As a female researcher, my positionality played an important role in eliciting these responses, as it may have fostered a sense of trust and reliability, encouraging respondents to share their lived experiences. While I am aware of the emotional distress these discussions may have had on participants, using ethical research practices and maintaining anonymity of respondents are some steps I have taken to adhere to these guidelines.

My epistemological stance is a mix of interpretivism and constructivism, as I have tried to analyse how my respondents understand the social world through their own perspectives (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Interpretivism argues that knowledge and processes are in a constant flux and the understanding of the March by its organizers and participants is shaped by their experiences, identities and interactions. Constructivists believe that knowledge depends on experience; since the aim of this research was to explore how individuals interpret the March through digital platforms and how networked structures influence their understanding, this research includes constructivist aspects as well.

Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

In this chapter, the findings will be analysed using Castell's concept of the Network Society along with other concepts mentioned in the conceptual framework.

4.1 Field Notes

While being part of the march as a volunteer,I also got to experience first hand what goes into planning the march and how the demands are structured.Volunteers were selected based out of a Google Form and a short interview was conducting to understand motivation for volunteering.

4.11 Days leading up to the March

Before the March every year, Aurat March team organises meetings and hosts a small fundraising event to gather funds for the March. The first meeting I attended had three volunteers along with two organisers at an activist's house. In this meeting, the

fundraising event was planned and a theme was decided for the event. This year's theme for the fundraising event was a feminist *dholki*. *Dholki's* are basically home-based celebrations comprising of singing songs, putting up decorations, and dancing. Feminist *tappay* (songs) were rehearsed and logistics related issues were settled. The activist whose home we had the meeting in made arrangements for a performance with a musician who is also engaged in activism. Responsibilities were allocated to each volunteer and I volunteered to bring a food item for the bake sale.

The feminist mela took place on 17th February, 2024 in the lawn of another supporter of Aurat March. Fundraising boxes were placed at the entrance along with the stage. Festive décor was done to avoid authorities from knowing that the event was for Aurat March. The ticket price was set at 1500 for outsiders. Volunteers and march organisers set up different stalls related to food items, merchandise such as tote bags, and posters. Feminist anthems were played throughout the event and people were dancing and enjoying food items and tea. A Hunza based group performed a traditional song and females gathered around a circle and sung Punjabi *tappay* that were given a feminist spin. One of the volunteers played the *dholak* [two headed drum] while others were singing. After this segment, a famous musician came to perform a few of his own songs along with progressive anthems like Hum Dekhein Gai [we will witness]. The event had very few attendees as PTI held a jalsa that day while another food and crafts related event was taking place. I was given the responsibility of collecting money from food related sales and total sales amounted to almost 15,000. After the event ended, we were left with a lot of leftover food, which was donated to people who helped set up the stalls.

Another meeting was held at Dr. Farzana Bari's place, where organisers and volunteers were present, to discuss the logistics, charter of demands and finalization of the performance that would take place on the day of the March. Since the Karachi Chapter decided to hold a dance class, Aurat March Islamabad decided to do a dance performance on Kishwar Naheed's feminist poem *'Yeh hum gunahgar aurtein'* [we sinful women].

4.12 The day of the March

Volunteers and organisers were required to come early to make arrangements and finalise slogans that would be raised during the march. I reached the venue at 10:00 AM. Despite arriving early, a lot of the entrances to Islamabad Press Club were sealed with barbed wires, while the assistant commissioner along with police were roaming around the venue. Music system was installed inside the truck where organisers would later stand to address participants. Feminist anthems were played and march organisers and volunteers made preparations such as arranging water bottles for attendees, setting up a stall to sell badges and merchandise, checking placards and props to be held during the march, and preparing passes for media personnel. Around 12:00 PM, media personnel started showing up to the venue and interviewing the organisers and volunteers. As the March was held on Friday, only a few participants had showed up to the venue at 2 PM, which was the starting time. Around 3 PM, the organisers decided to start marching but they stopped just outside the Press Club as barbed wire was placed and scores of female police officers blocked them from going further. The organisers decided to wait for more people to join the March and till then speeches by activists such as Fatima Atif and Nayyab Ali, and

feminist anthems were played to energise the participants, while organisers kept chanting slogans against the Islamabad administration. Meanwhile Dr. Farzana Bari along with other prominent activists were engaging with the police to allow them to march towards D-Chowk but this was refused on the grounds of the March not having received an NOC for the event to be held at D-chowk. During this time, organisers received news that Haya March organisers were allowed to go to D-Chowk without any obstructions. After the speeches were concluded and efforts to negotiate went in vain, it was decided that the March attendees shall try to move past the police blockade to make their way to D-chowk. Around 3:20 pm, the truck carrying the sound system was parked at the backside while March protestors were allowed to proceed forward with females at the front and men at the back. The organisers started trying to move past the police but since the participants were smaller in number they could not stand the retaliation they faced from the police and were pushed back. Since expecting mothers and older women were also in attendance, it was decided that the March would not try to move further towards D-chowk and the female March attendees were instructed to carry out sit-in on the road. Around 4:40 pm, performances were done and March participants decided to pay tribute to Palestine by dancing on *Dammi Falastini* by Mohammad Assaf. By this time, very few attendees were left and organisers kept on chanting slogans to keep up the momentum. A member of the Progressive Student Federation (PSF) addressed the attendees and pointed out how neoliberalism is demolishing grass roots movements. As the sun was setting and March participants were leaving, a voice note by Mahrang Baloch was played to express solidarity with the Baloch Yakjehti Committee against enforced

disappearances. Then, Dr. Farzana Bari addressed March participants and pointed out the biasness of the Islamabad administration because they allowed Haya March attendees to proceed without any hurdles but Aurat March Islamabad was not allowed to leave Islamabad Press Club. Concluding remarks were given by another organiser and a press conference was announced the next day, outside Islamabad Press Club, to condemn the behaviour of Islamabad Administration and around 6:15 pm, the March concluded. Organisers and volunteers picked up the trash on the road while some gave interviews to express their disappointment with the Islamabad administration. After the march ended, a debriefing session was held at a volunteer's place to discuss the agenda for the press conference scheduled the next day.

4.2 Analysis of Social media posts

In this section I will be analysing X posts shortlisted first for the year 2023 and then for 2024.

4.21 Before the march

These tweets are taken before 8th March to highlight how Aurat March uses X to build momentum prior to the march. During these period critics of the demonstration start inciting hatred by perceiving it as contradictory ot religious and societal values.

4.211 2023 X posts

X posts prior to the 2023 march with sub-headings showing their themes.

4.2111 Aurat March and LGBTQ+

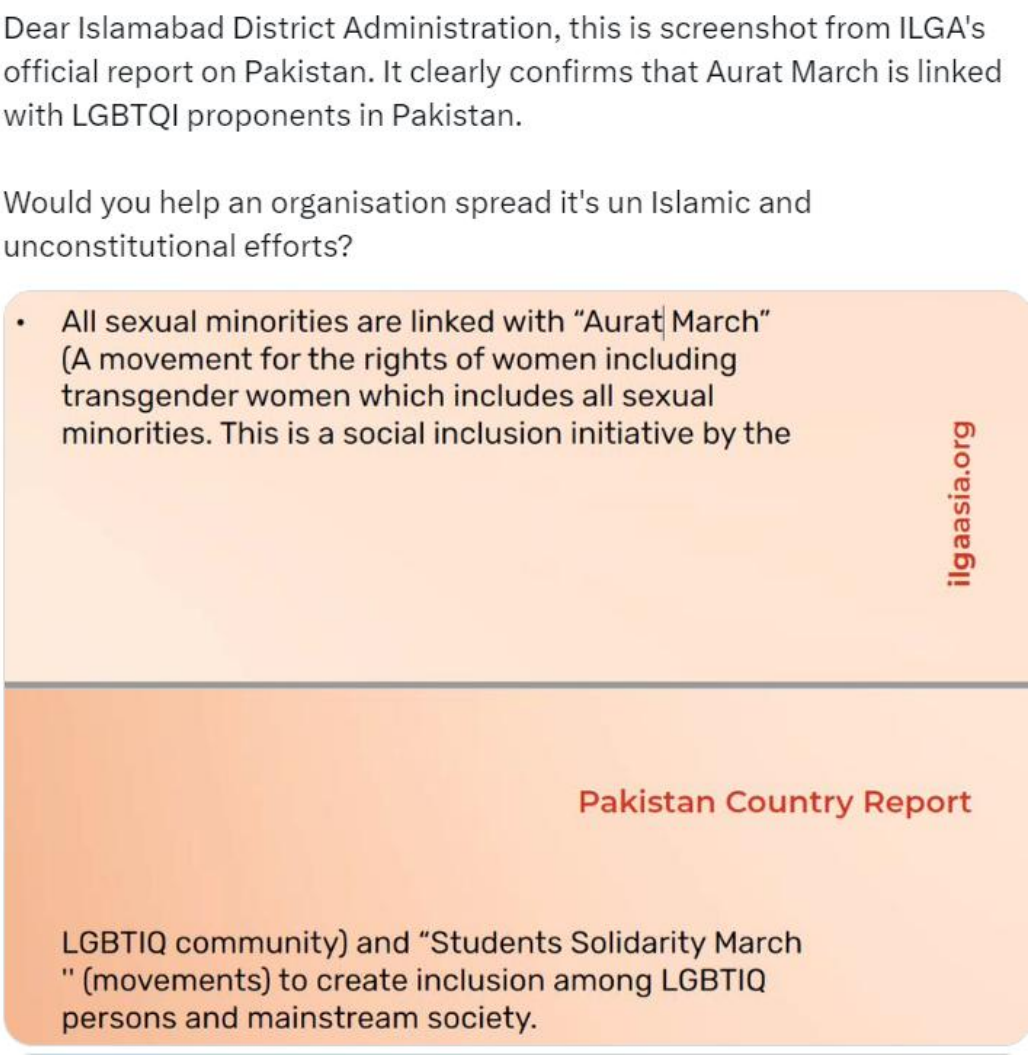

FIGURE 2: X POST AGAINST SUPPORT OF GOVERNMENT FOR AURAT MARCH ISLAMABAD(RAJA, 2023)

Textual data:

On February 7th 2023, Aurat March organisers posted a photograph after a meeting with Islamabad Administration about security concerns and no objection certificates. This user who has fervently opposed Aurat March on multiple occasions based on an analysis of their previous posts, reposted this X post along with a screenshot of a report published on Treatment of Gender Minorities in Pakistan by the ILGA

(International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association) to present the case for how Aurat March was linked with LGBTQ+ and was in reality a movement working for the rights of transgender women and other sexual minorities. In a sarcastic tone, he questions whether the capital's administration will help propagate Aurat march's unconstitutional and un-Islamic efforts, although he opts to use 'dear' at the start of the sentence to show his respect for the government.

FIGURE 3:AURAT MARCH ORGANISERS WITH ISLAMABAD ADMINISTRATION(@AURAT_MARCHISB AURAT MARCH ISLAMABAD, 2023A).

Context: While major institutions such as the government and the military have not endorsed Aurat March, this picture was a beacon of hope for March participants and organisers, as it showed that authorities were willing to cooperate with them. Security

is a major issue for March attendees especially since the counter Haya march has started. YouTubers also attend the March and ask March participants controversial questions to gain more subscribers by sensationalising the March.

While Aurat March posted this tweet to show appreciation for ICT administration, the X user viewed it as an attempt by the government to endorse Aurat March. This user has been critical of the March and has labelled this movement as a fraud. He borrows supporting evidence to show how the March, according to him, is against Islamic values by offering support to transgender and sexual minorities. For context, most religious councils deem it impermissible to attempt to changes one's biological sex/gender and along with homosexuality(*What Is Islam's Position on Transgenderism?*, 2022).

Link with theoretical concepts:

Aurat March continuously faces backlash for speaking out for the rights of gendered minorities and promoting a western agenda. This, however, is a big step for a movement like Aurat March Islamabad, as previously every obstacle was used to force attendees to not protest at the Islamabad Press Club. This shows that traditional political actors such as the bureaucracy are willing to engage with the March. This does not sit right with this individual who has labelled himself as an 'astute critic' of feminism in his X bio. According to a study on hate speech by researchers based in California, hate speech has increased on the platform ever since the acquisition of X by Elon Musk(Hickey et al., 2025). A limitation of Castell theory is that he fails to consider the ramifications of free speech on social media.When asked about the the possibility of regulating social networks in a recent interview we forget that ''as

human beings, we are frequently destructive: sexist, racist, xenophobic, homophobic, and in many countries, fascist. The Internet is an expression of society, which is increasingly distant from the progressive and solidary ideals we support''(*Manuel Castells: "We Must Find Ways to Regulate the Networks''*, 2024,para. 1)

By labelling the movement as anti-Islamic and against the constitution, tried to fuel propaganda against the March and the government by assuming that they are also propagating rights of gendered minorities. Increased visibility can work function as a constraint and enabler depending on the audience it reaches,as opposers might support this type of content while supporters might disagree and argue with the user.

4.2112 Aurat March and Islam

FIGURE 4: AURAT MARCH AND FREEDOM FROM ISLAM (HAYA_LEADS_TO_JANNAH, 2023).

Textual data:

The picture in this text translates to: *those who used to be buried on the day they were born, they are now asking for freedom from Islam which gave them the right to live.*

This X post contains different hashtags against Aurat March such as #banauratmarch, #saynotoauratmarch, #westernpropaganda, #weareempowered and #boycottauratmarch. The post labels Aurat March as a western propaganda and refers to women supporting it as liberal and believes that women are already empowered. This sentiment is expressed in the picture as well where women who support Aurat

March are portrayed as wanting complete liberty to move away from Islam, the religion that gave them the right to exist in the first place.

Link with theoretical concept:

In order to target bigger audience against the March, the X user adds a lot of hashtags along with emoticons to increase anti-march sentiment. The users add all the negative connotations associated with Aurat March and uses an image showing a veiled woman to garner more shares and reposts from people against the March. The watermark at the end says *Haya leads to Jannah* translating to Modesty leads to paradise. This post uses several techniques to label March supporters and organisers as against Islamic norms and values.The user here utilises multiple hashtags so that users can associate themselves with many of the pejorative terms associated with the movement such as liberal feminism, western propaganda, banning Aurat March and stating that women are already empowered.

4.2113 Foreign funding allegations

FIGURE 5: X POST BY PTI MNA ON SELECTIVE ACTIVISM OF AURAT MARCH ORGANISERS(S. G. [@SHANDANAGULZAR] KHAN, 2023)

Textual Data:

This X post reposted by a national assembly member working for PTI highlights how Aurat march is foreign funded and refers to them as an embarrassment to their name. She mentions in preceding posts how Aurat march has been strongly critical of Imran's Khan regime while accusing them of supporting PDM (Pakistan Democratic Movement) led government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. She mentions different issues where the Aurat March has been silent on such as the doctored video of Azam Swati-PTI senator- and his wife('Azam Swati Breaks down, Claims

Receiving Objectionable Video Featuring Him and Wife', 2022), prohibition of PEMRA from reporting on F-9 park rape case (Saaed, 2023)etc. Although she claims she has supported the March publicly on TV and print media, she argues that women right should not be used to pursue political agendas, and that they should be separate from political biasness of any sort.

Link with Theoretical concept:

The PTI MNA highlights how Aurat March chooses to engage with certain political causes based on their preference while ignoring others. She particularly mentions how PTI voices are silenced on the platform, whereas issues of other movements are amplified and gain more prominence. This is in line with the concept of fragmentation in network society, where Aurat March supporters might only engage with content that aligns with their views, ignoring a blatant crackdown happening on PTI. The founding member of PTI has been critical of the March previously and labelled it as against cultural norms ('Imran Khan Blames Education System for Aurat March "Culture"', 2020).Aurat March supporters might deliberately choose not to speak on violations happening related to their party due to visibility and persistence of social media posts, knowing their support to causes is visible over time. Another possibility is that they may not view them due to the selective algorithm of social media posts which allows users to choose what kind of content they want to view.

Thus, the concept of decentralisation and inclusivity are not fully captured in these online spaces, due to political biasness within the movement as she believes the movement engages in self-censorship to align with certain political or social

preferences while not speaking on others. In a sense she tries to control the narrative on gender-based violence by reasoning that women of PTI have suffered the most. While she mentions other incidents as well her main emphasis continued to be the crackdown on her party workers in the aftermath of 9th May.

4.212 2024 X posts

In this section X posts prior to the march of 2024 are analysed.

4.2121 Selective Activism

FIGURE 6: PTI FEMALE SUPPORTERS BEING PUSHED AND ARRESTED BY THE POLICE(IKHAN, 2024).

Textual Data:

This tweet was in response to a video posted by the official account of Aurat March Islamabad showing March attendees being pushed when they tried to proceed towards

D-Chowk. The X users reposted comments with a video underneath the video showing Pakistan Tehreek Insaf (PTI) workers being dragged by the police. He uses it to show the selective activism of Aurat March by asking them about their whereabouts when women supporting their party were being targeted by the police.

Link with Theoretical concept:

This post calls out the selective activism of Aurat March organisers by calling them out for not being vocal when female PTI supporters were being targeted by the police. PTI women expect to be entitled to the same feminist attention and activism which they discredited, insulted for four years while Imran Khan was the Prime Minister, however not offering any support only judgement and moral exclusion in return (Zia, 2024). PTI Chairman Imran Khan has been able to escape blatant indiscretions by leveraging moral flexibility to his favour. Although not being a very pious man himself, he frequently preached on topics such as the corruptive influence of films and arts, and women's rights, which he associates with cultural alienation (Zia, 2024).

Aurat March does not affiliate itself with any political party hence when PTI supporters accuse March organiser of not coming out to support them for their cause and accuses them of being selective. While Aurat March has issued statements condemning the crackdown against 9th May Incident, the supporters of PTI are trying to create a counter narrative to show that their women are the real freedom fighters, while accusing Aurat March organisers for not advocating for real issues facing women.The public nature of these X posts thus has been used to hijack narrative of Aurat March organisers by PTI supporters. Whereas their leader

has been quite vocal on critiquing feminism and blamed dressing of females for increase in sexual violence against them (Aqil, 2022).

Context:

Despite the opposition they have faced during Prime Minister Imran Khan's regime, they still uploaded a statement and held a protest against the verdict of his marriage to Busra Bibi being declared illegal as it was believed to have occurred during her mourning period (Munim, 2024).

PTI supporters bring this narrative forward that Aurat March tries to exclude them from feminist spaces whereas Aurat March has been vocal and given statements on human rights violations against most political parties including PTI as organisers are aware that by not speaking on such matters, they do not want to be complicit in actions that limit civic freedoms.

4.2122 In person mobilization

FIGURE 7: VIDEO SHOWING MOBILISATION DRIVE CONDUCTED ACROSS ISLAMABAD(@AURAT_MARCHISB AURAT MARCH ISLAMABAD, 2024A)

Textual data

Video compilation of mobilization drive conducted by Aurat March Islamabad two days before the March. Organisers and volunteers can be seen distributing manifesto of the March along with explaining the purpose of the March to individuals. The song playing at the back is *Hum Inqilaab Hai* [We are the revolution]. Different people can be seen grabbing the manifesto and speaking to Aurat March team.

Link with theoretical concept

March organisers uploaded this video on online platforms to show that their mobilization is not restricted to online mediums but is present in physical spaces as well. The video shows women defying cultural norms by getting on top of a pickup

truck and raising their voices. The post has a direct call to action to inform participants about the time they needed to reach the venue. Repeated use of the words Aurat March in the hashtags function as nodes in the post by creating a shared digital identity where people can see latest updates on the March. Repetition also increases visibility of their content and makes them prominent in digital spaces.

Comments underneath the post mock the March and accuse it of supporting LGBTQ+. Sceptics of the march use posts like this to advance their hateful narratives and to discourage people from attending the March. While this video does not make any political statement, one user uses it as an opportunity to label them as opportunists for not speaking up on Palestine and Afia Siddiqui. Dr. Siddiqui was a Pakistani neuroscientist who was arrested by the Afghan police in 2008 due to her alleged links with terrorist groups(Smith & Suleiman, 2024). She is currently serving an 86-year prison sentence in Texas for attempting to murder an American soldier in Afghanistan(Smith & Suleiman, 2024).

FIGURE 8: COMMENTS UNDERNEATH POST (@AURAT_MARCHISB AURAT MARCH ISLAMABAD, 2024)

4.22 Placards during the march

This section focuses on placards held during the march, first part will focus on placards in 2023 and the second section focuses on placards in 2024.

4.221 2023

FIGURE 9: PLACARD AGAINST VICTIM BLAMING FOR RAPE (AURAT MARCH ISLAMABAD, 2023)

Descripion of post:

This placard is an example of subversive wordplay where the placard holder aims to shift the responisbily from the victim to the perpeturator of rape. By crossing out the

word ‘get’ she makes it clear that committing rape is the rapists fault.In Pakistan, very few women come forward with sexual assault allegations and those that do fear victim blaming and social stigmisation.The enivroment in courts and police stations is not that conducive either. Ex-Prime Minisiter made headlines when he blamed women not wearing modest clothes for the growing cases of rape in the country (Tariq, 2021).Rampant internalised misogny within our culture and institutions targeting women for not forseeing what could have happened is pervasive in Pakistan both in online and offline spaces(R. Ali, 2025).The 16% conviction rate in rape cases is extremely low despite the establishement of gender based violence courts and induction of female police officers and women still feel threatened to report incidents of rape to protect their honor and inmidation by perpetrators (Jalil, 2024).

Linking with conceptual framework

Aurat March Islamabad has retaliated and resisted this perception that men safeguard women’s honour by controlling them. The March continues to stand up againsts rape incdients and issues statements and particpates in protests as well.Aurat March Islamabad, through their social media posts and protests wants to reduce the societal stigma that surrounds rape victims leading to under-reporting and social exclusion for victims. Language is a powerful tool that can be used to degrade women by trivalising sexual assualt.Social media is digital symbol of resistance against these narratives by sparking conversations that challenge societal norms around sexual harrasment.

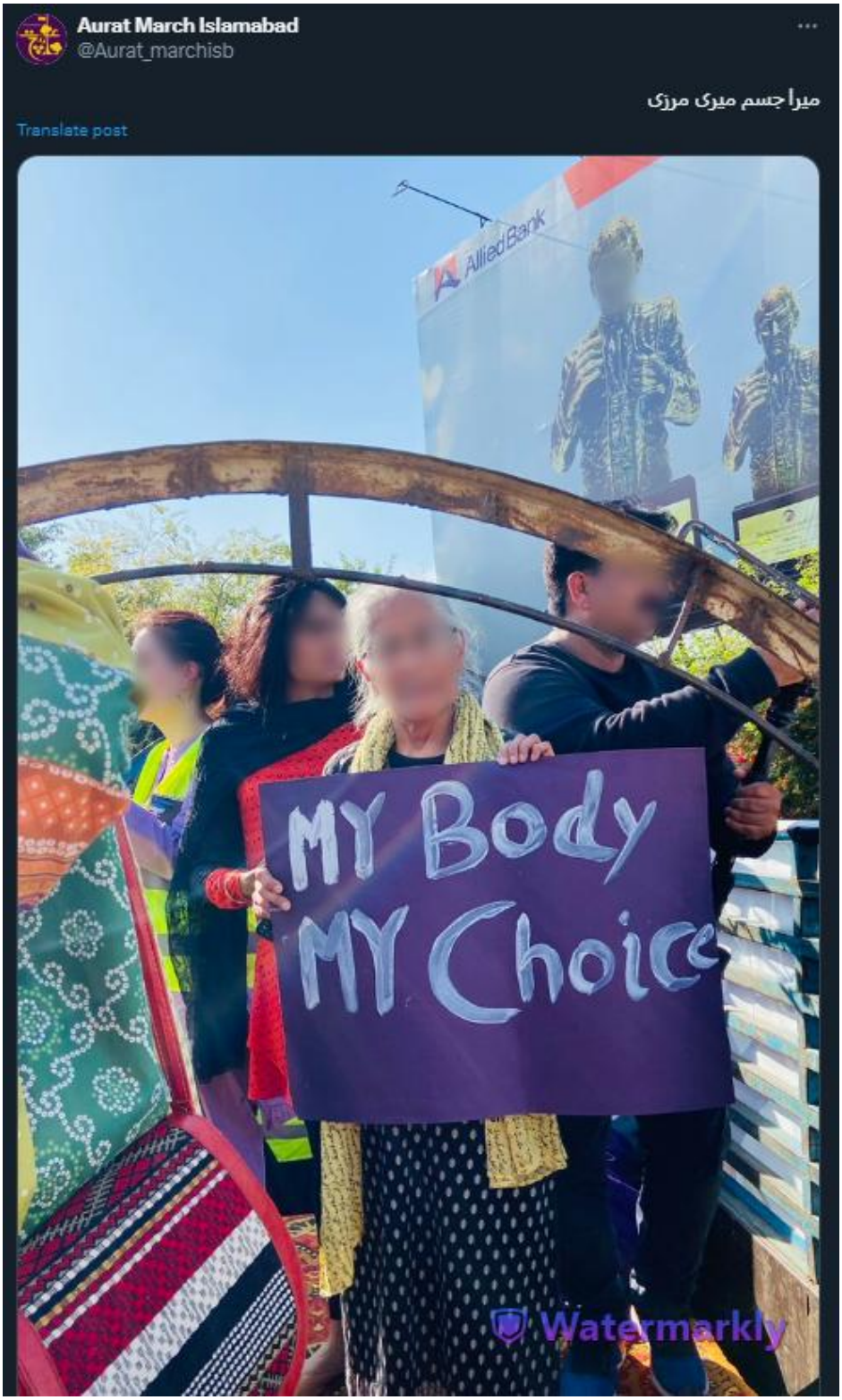

FIGURE 10: WOMEN HOLDING PLACARD THAT SAYS MY BODY, MY CHOICE(@AURAT_MARCHISB AURAT MARCH ISLAMABAD, 2023E)

Description of post:

In this post, an elderly woman can be seen holding a placard that says My Body, My choice. This post has more than 460 comments and 320 reposts with 224,000 views. This slogan became the epicentre of the movement, triggering a lot of discussions by religious scholars, politicians, and the general public. Their sexuality is strictly controlled and women are considered the repository of culture and honour. This slogan, however, calls for women reclaiming their bodily and reproductive rights, their choice to marry, to have children, and deny sexual violence, harassment, and domestic abuse (Zubair, 2022). As opposed to prescribed norms, this slogan broadens the discourse on female sexuality and body politics by taking these topics to the streets which are mainly occupied by men.

Linking with conceptual framework:

The comments underneath this picture reinforce the view of the religious clergy who argue that bodies are prerogative of God and women cannot exercise any authority over them. Many comments under this picture have ageism and sarcastic undertones, where the women holding the placard is questioned as to who has tried to force themselves upon her. Some suggest that she should focus on her relationship with God as her death is near. This gendered ageism stems from sexism and the media plays a significant role in exaggerating this concept where female physical attractiveness is linked with appearing youthful, slim, fair-skinned, and toned, which is not only restrictive but also unattainable for elder women(Cecil et al., 2022; Rodgers et al., 2019).

This blatant targeting is an attempt to silence women's voices by using personal, moral, and even religious critiques to suppress feminist movements by using rhetoric that she should focus on her spiritual obligations, framing advocacy as inappropriate for her age group, and suggesting that elderly women should conform to traditional roles of submissiveness and religiosity. When an elderly woman holds this placard the movement aims to highlight that these struggles transcend generational boundaries and this movement is inclusive of all ages.

4.222 2024

FIGURE 11: PLACARD RELATED TO ICHRA BAZAAR INCIDENT IN LAHORE(ZEHRA, 2024).

Translation:

When intelligence was being distributed, where were you?

I was eating Halwa

Description of graphic

This placard was in response to the Lahore Ichra Incident where a female wearing an Abaya with the words '*Halwa'* written on it in Arabic alphabet, was targeted by a violent mob, who claimed that it was blasphemous. She was saved by the police and a shopkeeper who allowed her to seek refuge inside his shop.

The shirt also depicts the incident that took place and uses humour to show how lack of knowledge and intelligence within our society makes us susceptible to threaten someone without having conclusive evidence. The accused was a female and the underlying issue is that women continued to be policed for what they wear, as it creates fodder for fundamentalism.

Aurat March again provides a counter narrative to a dramatic incident where a female was falsely accused of wearing an un-Islamic design and charged with blasphemy. Although no one in the country has been actually executed by the state for on blasphemy(Rentschler & Thrift, 2015), just being excused of blasphemy can trigger a mob to target a person. Aurat March has included amendments for the blasphemy law in its charter of demands for 2024 to prevent its misuse for political and economic gains.

Linking with conceptual framework

The use of humour by feminist to speak on issues and creates solidarities among feminists helps build solidarities by fostering communal ties(Rentschler & Thrift, 2015). While normally people would not be expected to joke about such an incident, due to fear of being accused of blasphemy. However, March organisers are aware of

the satirical practices trending among online users(Noor & Arshad, 2024) ,thus they use their online space to critique a trending issue using tactical humour to let women know they can occupy public space without fear.

FIGURE 12: THIS PLACARD CALLS OUT MARIA B. FOR HER VILE ARGUMENTS ([@AURATMARCHISB] AURAT MARCH ISLAMABAD, 2024)

Description of post

This placard calls out Pakistani fashion designer Maria B, who has uploaded several videos targeting Aurat March for her arguments being as bad as the clothes she sells.

Maria B has been consistently critical of the Aurat March and has blamed them for promoting gender ambiguity and supporting LGBTQ+ in Pakistan, which is considered a sin in Islam (Maria.B: Woman=Adult Human Female, 2024).

Link with conceptual framework

While Aurat March has gained visibility through social media, the same tools are being used by right wing activists like Maria B to fuel hate at the movement. As counter discourses and anti-feminist personalities perpetuate hatred against the march, Aurat March uses its online presence to reiterate that it stands with all gender minorities not just cis-women([@Aurat_marchisb] Aurat March Islamabad, 2023b).

Dr.Mehrub Moiz Awan a famous Pakistani trans activist has pointed that out of all the social media applications X has the most hateful content and their lack of content moderation, makes the platform a breeding ground for transphobia(*Gendered Disinformation in South Asia a Case Study- Pakistan*, 2024).

While Castell has not studied the link between online spaces perpetuating hateful narratives, according to Digital Rights Foundation whenever a politically motivated misogynistic content is shared on X with a hashtag, it rapidly starts trending online(Khurshid, 2025). This hate can permeate in to offline spaces as well, as after Maria B's criticism of the Transgender Act of 2018 as The Federal Shariat Court declared it un-Islamic('Maria B Tramples on Trans Rights As She Lauds Federal Shariat Court For Declaring Transgender Act 2018 As ...', 2023).Therefore it is apparent that narratives that target trans individuals gain more visibility on X which can harm online reach of Aurat March as a result.

FIGURE 13: PLACARD IN DARI FOR AFGHAN REFUGEES([@AURATMARCHISB] AURAT MARCH ISLAMABAD, 2024)

Description of post

A woman from the Hazara-ethnic minority based in Balochistan-holds a poster with the words *Naan Kar Azadi* which translates to bread,work and freedom from Dari.This was the slogan raised by many Afghan women in response to one year of the taliban government who bear the biggest brunt of Taliban's conservative ideology

(M. Ahmad, 2024). Women have been forced to abandon their education,faced detention and harrasment for resisting their orders.

As women protestestors face draconian laws targetitng their freedoms, state interventions in their neighbouring country have not been supportive of women either. Last October, Pakistan gave undocumented Afghans weeks to leave or be deported on the grounds of their invovlement in terrorist attacks. More than 650,000 Afghans went back and 32,000 were deported as of June 2024 (Lex & Saifi, 2024). Human rights violations by the moraility police in Afghanistan disproportionately target women. Aurat March Islamabad even held a protest against this forced repatriation and demanded that the government withdraw its 30 day deadline, to send refugees back immediately (Aurat March Islamabad, 2023).

Link with theoratical context:

The deporting of refugees is a feminist struggle as those women who have been away from their home country must now face a society that has drastically changed. The taliban not only dictate their right to education but economic participation and mobility aswell. A ban on women leaving their homes deprives them of financial independence and increases poverty while making them more susceptible to exploitation.Aurat March offers their support to Afghan refugees and holds the state accountable for not upholding refugee rights. Although the situation in Pakistan is not that pleasant either but it is much less restrictive than the Talibans regressive policies in Afghanistan.

By using their platform to offer support, Aurat March symphatises with refugees instead of using them as scapegoats for economic and security woes of the country

(Jehangir, 2024). This exemplifies networked feminism where Aurat March not only uses its platform to speak up regarding issues faced by women within Pakistan, but also stands in solidarity with Afghan refugees to create a collective identity of oppression by the state that resonates with diverse groups and adds support to the movement.Extending support to women rights issues across the border helps build transational networks of association and makes Aurat March disapporval of the deportation orders more apparent.

FIGURE 14:WOMEN HOLDING PLACARD IN AURAT MARCH 2024 (AURAT MARCH ISLAMABAD, 2024)

Description of post

Women holds placard that says *Zan Zindagi Azadi* in Farsi which translates to Women, Life, Freedom in English as stated in the placard. This slogan was used in Iran when Mahsa Amini was in police custody in Iran for not wearing her headscarf properly. Her death triggered a series of demonstrations and civil unrest within Iran, opposing the mandatory hijab laws and lack of freedom of women(Asif, 2022). At protests, women cut their hair, burned hijabs, and danced to express their resentment towards regressive laws.

Link with conceptual framework:

This poster exemplifies Networked Feminism as when videos of Iranian women protesting circulated online, people all over the world became of aware of the police brutality Masha Amini faced. This slogan raised by women in Iran bypassed geographical boundaries as it was chanted during the March as well to show global solidarity for bodily autonomy and freedom. Iran and Pakistan, both Islamic countries, have many similarities in terms of state sanctioned misogyny, although the laws in Pakistan are less oppressive. Still, Pakistan is no stranger to laws policing women and repressing their freedom especially during Zia ul Haq's martial law regime.

Women showed empathy and expressed solidarity with the women in Iran by chanting this slogan. Protestors in Iran have been dealing with state violence where the police have resorted to even murdering thousands of people to curb civil unrest. This protest gives hope to feminist organisers in Pakistan to persist despite multiple

hindrances in their way. It also serves as a source of motivation for feminists to continue in their struggle to shatter glass ceilings locally and not let state authorities silence them.

FIGURE 15:PLACARD REGARDING ISRAEL GAZA CONFLICT(AURAT MARCH ISLAMABAD, 2024)

Description of post:

Aurat March Islamabad theme for this year was Hope and Resistance. The Israel-Palestine conflict was also included in the manifesto and Pakistani authorities were requested to play a more active role in supporting Palestinian resistance. This conflict has been documented online and many people are witness to the atrocities committed by Israel in Gaza. People from Gaza have been reporting from their homes and communities after Israel began its relentless bombardment in October,2023.

Women and children are disproportionately suffering the most because of this conflict due to reduced access to health care services in the Occupied Territories. Bombing by Israeli forces damaged health facilities, led to massive levels of displacements, disrupting water and electricity supplies while restricting access to food and medicines (World Health Organisation, 2023). As of January 2024, about 50,000 women were pregnant in Gaza and 180 women gave birth daily (Dursun, 2024). Babies are born on the ground in harsh conditions where umbilical cords are cut with whatever sharp object they can find, and containers filled with hot water are used to keep new-borns warm, C-sections are being performed by surgeons without any anaesthesia, and doctors do not have sterilised water or antibiotics to treat infections (Malik, 2024).

Linking with conceptual framework

‘‘Social movements are most often triggered by emotions derived from some meaningful event that help the protesters to overcome fear and challenge the powers that be in spite of the danger inherent to their action’’ (Castells, 2015, p. 247).Harrowing videos and images coming out of Gaza online have made the

Pakistani population empathetic towards the plight of Palestinians. Women continued be disproportionality impacted by the destruction of health facilities which resonates with many women in Pakistan as well. Multiple rallies in Pakistan have taken place to show support to the Palestinian cause, which shows the power of online communication to manifest itself into a physical mobilisation (Arain, 2024).

X has accused of deliberately trying to reduce reach of content Pro-Palestinian content(Shankar et al., 2023) ,Elon Musk(CEO of X) has openly backed Israel's war on Gaza('Elon Musk's Israel Trip: What Was the Purpose, What Did He Tell Netanyahu?', 2023).This practice undermines the affordances of the media platform available to users particularly in the areas of association and visibility. While pro-Israel posts remain fully visible., this asymmetry undermines X commitment to free speech and equal access to information.

4.23 Events during the march

These events that happen during the march are shared in real time to encourage people who view their posts to participate in the march.Police and ICT administration create every possible hindrance to detract march participants meanwhile Aurat March organisers use social media to show despite their efforts,the March is taking place.This also creates a repository where march supporters interact with their posts while opponents make negative comments.Mainstream news outlets source their coverage from these posts (Sohail, 2025),which demonstrates the significance of reporting on ground events towards controlling narratives.

4.231 2023 posts

FIGURE 16:AURAT MARCH ORGANISERS CARRYING CASKET DEPICTING FUNERAL OF PATRIARCHY (AURAT MARCH ISLAMABAD, 2023)

Textual Data:

This video depicts March attendees carrying a graveyard depicting the funeral of patriarchy at the march. This act defies several cultural and religious norms as women are rarely seen as pallbearers of funeral caskets. It functions as a mean to show symbolic resistance to create space for women in male dominated customs.

Link with theory

Aurat March utilises Networked Feminism by using visual acts like women carrying a casket to depict patriarchy. This action not only questions male dominance but also challenges traditional gender roles. Such actions are amplified through the use of social media where this video received hate and some support at the same time. Uploading this video on social media allowed Aurat March to directly confront conservative and patriarchal narratives. Networked Feminism burgeons in such spaces by using visual and textual language, which spill overs from different platforms, advancing a more inclusive feminist movement.

FIGURE 17:POLICE OFFICER ARGUING WITH WOMEN AND INSTRUCTING OFFICER TO BATON CHARGE ATTENDEES (THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, 2023).

Textual Data

In this video, March attendees can be seen arguing with the police for not giving them permission to March and an attendee can be seen trying to hold back the arm of a police officer. The police officer grabs and pushes her when she touches him, and starts yelling at her to not touch him while people on the front struggle to enter through container barricades and barbed wires placed in their way and transgender individuals are baton charged when they try to cross the barricades. As a result of the police officer's behaviour, Aurat March urged their followers to repost X posts calling for his dismissal.

Link with conceptual framework

The dismissal of this police officer after this video went viral is a testament to the power of social media and how amplifying issues on it leads to change. After this video circulated online, the Interior Minister, Rana Sanaullah took notice of the incident and suspended the police officers involved. These visuals triggered public outrage and people were alarmed at the way police was using blatant force on unarmed attendees. Where offline spaces for dissent were limited and inaccessible, women took to social media to oppose this violence using hashtag activism. ‘‘While feminist hashtags appear on other platforms like Instagram and Facebook, Twitter’s highly visible, public- by- default nature makes it especially fertile grounds for viral campaign’’(Clark-Parsons, 2022, p. 67).This except on hashtag activism shows that X(formerly Twitter) has proven to successulful for feminist activism in comparison to other platforms.

The Minister of Climate Change, Shireen Rehman also expressed disappointment towards the authorities and without nonaming Haya March protesters posted that they should have been resisted instead of peaceful protestors of Aurat March Islamabad.The gives exposure to March organisers to directly voice their concerns to political actors in Pakistan by tagging them on X.One day after the March, Aurat March Islamabad urged its followers to tweet using the hashtag sack Superintendent of police. These efforts were fruitful in galvanising support as all the police officers involved were suspended and a meeting was called with senior leadership of the police to discuss this mistreatment (Correspondent, 2023).

FIGURE 18:MARCH ATTENDEES CELEBRATING AS THEY ARE ALLOWED TO PROCEED TOWARDS D-CHOWK AFTER REMOVING CONTAINER (AURAT MARCH ISLAMABAD, 2023)

Textual Data:

This video shows attendees, organisers, and volunteers cheering once the container was removed by Islamabad Police and Administration to allow protesters to move towards D-Chowk. Organisers can be seen chanting that the March will take place on the mega phone while the song *Peechay Hutt* - translating to move away - plays in the background.

Link with theoretical concept

While Aurat March Islamabad was facing continuous hurdles to hinder people from marching, they were continuously posting on what was transpiring on the ground. Women being manhandled by the police while transgender people were getting

harassed. Continuously posting about the hindrances along with the hashtag #marchtohhoga translating to #marchwillhappen gave organisers strength to persevere and helped generate support by other progressive forums such as the Women's Action Forum and Amnesty International. Women assertion in public spaces is seen as a threat to societal order where they are mostly confined to the domestic sphere. Utilising online platforms to post regarding these violations translated to the police removing the containers that they had used to block roads to deter the March participants from marching. Female police officers were also on duty at this year's march to avoid any uneasy contact between males and females. It goes to show how much influence these peaceful protestors had despite barbed wires and containers being placed and having to wait 3 hours as a result; the marchers were ultimately able to negotiate their way on to D-Chowk.

Posting videos of hindrances faced by march organisers and participants allows march organisers to exercise counter-power, where they utilise online repertoires of action such as videos, slogans and hashtags to visualise their struggles. Using visual imagery foster a meaningful connection with the movement, inspiring people to engage, share and eventually participate in the movement(Lu, 2023).

FIGURE 19:DR.FARZANA BARI REMOVING BARBED WIRES USING HER HANDS DURING AURAT MARCH (AURAT MARCH ISLAMABAD, 2023)

Description of post

Another powerful image that emerged during the march was this picture of Dr. Farzana Bari- a well-known sociologist-attempting to remove barbed wire with her bare hands, to make way for attendees. Despite being older than many of the volunteers and organisers she took it upon herself to clear the March route.

Link with conceptual framework

This image is reflective of the ferocity of feminist activists, who despite facing many obstacles, continue to march. One comment underneath this post labels this as a photo opportunity to seek and gain attention with the poster likely being unaware of Dr.

Farzana Bari's work in the domain of activism and advanced gender studies scholarship in the country. Her support to this movement is vital, as prominent feminist activists have been critical of the movement and have refused to support it in the past (Azmat, 2022). Her endorsement brings legitimacy to the cause and her affiliation with progressive politics builds more networks. Another important factor is that her presence helps evade malicious propaganda against the march as she has vast experience of dealing with press outlets while young organisers are not yet very experienced in facing them. She is present in all events both leading up to the March and after the March from press conferences to fundraising events. Her support and active participation in the March expands networks of solidarity by building more allies.

FIGURE 20:POST DISPLAYING THE PRESENCE OF TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY AT AURAT MARCH (AURAT MARCH ISLAMABAD, 2023).

Description of post:

This posts shows the presence of transgender community at Aurat March Islamabad. Aurat March has expressed on multiple occassions that it continues to stand with all oppressed individuals including gender minorities in Pakistan.

Link with theoretical concept:

Aurat March has been subjected to criticism for supporting LGBTQ+ by speaking up for transgender, non-binary individuals, and gender non-confirming individuals. While organisers could have explicitly stated that they only work for the rights of cis-women, however, they deliberately chose not to since the movement believes that freedom from patriarchy cannot be achieved until all individuals who are victims of patriarchy are given their rights.

Support of transgender individuals has played out negatively for the March with many public figures such as Maria B., Senator Mushtaq, and Raja Zia Ul Haq calling out Aurat March for advancing homosexuality and promoting gender ambiguity (Aurat March - 2024 ,عورت مارچ). This has created online propaganda against the March where certain groups carefully orchestrate hashtags and posts on X, exploiting algorithms to further their narrative and shape public sentiment (Azmat, 2022). Despite facing vitriol online, transgender individuals are part of the movement and participate in it every year.

Comments under this post are reflective of this narrative where people have made suggestions to call them intersex rather than transgender. Intersex individuals have biological anatomy or genes that do not fall under mainstream definitions of male or

female whereas transgender individuals do not have any apparent differences in biological anatomy but perceive their gender identity to be different (A4TE, 2024).

For instance, according to Maria B, intersex individuals are real people and Aurat March is in fact "Confused March," to show that organisers are unclear about which gender their movement is for. The designers blame Aurat March for advancing exploitative practices such as the *'guru chehla'* culture which is a system of kinship among the Khwaja sira community, along with increasing social ills such as homosexuality and prostitution (B, 2024).

FIGURE 21:IN THIS VIDEO AURAT MARCH ORGANISERS ARE CURSING ADMINISTRATION AND POLICE FOR NOT LETTING THEM MARCH (AURAT MARCH ISLAMABAD, 2023)

Description of post

This video was posted after the march was concluded but it shows the collective rage people had towards the police and administration. Organisers can be seen referring to authorities as enemies of women, transgender, labourers, and students while attendees repeat their chants, to express their resentment towards the state for not permitting them to celebrate the day.

Link with theoretical concept:

Women raising their voice by cursing at the authorities, that too while standing on top of a pickup vehicle is a rare visual in Pakistan. The comments underneath this post are reflective of this mind-set with one user referring to them as indecent and lacking any manners. Pakistan ranks 158th out of 177 countries according to the Women, Peace, and Security Index, due to discriminatory social norms and legal frameworks along with frequent cases of intimate partner violence (Women, Peace, and Security Index 2023/24: Tracking Sustainable Peace through Inclusion, Justice, and Security for Women, 2023). Women who challenge these norms are ostracised by society and have little support from their family members as well. In this visual, women can be scene using profane language which is commonly associated with women with negative character traits. This perception is rooted in in the fact that most the swear words in Urdu and Punjabi are centred around sexualising the female body (Ahmad, 2022). Aurat March Islamabad challenge this narrative and target state institutions for attacking women, transgender individuals, and labourers. Women realise that in order to dismantle patriarchy they must be bold and unapologetic to get their voices across.

Posting such videos online stirs online debate on the kind of values organisers are inculcating among women. March organisers cite that their tones and strategies need to be respectable and digestible to avoid overwhelming the public (Khatri, 2019). However, they are also aware that appeasement to what society terms as respectable can lead to them loosing space and other actors dictating what constitutes as feminism. By chanting slogans against the state brutality March organisers create space for themselves and prove that they won't just be bystanders to these violations.

4.232 2024 posts

FIGURE 22:VIDEO SHOWING AURAT MARCH PROTESTORS BEING PUSHED BY THE POLICE (AURAT MARCH ISLAMABAD, 2024)

Description of post:

This video aptly captures the chaos during the March with attendees pushing female police officers, blocking their way, while male police officers stand by. The organiser recording this video can be heard describing how Islamabad Police is not letting them proceed and how many attendees are getting injured in the process when the police force retaliates in return.

Link with conceptual framework

Organisers, volunteers and participants started pushing the crowd around 3:40 PM after speeches of organisers and activists were concluded and sufficient crowd had gathered. The huge contingent of police made the March attendees look negligible in comparison. Comments section corroborate this sentiment with many people calling out Aurat March Islamabad for supporting Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) government and not raising their voice for state crackdown against PTI. Some comments even applaud the police for resisting marchers while asking for a more severe response against them including baton charge and tear gas shelling.

Althought Aurat March Islamabad posted this to raise their voice and call out Islamabad Police discriminatory brutality, from the comments section it is apparent that this post had an adverse reaction.

PTI supporters underneath this post assert that supporting the party and its female workers in jail is a prerequisite for calling oneself a feminist. When individuals attempt to gate keep the feminist label, they disturb the organic connections established between activists, shrinking the space for genuine dialogue and solidarity in online platforms. If political affiliations start to take precedence over gender equality a lot of people who are contributing towards the movement currently might feel alienated.

FIGURE 23:DANCE PERFORMANCE OUTSIDE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB BY ORGANISERS AND VOLUNTEERS (AURAT MARCH ISLAMABAD, 2024)

Descrption of the post

This video shows the crowd cheering as march volunteers and organisers do a dance performance to Kishwar Naheed's poem *Hum gunahgar aurten* translating to *'it us sinful women'*. March attendees are sitting on the road while police blocks the road infront of Islamabad Press Club.

Link with conceptual fraework

The site of women dancing is continously stigmitised in Pakistan, as majority believe that women should not show their bodies in public. Hence dancing is also a form of protest to recliam public space in a country where conservatism is instutionalised (Sheikh, 2016). This performance was intended to take place at D-Chowk but since organisers realised it was difficult to March past the Press Club due to police blocking their way, they perfomed outside the Press Club. In contrast to this, Haya March protestors on D-Chowk raised slogans on how Islam gives rights to women and offered prayers near red zone (Aik News, 2024).

To measure how at ease women feel in a society is directly related to their presence in public spaces and their ability to participate in all those activtices that men can take part in without fear of being judged or harrased (A. I. Khan, 2024). Former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif commended women at his rally for not dancing in his recent jalsa, unlike the women in rallies of PTI (Guramani, 2023), which is reflective of how womens place in society is dictated by men.

Women dancing at the March challenges the dominant view of how they should appear and move in public spaces. Although dance is not crimanilised in Pakistan, women are cautious of online harrasment and people recording them without consent and posting these vidoes online. Past incidents are not supportive of this either. For example, in 2016 when a clothing brand advertisment showed women performing a flahshmob on the streets of Lahore. The women faced intense backlash and the clothing brand removed the ad after facing online criticism for using women's bodies to promote their clothes(Shah, 2016).

While women's performacnes are limited to private spaces, posting this video acts as stage, where perfomances are public, while facing moral policing.Women dancing here send a powerful message that despite police standing at the back and dozen of people recording them,women will not engage in self censorship just to appease society. The song they are dancing to itself conveys definace, as Kishwar Naheed wrote this poem in 1983 when women marched to Lahore High Court against General Zia Ul Haq's Law of Evidenc Bill (Onial, 2015).

FIGURE 24:VIDEO SHOWING VOLUNTEERS AND ORGANISERS DANCING TO PALESTINIAN SONG (SHIRAZI, 2024)

Description of post:

Aurat March organisers can be seen dancing to Palestinian resistance anthem ‘Dammi Falastani’, while wearing Kuffiyeh (traditional black and white scarf). This year’s charter of demands included calls for the Pakistani government to play an active role in putting an end to genocidal war in Gaza by calling for the liberation of Gaza on all international and diplomatic platforms. Even the poster for this year’s March shows a women dressed in traditional Baloch attire wearing a Kuffiyeh to express solidarity with Palestine.

Link with conceptual framework:

The Israeli Palestine conflict has been massively documented online by people living in Gaza, especially on Instagram. This has given people real time accounts of the atrocities people in Gaza are facing from unexpected strikes, shortage of food and water, and losing their loved ones. Palestinians have created a public repository of their lives through their Instagram accounts, as their followers empathise with, express solidarity, and react to their posts in disbelief(Chalise, 2024).

Although Pakistan has called for the recognition of Palestine as an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital and called for the withdrawal of Israel from Palestine occupied territories (Arain, 2024), Aurat March Islamabad feels they need to play a more active role in this conflict by building peaceful ties with its neighbouring countries.

This video of participants dancing was termed as tone-deaf by several users underneath it, as they are of the view that people in Gaza are dying and acts like this

don’t change their ground realities. Women are expected to mourn in crisis instead of celebrating the Palestinian struggle. Even though such acts do not produce tangible change, it is a form of symbolic activism, where the boundary blurs between local and global audiences and Aurat March Islamabad can provide a locally grounded view of the suffering they face.

FIGURE 25:A VIDEO SHOWING HAYA MARCH PROTESTER GOING TOWARDS D-CHOWK (THE KHORASAN DIARY, 2024)

Textual Analysis

The Aurat March slogan *mera jism meri marzi* which was significantly opposed by Jamat-e-Islaami leaders had been given a rebrand instead to say *mera jism Allah ki marzi* translating to Our Bodies, Allah’s Choice in the counter protest called Haya March. Haya which is the Urdu word for modesty has received support from various right-wing groups and is not subjected to hurdles unlike Aurat March. Haya March Protestors carrying different placards are being escorted by the police while they walk towards Blue Area in this video whereas the situation near Islamabad Press Club is

completely different with protesters being instructed not to move towards D-Chowk and huge contingent of police blocking their way. In 2020 Haya March protesters pelted stones and threw shoes at Aurat March Islamabad attendees yet they were never held liable by the state for this. In subsequent years, Aurat March has faced massive state suppression while Haya March protestors do not face any retaliation from the state.

Link with conceptual framework

Aurat March continues to irk conservative groups within Pakistan, as can be seen with the initiation of a counter protest following the same route and destination as them. Haya March does not have a social media page for sharing their views and for influencing mobilisation, however, a significant number of participants turn up at their march, while supporters chant slogans for banning Aurat March. Speeches are given to demonstrate how feminism is a western agenda imposed to destroy family systems and encourage unrestrained sexual freedom. Sharia Law is viewed as the way forward for achieving women's rights. A survey conducted by Images in Pakistan highlights that both men and women support conventional roles where women are the care takers for children and family and look after household responsibilities (PAK-IMAGES, 2017).On the other hand, only 33% men believe that married women should have the same opportunity to work outside their home as their husband (PAK-IMAGES, 2017).

So, a movement that challenges the existing status quo does not sit right with the majority as they are unbothered by the gender imbalance in both public and private

spheres (PAK-IMAGES, 2017). Endorsement from several right-wing groups and political parties also influences turnout as more people are eager to join.

Censorship, be it online or physical, is reflective of how powerful actors such as the state and right-wing groups attempt to suppresses movements they find threatening. This stresses the precarious nature of feminist activism in countries like Pakistan, where digital mobilization is necessary but is constantly opposed by divergent forces, both on the ground and in the digital sphere. Movements like the Haya March form a strong collective identity based on denouncing western influence and inculcating Islamic values and teachings. Attending and supporting such movements is seen as a way to demonstrate religious devotion and denounce feminism.

4.24 Aftermath of the march

In this section X posts pertaining to events that happen after the march have been analysed.

4.241 2023

This sections focuses on major events that were posted on X after the march of 2023.

FIGURE 26:LEFT WING COLLECTIVE EXPRESSING SOLIDARITY WITH AURAT MARCH LAHORE AND ISLAMABAD IN AACHEN, GERMANY (AURAT MARCH ISLAMABAD, 2023)

Description of the post

Aurat March Islamabad posted a video in which people from a left-wing coalition in Aachen, Germany held a protestor along with posters to express solidarity with Aurat March Islamabad. In the video they can be heard chanting slogans for freedom of women in Urdu and demanding an end to patriarchy.

Link with conceptual framework

Social movements in the network society are not confined to borders, X has allowed global social movements to respond to injustices happening locally. Despite being in

different geographical locations, people were able to mobilize around common causes-in this case gender rights and freedom-by utilizing the internet to connect and interact with each other.

Platforms like ‘X’ function as spaces of flows where ideas spread instantly, to allow marginalised voices, like those of the March participants, to be heard across borders. The protesters in Germany, by expressing solidarity online, are taking part in a global discourse that speaks out against injustices beyond their own local contexts. Hashtags, mentions, and organisation accounts mentioned here are used as nodes to expand networks, where information is disseminated and mobilisation for a cause is done. The power of social media to bring diverse groups together helps in bringing international media’s attention to struggles faced by the Aurat March collective in Pakistan. Through posting about police brutality faces by marchers the collective was able to build transnational networks of support,by bringing global awareness to their issues.

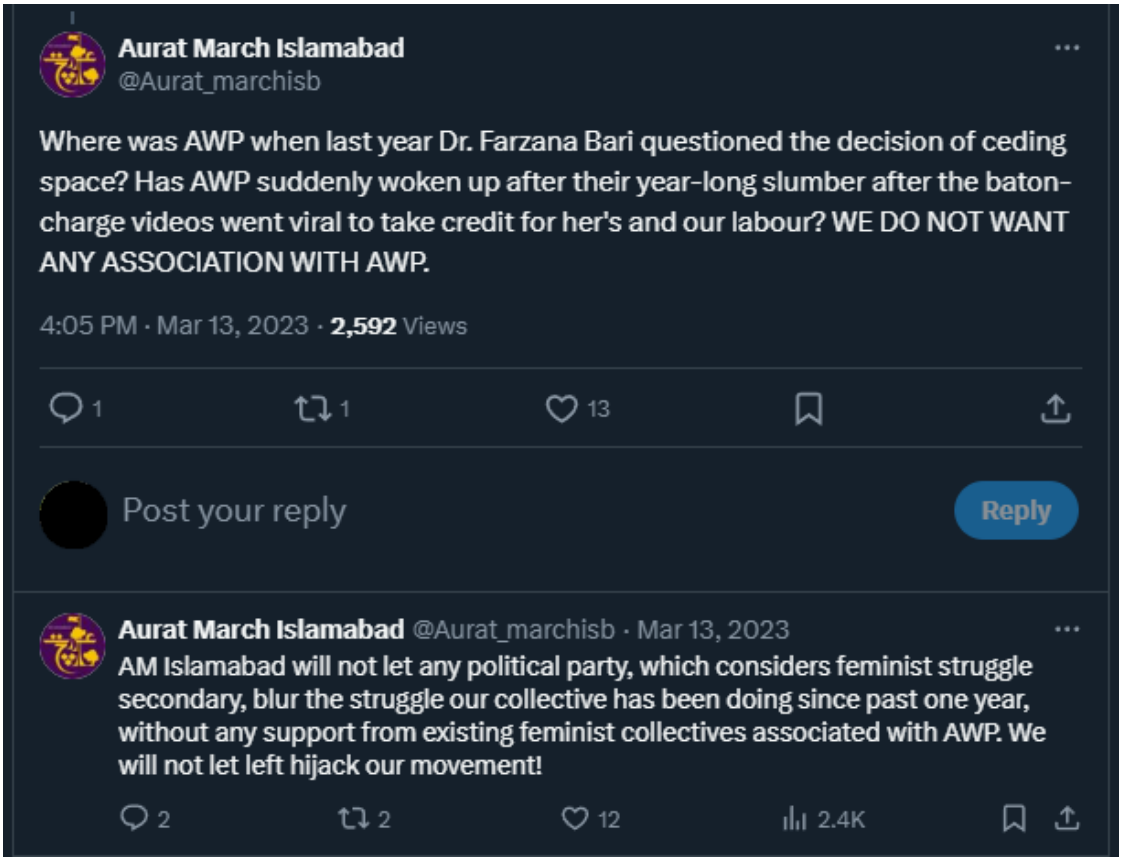

FIGURE 27: AURAT MARCH ISLAMABAD X POST ON NOT LETTING THE LEFT HIJACK THEIR MOVEMENT (AURAT MARCH ISLAMABAD, 2023E)

Description of the post

This post by Aurat March Islamabad is related to how Awami Workers Party -which previously organized the Aurat Azadi March -for taking credit of their labour. The posts mention that Aurat March Islamabad will not let any political party hijack their movement and questions their complicity in backing away from holding a march initially. The feminist collective of AWP called WDF (Women Democratic Front) used to organise the march before 2021 but in 2021, after facing allegations of blasphemy and threats from right wing groups, they decided to hold a *jalsa* meaning

gathering, instead. Following this, some young feminists along with Dr. Farzana Bari decided that they will hold the March under the name of Aurat March Islamabad.

Link with theoretical concept:

Instantaneous and decentralised communication in the Network Society is a double-edged sword as demonstrated here. Although the previous posts have been deleted due to editable interface of social media applications, this X post points to how it's the organisers who have carried out the ground work but AWP has tried to take credit for it, after the videos of police baton charging became viral. On social media, people can appear to be supportive of causes for which they have made no genuine contribution, as in this case known as performance activism[8]. Only Dr. Farzana Bari from the party has supported Aurat March Islamabad while feminist collectives such as WDF associated with AWP have not contributed much towards their cause and hold a separate rally for women's day. In fact, the event venue has been severely politicised which is why Aurat Azadi March decided to hold a rally in F-9 park instead of Islamabad Press Club. On the other hand, Aurat March Islamabad continues to take the same route despite not receiving NOC for marching and being instructed to change their location by the administration.

[8] ''Performative activism is a critical label that is applied to instances of shallow or self-serving support for social justice cause''(Thimsen, 2022, p. 83)

FIGURE 28:AURAT MARCH ISLAMABAD DISCUSSING HOW AWP IS NOT THEIR ALLY WITH X USER (GABEENA, 2023)

In another post, this argument is taken further by a follower who expresses her disappointment with Aurat March Islamabad for over-reacting to a picture of Dr. Farzana Bari from Aurat March Islamabad posted by AWP. This is also resembling another aspect of the Network Society where the general public engages with organisers by directly tagging them and the organisation replies instantaneously to clarify their stance. Aurat March Islamabad argues that Dr. Bari participates in a personal capacity on Aurat March and explicitly states that AWP is not our ally due to ideological differences as shown in the above figure.Due to the persistence nature

of social media taking such a stance is important to function as proof on a movements association.

4.242 2024

In this section X posts after the march of 2024 have been analysed.

FIGURE 29: AURAT MARCH ISLAMABAD HOLDS PRESS CONFERENCE ON 9TH MARCH (AURAT MARCH ISLAMABAD, 2024)

Description of post:

Women can be seen sitting outside Islamabad Press Club with mics to condemn police blockade for obstructing their March. The organisers raised the issue of why they keep on facing such deterrence towards marching while Haya March faces none.

Link with theoretical concept

The movement responded swiftly as videos of police pushing march attendees began gaining attention. However, issues highlighted online often remain relevant only temporarily, until a new topic emerges. Attaining prolonged visibility is a major issue where supporters of the march constantly being bombarded with new information they might show temporary engagement to Aurat March plight.To take maximum advantage of this short time frame Aurat March organisers called a press conference when the march was concluded and posted it on their social's aswell. Though only few attendees and organisers were present, this did not lessen the spirit of women who were outraged at Islamabad Police for interfering in their March again. Organisers also called for an investigation into why Haya March protestors were allowed by the state to march without any obstructions. They believed that this counter protest was created by the state to stop Aurat March from protesting on D-Chowk, which is where most government buildings are situated.

Press club has been site of contestation since General Musharraf's martial law to PTI members using it to hold press conferences to announce their political defections(M. Z. Khan, 2024). This relates to Castell mentioning the importance of occupying physical space for movements ''The space of the movement is always made of an interaction between the space of flows on the Internet and wireless communication networks, and the space of places of the occupied sites and of symbolic buildings targeted by protest actions'' (Castells, 2015, p. 250)

Although organisers of Aurat March have been requested by district adminisation and police to take their march to a nearby park. March organisers have refused to cede their space as it holds significance in the political realm. Press clubs are natural hubs

for media personal, thus making them the perfect choice for protests that aim to maximise publicity and coverage.

4.3 Newspaper Articles

In this section Newspaper articles from 1 English Newspaper and 2 Urdu Newspapers have been reviewed. Using content analysis to examine how print media portrays the march, this section aims to uncover differences in coverage among leading outlets and determine whether these portrayals influence public support for or opposition to the March. Amongst Urdu newspapers, Jang and Nawaiwaqt while Dawn was selected for English news as these newspapers have a high readership(Aslam, 2024; 'Pakistan Media Guide', 2023). For Urdu newspapers I have read articles in detail and then translated them to English for further analysis. Snapshots have been added to of newspaper headlines for each article both in Urdu and English to show how the authors portray Aurat March.

Only opinion pieces were used as they provoke discussion, address controversial subjects in detail, and are useful in understanding the arguments of both critics and supporters of the movement. This section ties to the overall objectives of my research as I want to draw inferences how mainstream media represents events that took place during the march in comparison to social media.What role print media has in instigating hatred towards the march and whether journalists engage in self-censorship while reporting events that transpired during the march.

4.31. Urdu Newspaper coverage

پاکستان اور عالمی یوم خواتین

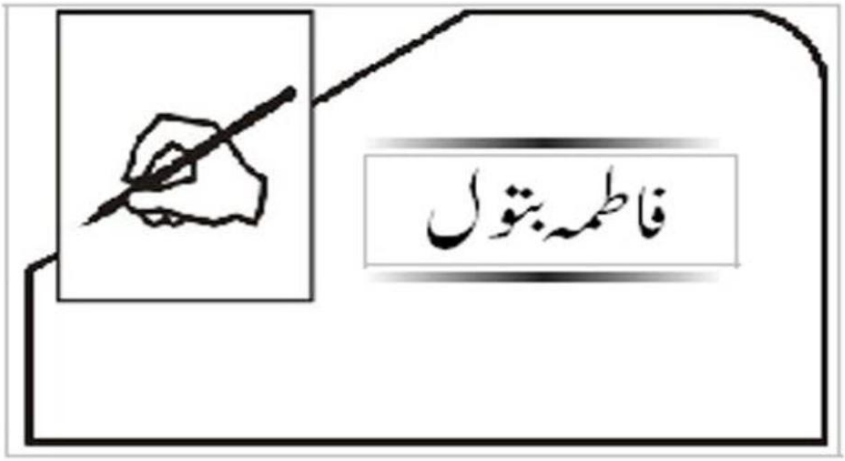

FIGURE 30:ARTICLE HEADLINE SCREENSHOT TAKEN FROM NAWAIWAQT(BATOOL, 2023)

Publication: Nawaiwaqt

Date of Publication: 10th of March,2023

Headline of Article: Pakistan and International Women's Day

Author: Fatima Batool (Batool, 2023)

This article mentions how the Constitutions of Pakistan grants equal rights to all citizens, regardless of their gender. Despite constitutional guarantees of equal protection from the law, prohibiting discrimination based on gender, and ensuring equal access to public spaces and employment opportunities, Pakistan is still considered a dangerous country for women. Girls often face limited access to education, women are deprived of healthcare, and around 90% of women are denied their rightful inheritance.

The author mentions how deeply entrenched patriarchy is within our system by discussing the case of a woman who has been fighting to claim her inheritance for 46 years. She mentions how the Constitution of Pakistan has sections pertaining to fundamental rights that promote women empowerment. The author states how article 34 talks about female participation in all spheres of life and article 35 demands the state to protect marriage, family, motherhood and childhood. Adding that true progress can only be achieved if women are able to succeed in all domains including social, economic, and technological. Lack of education and awareness of legislative initiatives for women serve as big deterrents in women realising their full potential.

Article Analysis

This essay sympathizes with the plight of Aurat March organisers and their ongoing fight for Human Rights The author signs off with a poem reflecting the struggle, disappointment, and uncertainty associated with working for women's rights in Pakistan. In the poem, the last two lines mention that despite facing so many hardships, the desired result has not been achieved, which is relevant to Aurat March struggles, as every year they have to face new difficulties and online backlash. Each year the charter of demands highlights new challenges that women face which shows the multitude of injustices women face. This article can motivate readers to support Aurat March and attend it, as it demonstrates how women have been deprived of their rights and why this issue needs to be addressed.

Publication: Nawai-waqt

Date of Publication: 9th of March,2023

Headline of Article: International Women's Day, rallies of Jamaat-e-Islami in Islamabad led to heated exchanges.

Author: Not given(‘ خواتین کے عالمی دن پر مارچ جماعت اسلامی کی بھی ریلیاں اسلام آباد میں تلخ کلامی"On [International Women’s Day, rallies of Jamaat-e-Islami in Islamabad led to heated exchanges]’, 2023)

FIGURE 31: ARTICLE HEADLINE SCREENSHOT TAKEN FROM NAWAIWAQT(‘خواتین کے عالمی دن پر مارچ جماعت اسلامی کی بھی ریلیاں اسلام آباد میں تلخ کلامی"ON [INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY, RALLIES OF JAMAAT-E-ISLAMI IN ISLAMABAD LED TO HEATED EXCHANGES]’, 2023)

This article was published after International Women’s Day and it covers major women’s day events that took place in Lahore (‘ خواتین کے عالمی دن پر مارچ جماعت اسلامی کی بھی ریلیاں اسلام آباد میں تلخ کلامی"On [International Women’s Day, rallies of Jamaat-e-Islami in Islamabad led to heated exchanges]’, 2023). It provides coverage of main events that took place in Lahore on Women’s day. Some apparent differences between Aurat March Lahore and this Women’s Walk is the support extended to the

latter by the government. Popular slogans of the Aurat March that is My Body, My Choice were labelled as anti-Islamic and against Pakistan by Jamaat-e-Islaami. The speakers remarked that such slogans destroy the moral fabric of our country and are against the Constitution as well.

The article then provides an overview of events held at Lahore College for Women and Sui Northern Gas to commemorate women's day. In the concluding paragraphs, the main events at Aurat March Islamabad are discussed such as police baton charging and suspension of police officers and altercations between participants and journalists. The article highlights that transgender individuals and March participants were involved in attacking media personal, while it also mentions how March organisers contradict this perspective saying that journalists attacked transgender individuals'. It also provides the statement of condemnation from Sherry Rehman-Ex Minister for Climate Change saying that this hostile reaction by the police is not tolerable.

Article Analysis

At first the article gives a balanced perspective by providing coverage of the Aurat March in Lahore and Islamabad while also covering Women Walk in Lahore arranged by Jamaat-e-Islaami Lahore.But later on the article taints Aurat March organisers in a negative light by blaming them for the violent clashes that took place during the March in Islamabad. The article accuses march protestors of violating the NOC for their planned route, but also offers the point of view of Marches whose route was obstructed therefore they had no choice.

It aims to portray Aurat March as a proponent of anarchy where it will use force against people who do not agree with them. Reading this article might make people reluctant of supporting the march as it perceives them as having violent characteristics.

Publication: Jang Group

Date of Publication: 8th March,2023

Headline of Article: Aurat March....Men should stay in their limits.

Author: Yasir Pirzada (Pirzada, 2023)

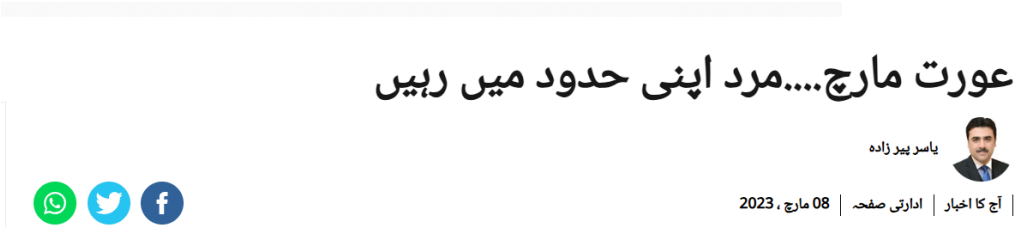

FIGURE 32: ARTICLE HEADLINE SCREENSHOT TAKEN FROM JANG(PIRZADA, 2023).

This article is an opinion piece targeting the role of men in perpetuating misogyny and fuelling hate against the March (Pirzada, 2023). It establishes that whatever limits religion or society has prescribed for women, each woman will follow them out of her understanding and fear of accountability to God. This does not mean that men take on this responsibly to establish boundaries on what is permissible for women and what is not.

Article Analysis

It refers to arguments raised against the March as controversial and repetitive. Criticism can vary from labelling Aurat March as being backed by a western agenda, criticising their dressing, disapproving their slogans, sometimes asking why they only

march on one day, and asking why they need to march in the first place when Islam has already given them their rights. However, according to the author the most damaging allegation is the circulation of doctored images last year sparking a huge uproar against the march(Mirza, 2022). It becomes difficult to persevere in such circumstances, when these movements are associated with immodesty and propaganda.

The author mentions how it has become a pipe dream to expect the general public to not hold biases against women. While appreciating their efforts he also points out that woman sometimes misuse laws aimed at protecting them. Using real life instances, he corroborates his argument to show that considering the atmosphere for women isn't that favourable already, such actions only increase resentment.

In the concluding paragraphs, he mentions that the behaviour of those against the March is not normal either. While men aim to constitute boundaries for women that fall under the ambit of the teachings of Islam, they forget that God has ordained limits for them as well. Using religious justifications to attack women, and then insisting that one supports their rights as long as they adhere to one's conditions is absurd to the author.

The author states that he himself is supportive to the purpose of the March. He believes that men should let women have this day and celebrate it as they like. He calls out men for their internalised misogyny and their biases towards women. This article might trigger hate speech against the author from conservative readers for sympathising with Aurat March participants and calling out men for their role in promoting hate speech against the march. He points out the role of women in

providing fuel for critics who oppose female empowerment. By exploiting and misusing laws that are crucial to protect them, they can undermine their credibility and harm their initial purpose. This shows that the author distances himself from an idealised view of feminism, as he acknowledges the exploitation that is associated with women's right framework, due to absence of accountability.

4.32 English newspaper coverage

Publication: Dawn

Date of Publication: March 8,2023

Headline: The women will march

Author: Maria Amir(Amir, 2023)

The women will march

The Aurat March is not a sanitised, polite, controlled version of a narrative of women's rights. It is organic and therefore, it will always be messy and diverse.

Maria Amir | Published March 8, 2023

FIGURE 33:NEWSPAPER ARTICLE SCREENSHOT TAKEN FROM DAWN(AMIR, 2023).

The article is written by a former journalist who researches South Asian Feminist movements (Amir, 2023). The author mentions how women's mobility is restricted from a young age due to the perception that the primary danger they face outside their homes comes from men. Men teach women that their respect is conditioned upon limiting their movement outside the home, all because men cannot control themselves

in front of women. Women's honour is framed through her body and men's honour lies in how they control women.

Article Analysis

The author elaborates that any independent minded women who has defended herself has faced backlash from society in some way. She highlights how women who attend the March are considered bad and are also accused of not being real women. She considers the accusation of Aurat March being foreign funded as completely baseless and elaborates that funds for the March are collected through bake sales, dholkis and whatever volunteers can sell.

The March does not affiliate itself with any political party or religious group; individuals organising the march do so in a personal capacity, which she believes sends out a message that the organisers as individuals have rights. The state, however, chooses to side with violent groups who threaten organisers and attack them as well. She mentions that the March is a grassroots movement that thrives on inclusivity. The accusation levied at Aurat March organisers that they are elitist is rejected by showing that grass root campaigning takes places all year around with marginalised groups.

The author states that Aurat March is feared because it allows women to display the two emotions that are rarely allowed to be expressed in our culture - anger and joy. This article aims to debunk much of the criticism Aurat March faces by providing detailed explanations for each point. According to her, the aim behind the placards and slogans is to take back the narrative that women should only be restricted to their homes. This movement is associated with the collective power of women to take

charge of their movement. Women are in a way exercising counter power by occupying spaces traditionally dominated by men along with turning insults and slurs directed towards them into art and powerful visuals.

In a way, the author is creating a counter discourse to silence online vitriol against the movement that aims to delegitimise the movement. It exhibits the qualities of a connective action movement as decentralisation allows for a range of voices and experiences to be represented and become part of the movement while a collective identity is formed by sharing common concerns of women in the form of speeches, placards and artwork.

Publication: Dawn

Date of publication: March 18th ,2023

Headline of article: I marched for my mother who wasn't allowed to go to school

Author: Ehtesham Hassan (Hassan, 2023)

FIGURE 34:ARTICLE HEADLINE SCREENSHOT TAKEN FROM DAWN(HASSAN, 2023)

This article is written by a man whose picture of holding a poster that read 'I marched for my mother who wasn't allowed to go school' in Aurat March went viral on X

(Hassan, 2023). He mentions how his mother was not allowed to go school due to a religious cleric declaring it against the honour of their family. Despite this incident being really old, his mother still wells up thinking about it.

After sharing this post online, he received countless messages from people who shared the pain his mother felt. This, he believes is the story of countless women in Pakistan who do not have the autonomy to make decisions about their lives. He mentions that a major factor prohibiting women from attaining education is cultural and religious norms. He equates education as the solution for slowly getting rid of societal ills such as bigotry, extremism, and misogyny.

Article Analysis

This post is a testament to the power of social media in influencing people to talk about their shared experiences. While Aurat March is criticised for not including real voices and only speaking about issues of a certain segment of society, such stories show that it is relatable for the masses. As his family used to reside in a village in North-western Pakistan, his story might have sensitised men towards the plight of organisers and how patriarchy is a systematic issue that has prevented many women from contributing towards educational, political, and economic sectors of our country.

This post embodies the concept of personalised action frames where individuals share their personal stories and experiences on social issues that can evoke emotional responses from people viewing them. When people feel a personal connection to something they might be motivated to engage with the cause and mobilize others.

Publication: Dawn

Date of Publication: March 12th,2023

Headline: *Khud khana garam karlo'*: Why some Aurat March posters touched a nerve.

Author: Ilqua Lutfi(Lutfi, 2023)

FIGURE 35: ARTICLE HEADLINE TAKEN FROM DAWN(LUTFI, 2023)

This article revisits posters at the Aurat March that describe the shared everyday lives of many Pakistani women (Lutfi, 2023). As opposed to these posters being termed as frivolous, the author argues that they do not dampen the 'real issues' of the March; instead they aim to challenge patriarchy in the private sphere, which is eventually reinforced in public realms.

Article Analysis

Lutfi(2023) recalls how the '*Khud Khana garam karlo'*-heat your own food - poster got so much media attention online as critics believed that this meant women abandoning their household chores to go on the streets whereas the poster creator clarified that her motivation for this poster came from the unequal share of household

responsibilities between women and men, where women have to do handle more than men.

Another post that was the subject of debate online *was 'Mujhay kya pata tumhara moza kaha hai'* translating to- how would I know where your sock is? It is reflective of a real-life conversation that takes place in a household wherea woman's household responsibilities range from arranging her husband's shoes to platting up his breakfast while he gets ready to leave for work. Critics point out that instead of focusing on real issues such as child marriages, education, domestic violence and honour killings, Aurat March chooses to focus on mundane day to day activities. However, these placards depict that gender inequality is a lived reality that women are subjected to on a daily basis and is intimately linked to ordinary space, time, and living (Lutfi, 2023).

Political movements are often associated with a serious tone, with participants expected to follow a certain decorum. However, Aurat March destabilizes these conventional modes by using playfulness and humour as tools of resistance to the accepted discourse on gender. The movement thus exercises counter-power, by reimaging protest culture, suggesting that protests can be joyful as well.

This article offers a nuanced understanding to the meaning behind these posters which generated a lot of online discourse on how Aurat March is challenging prevalent gender practices. These messages according to the author resonate with a lot of women but being aired in the public means being subjected to online backlash. It is a unique to way present their demands and challenge the rigid public private binary that exists and demanding public accountability for household practices that reinforce patriarchy.

4.41. Professional and Educational Background

This theme comprised of the profession and educational background of the respondents. In order to protect their identities, work place names are kept confidential and only the nature of work that they engage in will be given. Educational institutes have also been omitted to only show the study area and location of their institutes. The sample comprised of public policy analysts, activists, students, filmmaker, journalist, media specialist, HR professionals, real estate advisor, and a psychologist.

4.4. Thematic Analysis

In this section, the collected information from 20 respondents including participants and organisers using semi structured interviews is analysed, dissected, and fine-tuned to reveal hidden meanings and findings. The main objective of doing this analysis is to convert data into comprehensible accounts of the outcomes by connecting it to research questions and theories to interpret data in a way that it fulfils research objectives.

This chapter gives first-hand accounts of the respondents and their contextualised interpretations. The information derived from this can be used by policy makers to identify why women march and what gaps in policy implementation the government should work upon.

The verbatim transcription was coded using themes and sub-themes in line with the conceptual framework, which helped transform the data into valuable insights. Data was filtered out to consider its meaning and relevance to the subject under inquiry.

These insights can be used to inform policy making related to Information Communication and Technology. The following figure shows the themes and sub-themes that were developed while dissecting the data into representable categories.

TABLE 1: THEMES AND SUB -THEMES FOR THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS

Themes	Sub-themes	Sub-Categories
1. Professional and Educational Background	1.1 Profession 1.2 Education	
2. Participating in AM	2.1 Attending AM since 2.2 Reasons for Participating 2.3 Future Participation	
3.Social media usage and activism	3.1 Most used social media app for activism 3.2 Relevance of social media for activism 3.3 Social media as a mobilising agent	3.21 Post that led you attend AM 3.31. Coalition building
4. X Activism and censorship	4.1 Do you have an X account 4.2 X relevance in Political space 4.3 X ban impact	4.21 Spill over of X posts
5. Propaganda against the march	5.1 Online Harassment 5.2 Hate speech against participants	5.11 Online harassment 5.12 Doctored images of participants 5.21 Charges of blasphemy
6. AM Islamabad critique	6.1 Fluctuations in Turnout 6.2 Placards raised during the march 6.3 AM management weaknesses	6.31 Disconnected from wider population 6.32 Better utilisation of social media 6.33 Issues of peripheries neglected 6.44 Violating cultural norms

4.42. Participating in AM

This theme aims to gather information on how long respondents have been attending or organizing the march, their experiences in any capacity, and their motivations for

attending. This will help in interpreting whether they have been motivated to attend through personal acquaintances or through online mediums.

4.421. Attending AM since

In response to the question about when they started attending the march, most respondents indicated that they have attended the march multiple times. However, a few participants mentioned that they only attended this year's march. Volunteers, in particular, have been more consistent in participating regularly.

4.422. Reasons for participating

Reasons for participating were quite nuanced; for some it is associated with their leftist politics. One respondent mentioned:

''In general, the purpose of Aurat March is to advocate gender equality, women's empowerment and challenge patriarchal norms and their structures in society. In my opinion, attending events like the Aurat March is important as it offers a platform to raise awareness about the challenges faced by women or marginalized communities or the women of marginalized communities. Moreover, it fosters solidarity and encourages collective action towards social change. By participating in such events, we contribute to paving the way for a better future, where the next generation won't have to face the same struggles.''

This response shows that the main purpose according to her is advocating for gender equality and breaking the cycle of oppressive practices that limit women's participation in the public sphere, so that other women do not have to face the same struggles. An organiser who started as a volunteer mentioned that her motivation to

join Aurat march was based on the patriarchy women in her family, where certain topics were considered off-limits:

''Coming from a middle-class background, I observed from a young age how discussions about inheritance rights were considered taboo, and how women were often discouraged from pursuing careers. Seeing my mother and elder sisters stand up for themselves despite these challenges deeply inspired me. Their courage and determination fuelled my desire to join movements like Aurat March, where I could actively contribute to challenging and reshaping these societal norms for the betterment of women's rights in Pakistan''.

She mentions that juggling careers and motherhood was discouraged in her family, but her family defied these expectations, which made her join the march to support women who continue to fight for the rights and reshape societal norms that aim to limit women. An HR professional who has been supporting the March since the very beginning says that:

''The Aurat march is an important symbol and action for Pakistani women on International Women's Day; it has not quite manifested beyond International Women's Day. Something to think about. Nevertheless, it makes misogynists and conservatives uncomfortable and therefore constructive in moving the mind-sets into thinking, what are these women raising? Every time the government or elements in society try to clamp down or ban or disregard or undermine such gender equality movements or protests, it in fact highlights the very issues that matter for women. Therefore, Aurat march is a positive expression because it brings into attention the problems in urban Pakistani women's lives.''

Her stance is that government attempts to censure the March, which is why women take part in it the first place. It is reflective of their agency and shows that they have the ability to divert attention to their problems through marching and raising slogans. It makes conservatives and misogynists uncomfortable to see women taking up spaces traditionally dominated by men.

Another respondent mentioned that she feels obligated to march because her sister experienced harassment at the workplace. Even after she filed a complaint, no action was taken. While there is legislation to protect women at the workplace notably The Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act of 2010, the social stigma attached to filling these sorts of cases and time-consuming court procedures make victims reluctant to do so (Iqbal, 2023). Her sister had to leave the company while the victim stayed which makes her think about how patriarchy is embedded in our institutions.

One male respondent recalls his experience of being a volunteer and how the countless logistics related issues he faces while organising equipment for the March, affirming the prevalent bias against Aurat March. From the sound system vendors to the person providing the vehicle, which organisers use to make speeches, everyone is reluctant to cooperate with March organisers. He believes the state apparatus is such that vendors are afraid to work with movements that question their authority.

On being asked why he still persists despite facing so many hurdles, he responded that *"Iss movement ki sab se ziada zaroorat mardon ko hai*" which translates to men need this movement the most. He thinks that men need to introspect on why women are marching for their rights on the street; it is because of equality which is a basic

human right. Whether someone is a transgender or a woman, the human element comes first and whatever rights everyone else gets, they deserve them also. He thinks that men should be aware of the rights Aurat March is asking for by reading them and he also thinks feminist theory should be understood so that it is easier for them to understand why they march.

Another male participant, when asked why it is important for cis men to march says he views Aurat March from a political lens:

"I personally don't like this whole idea of male allies; it doesn't make so much sense to me. Taking on labels like that ultimately becomes more about putting out a performance of ally ship especially on social media and I don't think that does much good and I think we have seen a lot of that in the last few years. But for me I think it's just about you standing up for what's right just like I stand up for the rights of katchi abadi(informal settlements) residents or for Baloch, Pashtuns and other ethnic nations that are exploited and oppressed in this country and it is an issue of fundamental rights and it has been very clear to me for a long time that the gender apartheid in Pakistan is one of the worst in the world. Like I wasn't aware of that growing up but overtime after becoming an adult and like comparing it with other places it was very clear that like its similar to I've written about it in the past its similar to like forms of racial apartheid that exist in places like South Africa for instance like it's in the legal system, inheritance rights, access to education, access to health, access to public spaces. It is really subjectively one of the worst in the world, so not standing up would be a bigger question in my view. Yeah I think this movement needs to grow, I think feminist consciousness needs to expand, so that everyone can

be an equal human being in the eyes of the society, the law or in the eyes of public institutions yeah I guess those would be my motivations to attend."

This participant views the concept of male allies as a form of performative activism; to him this movement is more about standing up for what's right. He is a public policy analyst by profession who believes that inequality is present in multiple domains whether it be legal or education. He believes that by increasing feminist consciousness through movements like the March, women will be regarded as equal citizens.

4.423. Future participation

Most participants say that they do plan on attending next year's march however, one respondent says that if they do not make proper organising arrangements and improve their social media strategy, she might end up not going. Another female participant mentioned how she will attend the march, as it is her way of commemorating women's day and being in the presence of women on this day brings joy to her:

"Yeah I hope so and the funny thing is even If I'm not in Islamabad I make sure I attend the March. I was working in Lahore for a year and attended Aurat March Lahore. While I was studying abroad for my Masters I wasn't able to attend the march but I made sure I went to the women's protest happening over there. Because it's become kind of like my own way of celebrating women's day. And I think I really enjoy being surrounded by women based on that single day. No matter where I am what I am doing I make sure I attend whatever is happening in the city for women's day."

A male participant says that he supports both Aurat March Islamabad and Aurat Azadi March, where the latter hosts a jalsa in the F-9 park while the former wants to march to D-Chowk. He thinks these are 'petty' issues that consume progressive movements, but he says he will still attend the March if it takes place.

4.43. Social media usage and activism

In this section, respondents were asked about their views for using social media platforms as a tool for activism. This section did not focus on a specific app as the motivation was to gauge the view-points of respondent's view point on whether they use social media and their familiarity with online tools. Most respondents did view it as an important medium for activism, however some people suggested that it should not rely it on completely due to issues such as internet disruptions and the digital divide being gendered as well.

4.431. Most used social media app for activism

Most respondents said that they use Facebook for activism, as their Facebook accounts are public so they can reach a broader audience. One of the organisers for the march believes social media is important to make noise against state resistance and backlash to such movement.

One respondent claims he uses X more due to its ability to bring together different people in the political arena on a common objective through hashtags and other features. As people with similar political narratives are able to get together, creating echo chambers in a way:

"I used to use Facebook a lot more and I still do sometimes but less regularly now. So Twitter because I mean it is the politics app so current affairs and news come up. So much of politics is about information both being able to pain it in timely way and both being able to pull the right information out to people in ways that is amenable to your objectives. Twitter is the best place for that and it's a place where you can aggregate political views more than other platforms in terms of like the hashtags and stuff. So if you have group of people with similar views you can get together more quickly.''

Some young respondents mentioned that they used Instagram for news, because the platform has more easily consumable content. As the headlines and captions on the platform clearly capture the essence of the content and you do not have to open any further links, one respondent said. A major factor for determining which app they should use for activism is whether their account is public or not, to allow people to interact with their shared posts,as a young activist pointed out:

''I have a public Facebook account, my Twitter account is also public, Instagram is private as I post pictures of my friends and family there. But still I use Facebook more and receive more backlash on the platform, as more use it in comparison to Twitter. Twitter posts do receive backlash but not the kind of derogatory comments you get on Facebook''.

While some older respondents mentioned they like to use Facebook more as its more interactive and they have gotten used to the interface. One respondent mentioned they never really got into the Twitter space and were reluctant to post there for being judged for their views. Another respondent shares how the banning of X makes him

reluctant to open the app, as first one has to turn on VPN.Thus most respondents in both age brackets have not cited Twitter as their preferred medium for activism,while Facebook is the most popular.

4.432. Relevance of social media for activism

In terms of its relevance for activism a respondent cites that he knew many people who came to the March due to social media. Another respondent agrees to this as well who mentions that Aurat March started gaining traction because of social media. However, on the flip side it has also contributed to a lot of hate towards the movement. Despite its repercussions she believes social media is an integral part of Aurat March.

One respondent believes that the post-event buzz that the march receives through social media helps give it permanence in people's minds as whatever is posted on social media related to the march stays on online platforms unless it is deleted by the user or taken down by the app. One male participant mentioned that although it is vital to be present online, it carries a lot of burden for March supporters who face slurs and abuse regularly.

A male volunteer believes that social media has had a massive impact, especially for Aurat March, as most attendees attend the March and come to know about it by following its social media accounts. A male participant thinks that social is not only valuable but also a necessity to get your voice heard:

"You cannot build collectives, you cannot build movements, you cannot build parties without also having very concrete social media teams, strategies policies. Just

because all the major parties and all the other powerful actors in the public space are using them, the state uses them, the military uses them, they use these technologies, mainstream parties use them all the private sector everything."

An activist shared that because of constant state surveillance and control on electronic media, social media is the preferred outlet for-especially for the new generation. A female organiser believed it is crucial to be online because new harassment and rape cases surface every day. Being active online facilitates them in talking about these issues and raising awareness. She also mentioned that by sharing the events that happen during the March, it is important to spread awareness on violations that happen and expose the hypocrisy of people who oppose them.

4.433. Post that led you to attend AM

One female participant mentioned how the epicentre of the march - the slogan Mera jism, Meri Marzi - is what led her to participate after seeing that it generated a lot of debate online. She recalls how a discussion related to Aurat March on Facebook on how men usually provide for women and how people were commenting that women are comfortable with this arrangement as most of them choose not to work after marriage themselves. This made her furious and she responded that many women she has interacted with do not have the autonomy to make this decision and those that do choose to work have to face a lot of resistance from families, spouses. She also recalls that women are not complaining but are celebrating their struggles, and she replied to a man saying if it triggers you so much go earn money yourself then, but you won't because she is earning already. The motivation to post this sarcastic dig was to show that women are already working and the hate she received online was her prime

motivation to support the March. This slogan and the discussion that led to it was her major motivation for attending Aurat March.

4.44. Social media as a mobilising agent

This section got some mixed responses with some people saying that it is not effective for mobilisation and cannot replace in person mobilisation. One respondent believes that it is not grassroots movement because of too much dependence on social media. He thinks that this year, the Islamabad chapter arranged a lot of protests for issues not related to women's day. That is a step in the right direction but he still thinks that the working class struggle needs to be highlighted more so that they become involved as well.

Another respondent states that the March is growing because of social media, but attending it in-person is important to differentiate it from the propaganda surrounding it. Another respondent believes that despite being active on social media, March participation has dwindled because of Covid-19, more state interference, and non-provision of NOCs by the government.

An organiser states that the class composition of the March tells you that mobilization is mainly through online platforms. She says although there are people from working class, they are not that many; middle class educated individuals are the major attendees. They mostly get information from social media, so internet access is a major determining factor on who attends the March. Another organiser states that:

"Yes, definitely social media has played a crucial role in sustaining Aurat March since 2018. It has been instrumental in creating awareness about the march, its objectives, and the issues it addresses. Social media platforms have enabled us to

reach a broader audience and mobilize people for participation. People get updates from social media if they cannot attend the activities prior to the march. Our important dates are communicated through this medium and it has proved to be useful."

Hence organisers believe it is useful for reaching a broader audience as the March is already the subject of state surveillance and in-person mobilization is difficult and costly as well whereas social media is less restrictive and does not cost much.

4.441. Coalition building

A male volunteer says that he uses social media to mobilize more volunteers for security but in comparison to previous years, finding volunteers for this year was a difficult task. He says that March organisers need to think from an international perspective and highlight human rights violations that are happening globally as well. The multiplicity of voices helps create global pressure on governments and other authorities' bodies, as historically, unions and Amnesty international have passed a lot of bills for Pakistan.

According to one organiser, coalition building with other movements is important as Aurat March Islamabad participates in other movements by sending one or two of their organisers to participate in events and protests. This helps Aurat March remain in people's imagination and according to her and face to face interaction with social movements drives support for the March. She thinks that currently march organisers need to focus more on this for their growth.

4.45. Social media and the citizen government gap

In terms of bridging the citizen government gap, most respondents are of the view that it just creates noise and does not impact much in reality. One respondent said that Aurat March supporters have been quite vocal of the issues they face during the March but the government still creates more obstacles for in-person demonstration. Despite these hurdles, she still thinks that the induction of female police officers in the front was a way to avoid any police-protestor face off like last year. As she believes that after the scuffle that took place last year between a male police officer and a female attendee, female officers were inducted and police also showed restraint and did not baton charge marchers.Some respondents disagree and do think that social media has an impact in narrowing this as many political personalities have created their profiles and respond and resolve issues as well. Another respondent says that it is a tool for advocacy and accountability for raising issues pertaining to discrimination against minorities and marginalised groups.

4.46. X activism

In this section, I delve into how respondents use X for activism and the censorship they have faced online. Currently X is banned in Pakistan from February 2024 till date and the government does not seem keen on making it operational in Pakistan anytime soon. Despite many government officials still using X, this contributes negatively to free speech and information dissemination.

4.461. Do you have an X account?

Few respondents stated that they did have an X account as they prefer other platforms such as Facebook,Instagram and Linkedin for keeping up to date on political matters and speaking out social issues. Familiarity with the interface of other platform has made users reluctant to be active on X. Some respondent shared that before the ban they frequently posted on the platform but since the ban they do not open the app as frequently.Using X with VPN is a cumbersome process as it slows down internet speed as well. A political worker for Pakistan People's Party(PPP) mentions that he regularly posts on X for his work and the events he attends.

A respondent recalls how her X account got restricted because of the content moderation policies of the platform, as she was posting videos from Palestine:

''I use it frequently but I was actually restricted for the last 5-6 months and I regained it a couple of weeks back so now I have the access, my account is active now. I was posting constantly about Palestine and then they restricted my account and they weren't listening to my appeals so I had to send in a lot of emails to get my account back it wasn't working and finally after like five months they were like oh this was a mistake''.

4.462.Twitter relevance in Political space

Most respondents believe that X is an effective tool for advocating different causes and staying up to date on current events that are happening in the country. The presence of political figures and institutions make it important for Aurat March organisers to voice their concern to the relevant authorities, as stated by an organiser.

One respondent said that opinions and posts shared on X are more significant as compared to Facebook and Instagram. Language has a role in this as well, as posts shared in Urdu might not gain as much as views as those shared in English, according to him. One male volunteer says that ASP Nausherwan was suspended last year by Islamabad Police because his video of shouting at a female organiser caused a huge uproar online. Tagging is an important feature of the app along with hashtags that garner attention of activists, different ministries to bring light to certain issues.

4.4621. Spill over effect of X posts

While X does not have that much of a user base in Pakistan as compared to other social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X posts tend to migrate beyond the platform to other platforms and even mainstream media. As one respondent who works with the leftist political party said:

"Also people think that Twitter is a smaller platform and it's not used as much in terms of overall aggregate but the spill over from Twitter is much more so if something was viral on Twitter it will reach the other platforms also and it will reach WhatsApp also. So that's why its banned frankly if it wasn't so influential it wouldn't be banned in Pakistan."

He points out that due to its influence, it has been banned by the government. Many critics of the government have gained massive following on X and this is an attempt to silence dissent. In 2022, the government passed a ruling amending the Pakistan Electronics Crimes Act (PECA) to make online defamation of authorities a criminal offense with harsh penalties (Antoniuk, 2024).

An organiser states that because of X, journalists and media persons are able to read and reproduce their demands on talk shows and newspapers. She mentions that because of its shorter character limit, she enjoys reading people's views on the platform. Another feature that makes it very useful for her are X spaces, where they have an opportunity to interact with the general public. She mentions that as Aurat March cannot afford to hold in-person meetings because of security concerns and affordability, spaces provide them with the means to discuss issues. A female participant mentions that X allows people to hold virtual gatherings with over 50,000 to 100,000 listeners.

4.463. X ban impact

Due to the X ban, many people who were active on the platform decided to migrate to other social media platforms. Aurat March Islamabad regularly shares their stance on different emerging issues using the platform, but ever since the ban, it has explored other avenues as well such as Instagram. Most respondents view this ban as not influencing Aurat March only but other movements as well. Impact is along the lines of restricting communication, information access, and campaigning. Many respondents who used to be active said they don't use the platform as much because turning on VPN and then using X seems time consuming.

A lawyer shares that laws like Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) should not be used to criminalise dissent:

"I think Twitter is more effective but a ban was imposed on Twitter but political figures are still tweeting and ministers are tweeting as well but we still have to use X with a VPN. So, a contradiction is there as we are thinking whether X will be allowed

to operate within Pakistan. Courts are taking action and within one to two months there is an order so the state has not provided a reason for banning X. Adult content is available on the platform so the state can use this as a reason to ban X. If you want to block you have to take approval from the cabinet and prime minister through a formal procedure. So, because of this, a confusion exists as Maryam Nawaz currently takes action on Twitter posts when she is tagged but the PTA is not lifting the ban. Laws like PECA should exist but they should not be used to criminalise dissent. For example, Asad Toor was arrested using PECA however when it comes to online harassment, institutions are not active but I think PECA implementation has some positive effects as well. So, I don't think it is impacting the March negatively. PECA ordinance has been implemented for quite some time now and it regularises cybercrime and cyber space because we have seen illegal activity and scams taking place. Whenever a state institute is targeted PECA is implemented by FIA (Federal Investigation Agency) and if a complaint is registered at an individual level an investigation is intimated by the FIA the complaint is thoroughly investigated and if security agencies think that they can take action against this or it is imperative to take action then they take legal action. Otherwise PECA hasn't impacted that much. As far as Twitter ban is concerned it not only impacts Aurat March but other social movements as well. For instance, it impacts social media campaigning where people try to make an issue trending in order for the government to take action or create awareness. Even Aurat March campaigns but as compared to the marketing on roads not a lot of audience can be targeted but since social media provides easy access it is better for mobilization. Even those people who cannot physically participate in the

march in Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi and Multan, people from GB are also aware of the march since they want such activities to take place in their hometown as well."

One activist who regularly uses the platform states that:

"Of course it does, as it is one of the keys organising platforms for the left, for feminist movements, student movements, for nationalist's movements, for all kinds of progressive movements and it is definitely limiting like our fundraising abilities, it is limiting our communication abilities. It is limiting our ability to campaign effectively on issues and I mean it is what it is. We have to figure out alternatives obviously we have continue trying to fight the ban. The thing it has most effected is fundraising because Twitter is really good for a go fund me type of thing, if you are organising funds for a cause but right now it is very difficult to get that kind of traction. Yeah, just the daily active usage is much lower."

4.47. AM Islamabad Critique

In this section I combined the areas that Aurat March needs to work and the ways with which it can strengthen itself as a collective. March organisers and participants believe that participation has decreased due to state belligerence, especially during 2023 when attendees were baton charged and scuffles took place between police and volunteers. Participants interpretation of the events that transpired during the March and what areas the March struggles with generate discussions on the movement's sustainability.

Previously Aurat March Islamabad did not have any defined organising body. After this year's March it was decided that a core group will be formed based on women, who have contributed to the March regularly for the past one or two years. Women only under 35 years were eligible to become part of the organising committee, furthermore members were required to not have any political affiliations as well. Such steps were taken to increase accountability and define clear roles. Since the March previously did not have any organisational hierarchy, many people ended up taking credit for the work that only a few organisers were doing. These interviews were taken before these steps were put in place, hence do not take into account these measures taken.

4.481. Fluctuations in Turnout

A loyal follower of the March felt that participant fluctuation is not that significant however, he mentions during Covid-19 the turnout was significantly lower. Another participant, who regularly attends the March said she experienced their peak in 2022 and 2023, but this year figures were drastically low as only 200 people attended, according to her. She mentioned that the organising team were more in attendance, as compared to participants-as organisers and volunteers wore neon jackets. Organizing the March during working hours also contributes negatively to turnout.

Another respondent who has experience organising the student solidarity march draws parallels between the Aurat March and Student Solidarity March. The former is an annual march calling for restoration of student unions, reducing fees, increasing representation of women in harassment committees, and strengthening systems in higher education (M, 2022) .He recalls how Aurat March in 2020 and 2021 was a

major movement and people were connecting and thousands were coming out to show support.Whereas now he thinks the situation has changed completely and PTI hijacked the discursive space for such movements to grow:

''National politics has a large discourse meaning that Imran Khan and PTI's popularity is at an all-time high and previously this popularity was only restricted to Imran Khan's persona and his party but now it has taken an anti-establishment turn, everything that is against the tide that space has now shrunk. If people talk about women, it is about PTI women and if other human rights violations are being talked about, it is concerning PTI. Political discourse also concerns PTI considering many significant events that are happening that do not receive this much attention such as a Mohsin Dawar being shot and Manzoor Pashteen being detained. A year back it would have been a thing and but today these events are overshadowed by PTI struggles and PTM cannot even conduct a protest. Attention is not being given and momentum cannot be generated and political space is shrinking''.

The massive online presence of PTI and the crackdown against their leader and party have dominated online spaces. They hijacked issues such as patriarchy, human rights abuses, state surveillance to guilt trip people to include PTI in every post that mentions these issues. Documentation of the resistance online and the apprehension the PTI workers have faced, has led to many people taking a backseat and avoiding actions that spark dissent against state institutions.

Another male participant who has experience of being involved with progressive movements cites the split between Aurat Azadi March and Aurat March Islamabad has affected turnout to some extent

"Yeah, but I feel like obviously it has perhaps this year in particular 2024 definitely it was down but in 2023 and 2022 there were still even if the march was not well attended the jalsa by the Aurat Azadi March organised was well attended pretty much by as many participants who used to attend the march also. So, it was still like the movement was still alive but to some degree the split and the fact that Aurat Azadi March and Aurat March Islamabad are not working together and have developed serious issues as a result of that split obviously affected participation at the same time. Turnouts, yeah, I feel like turnouts are a broader structural problem, Pakistan progressive causes in general obviously you see the same kinds of marches in like western countries and you'll have hundreds and thousands of people, here you have a thousand at most. But there has been an engineering of society away from these kinds of ideas and there's been a destruction of the institutions that can breathe these kinds of movements like student unions, trade unions and like other women organisations. So, we don't have those institutions and they have been just disseminated overtime and also, I feel like these movements are our best chance at rebuilding those institutions so that for coming generations these ideas can have mass popularity and be transferred through the education system and be transferred through various kinds of institutions, unions, through the media. So, I think it's our generations job to establish these institutions so that these ideas are popularised across the mass of Pakistan and for years to come."

He attributes the decrease in support for progressive causes to dismantling of forums where they could prosper such as unions and feminist organisations. The ban on student unions took place during the Zia era but since then they have not been

restored. This ban weakens the advocacy landscape, making it even tougher to mobilise people. Security concern is a recurrent factor mentioned by many respondents that has led to reduced March attendees. Counter protestors and state resistance make unarmed protestors fearful of what could happen on March day.

4.482. Placards raised during the march

The use of placards is a double-edged sword as they have increased support for the March, although making it contentious aswell. An organiser says that the slogan 'Mera Jism,Meri marzi' has created a lot of anxiety among society as men try to vulgarise the concept portraying it as authorisation to have sexual relationships with whosoever. This in a way reflects their mind-set that women belong to them. Men are viewed as custodians of women and this slogan challenges this narrative by viewing women as individuals who can have bodily autonomy. She refuses to stop using the lexicon and idioms that are more socially acceptable, as according to her, movements are supposed to cause disturbance where people are pushed to thinking. This slogan ties to the whole movement; she states that if women are liberated it will be beneficial for the entire society.

Another march organiser also highlights that placards give persistence to the movement as they fuel discussion after the march. The posting of placards on social media has become a ritualistic aspect of the movement,by sharing placards on multiple issues they movement continues to resonate with diverse audiences online.

4.483. Consistency in activity

Most participants believe that Aurat March is quite vocal throughout the year, as this year they arranged several protests for Baloch enforced disappearance, Afghan refugees, the Iddat case verdict, Noor Mukadam murder etc. An organiser of the march says:

"I believe it's crucial for Aurat March to speak up on multifaceted issues, even when they are not directly related to the March itself. Whenever human rights violations occur, it's essential to raise our voices in solidarity and advocacy. By addressing broader issues, Aurat March demonstrates its commitment to justice and equality beyond specific events or dates."

March participants, even if they do not manage to arrange protest are quite vocal on issues on social media. A female respondent says that she notices a lot of people tagging Aurat March on social media asking them why they are not issuing a statement or condemning this incident. This shows that their opinion and reaction to issues larger political discussion on autonomy, freedom and state control has direct effects on demanding state accountability. One respondent stated that staying active throughout the year is difficult since most organisers are working and belong to middle class families, on top of which, scrutiny from right wing groups and the state is a constant deterrent to pragmatically arranging frequent protests.

4.484. AM management weaknesses

This section focuses on the weaknesses pertaining to Aurat March Islamabad's organising team. When I asked what areas for improvement do you see for Aurat March, a lot of the respondents criticised the management of the event. Sub-

categories were created as a result to reflect the plight of respondents and the areas they think the organising committee needs to improve.

4.4841. Disconnected from wider population

The march has often been criticised for not being a truly grassroots movement as mostly educated, middle class women and men are involved in the movement and it often focuses on issues prevalent in urban centres. As stated by a former activist/organiser:

"Aurat March people that you know are not very connected at the grassroots level with the women workers and all those causes, more discursively they are leading so this Aurat March Movement is more of kind of discursive movement and it also means created in a space you know which is not like reaching out to the most downtrodden or the women in rural areas and all that. So, in that way I think Aurat March is contributing to the discourse not only –but the thing is that this discourse remains in a discursive space rather than moving out of that you know the reason being because it is mostly done through campaigning through social media and using this technology. There is already a digital divide in this country and it is severely skewed, so a lot of women don't have access to information in this country."

The digital divide is a major factor in determining what information reaches individuals and decreases their awareness. 50% of women in Pakistan do not possess a smartphone, while women in Pakistan are less likely to use the internet than men (National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW), 2023). Thus, this March participant believe that it is necessary to include these women who do not have access

to internet, to build a larger feminist conscious and to do this they need to focus on in-person mobilisation.

Another male participant believes that in order to challenge this narrative and present itself as a grassroots movement, organisers need to involve more people from the lower middle/middle class. They need to be interacting with younger minds by visiting colleges and schools otherwise only a couple of elite and educated individuals will end up showing up.

4.4842. Better utilisation of social media

The March uses social media to share updates for it and events that it supports. One female organiser recalls the after the split of Aurat Azadi March and Aurat March Islamabad, the former lacked the organisational capabilities to manage the movement effectively. She recalls how a lot of confusion was created because both protests had a similar name and she blames poor use of social media for this confusion.

Although she thinks it is an effective medium to mobilize, she still considers there is a lot of work to be done in this department. She shares that management on social media as well as the attitude of law enforcing agencies discourage people from attending the March. Events timing and the route to the March needs to be shared publicly through social media. Lack of a consistent social media strategy does affect the March.

Another female activist who belongs to Hunza thinks Aurat March does take a stand on issues concerning Gilgit Baltistan. This solidarity she feels is only restricted to the online space but they eventually have to come to the peripheries. Women in

peripheries do not have access to the same kind of facilities available in urban centers. She also mentions that contrary to discourses on social media the society in Gilgit Baltistan is quite conservative and only favours women working in selective fields.

A male respondent cites that the ability of social media to create echo chambers has led to disputes among feminist and progressive causes where assuming the identity of being a victim has made it difficult to build coalitions. Social media fuels this sense of victimhood where people are able to meet likeminded people, or see content that validates their feelings. This feeling of being a victim becomes a social currency of sorts. Where social media has sort of engendered this valorisation of being a victim and organisers start to see oppressors everywhere including their own movements. This according to him has led to frictions among progressive movements and they need to introspect what kind of ideological and epistemological structures perpetuate these tendencies concerning victimhood identification and grievance grounded politics.

Another organiser points out that Aurat March Islamabad is largely disconnected from the public. She mentions how dancing on the streets does not accomplish much,it just causes a 'rebellion'.A male volunteer points out that a lack of focusing on in-person mobilisation has led to this disconnect and reduction in number of participants aswell.

4.4843. Issues of peripheries neglected

Another issue that two women belonging from peripheral areas voiced was disproportionate attention given to issues of urban centre. They felt that Aurat March

only speaks about those issues in rural areas that are already trending online. Women in these areas are probably not aware of Aurat March and those that do, have a very negative impression of it,one respondent said. Whatever is being told to them they have accepted, thus to get them on-board, they need to speak on issues that impact them.

4.4844. Violating cultural norms

Aurat March Islamabad held a play last year and this year organisers danced on a feminist anthem. One female participant was concerned that the March is ignorant of cultural norms and is causing a rebellion by engaging in such performances. She states:

". What we need to do is we need to comply so that more people show up to Aurat March but what they are doing is they dance, they say these things and make these posters which are controversial and then that one poster or that one video of that dance goes onto social media and it goes to 90% of the population which thinks the same way and they think we are spreading vulgarity. Personally, I don't think it is vulgar, like if a woman is dancing or she's trying to express anything that isn't vulgar. But I also at the same time know that our population thinks in this way and they are going to perceive this as vulgarity and what this does it undermines our whole cause''

When Islamabad police blocked their way, Aurat March organisers started cursing the administration and police by using words like '*Lakh Lannat'* translating to curse you.

It is less culturally acceptable for women to use cuss words in our society, as one female participant associates using such language to stooping to the authority's level:

"I feel that the movement is becoming a laughing stock where few angry women want to come out and dance and just shout weird slogans. I can recall how for 5 minutes' organisers were shouting 'Lakh Dee Lannat'at the police and bureaucracy, which I believe is equivalent stooping to their level.''

She calls on organisers to establish a better plan and consider alternatives rather than just taking actions in the heat of the moment. This year, March organisers did not proceed to D-Chowk so there was a lot of confusion among participants whether they will attempt to do it again. Organisers tried to keep up the momentum by raising slogans and inviting activists to speak on the mic to address the crowd. People were disappointed and started leaving early before the March formally concluded. Considering the March is usually held on a working day, she expected women to be more organised, as many people left their routines to show solidarity with them.

4.48. Hate speech and Propaganda

In this section I asked questions related to March attendees experience with online harassment and how it has impacted their lives. Women, especially have been subjected to abusive remarks on their public profiles, while men face backlash for attending from their friends and family. Most of the criticism directed towards them is from viewing the movement as being against Islam.

4.471. Online Harassment

An organiser who has decades of experience shares that those women who support the March online often face threats for speaking out for it. Although she says that whether these groups act upon these threats is a different matter but just threatening them has psychological impacts on them, as they become fearful. Local administration and police side with these violent groups while they continue to feel insecure, so she says they feel they are on their own. This frustration and resistance make them even more motivated to March, despite the threats they receive around that time.

Due to continuous threats to him and his family, one male participant had to leave the country, he has been associated with a leftist party in the past. He says with the X ban things have become much harder, especially mobilisation. However, he says there is a silver lining to this, as previously, progressives and nationalists were the only ones critical of the state but now he believes the entire political spectrum is anti-state. He thinks that steering this narrative in the right direction can make things better for feminist and progressive movements alike.

In order to protect March participants from vitriol online, one female participant takes their consent before posting their pictures on her social media accounts. She even tries to avoid photographing people and asks for their approval to take a picture of just their placard if they seem uncomfortable. One participant also believes that social media provides a curtain to men when they engage with women, as they are not aware of who is on the other side which gives them a free pass to say whatever they want, hateful comments and messages led her to deactivating her Facebook account for her mental health.

4.4711. Doctored images of participants

In Pakistan, where the situation is already precarious for women, the threat of doctored images which have been altered to malign reputation of women is a major threat. A female participant shares one such incident:

"The first march I attended I took a picture with a poster somebody had made that said 'I am marching for all the rape victims with unheard stories.' Somebody took that image and cleared the placard and they photo shopped it into something else and that was my first time engaging with content like that."

I had interviewed the legal representative for the March as well, to whom I asked whether March attendees and organisers have filed any formal complaints against accounts that post these falsified images to which he responded:

No, we haven't done any such litigations because it is very difficult currently such complaints are handled by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) so after a complaint has been registered FIA starts their legal procedure. But state institutions are not interested in such issues as they only take actions against those people who are posting against their institutions whereas in civil society if someone posts something that is not anti-state, they rarely pay attention to it. In some instances, they have cooperated and arrested people accused of harassment, however in such instances they rarely take action. PECA ordinances and cybercrime laws have been made recently and with time institutions like the FIA being established recently as well their domain is still not that vast, for example if a person posting a doctored image online is found to belong in another country other than Pakistan. as in several instances people have registered their online accounts on an overseas number so you

cannot take legal action against them as there are other laws for other countries. It also requires threshold from other countries to take legal action against their residents. So, since most of these accounts are being operated in foreign countries, so Twitter and Facebook users can only report them."

Lacunas in existing laws have been carefully navigated by opponents of the March and with the state abandoning them altogether, March attendees have to face the repercussions of posting online themselves.

4.4712. Charges of Blasphemy

Blasphemy is a serious allegation March organisers have grappled with in the past.When a video started circulating on X of the Islamabad march ,where march organisers can be seen waving a Purple, Red and White striped flag that was portrayed to be the French flag (Jillani khan, 2021).As French President Emanuel Macron encouraged the display of cartoons depicting the Holy Prophet(PBUH).However it was later clarified that this flag did not have blue stripes unlike the French flag and it belonged to Women Democratic Front(Women Democratic Front, 2021).This along with pelting of stones and the subsequent blasphemy cases registered against members of Women Democratic Front(WDF) made them fearful of holding marches. One male activist affiliated with AWP shares the predicaments he faced while helping WDF members fight these accusations:

"Several organisers particularly in Islamabad were affiliated with WDF were framed with blasphemy charges which they then had to fight out in the next few days. So that obviously created an atmosphere of fear and insecurity and some organisers had to leave the country and had to go into hiding. I mean I was involved in helping fight

those charges so I remember how difficult that time was for them. So, in the subsequent year organisers who had been targeted specifically, also the target which we realised later was very deliberate, coming from the state. I was communicated directly from intelligence officials they were related to the support that Aurat Azadi March had extended to the Baloch Missing person's month before the march began and the theme of the march that year was also around Baloch missing person."

These cases, according to the respondent, used blasphemy as a tool to silence backlash on enforced disappearances in Baluchistan province. The state has labelled Baloch activists- many of whom have advocated Baloch nationalism and opposed irredentism-as disruptors and secessionists (Zein, 2024). Despite this backlash, Aurat March has extended support to their movement against enforced disappearances and even participated in their sit in outside Islamabad Press Club (Aurat March Islamabad, 2023). One male respondent points out that Aurat March cannot afford to engage in in-person protests throughout the year because of the looming threat of blasphemy charges.

A feminist activist points out that a video was circulated on X that was used to charge the Islamabad chapter with blasphemy charges. The doctored video was massively circulated online, although it was a footage manipulated from Aurat March Karachi (AFP Pakistan, 2021). A judge in Peshawar ordered an investigation to the un-Islamic and obscene slogans raised during the Islamabad March (Reuters, 2021).

Accusing someone of blasphemy is the final silencing tactic and with the visibility offered on online mediums this can increase public scrutiny at a movement already facing resistance. Given the sensitivity surrounding religious issues Aurat March

organisers needs to carefully navigate online spaces and avoid their content being misconstrued as disrespectful of Islam.

4.472. Hate speech against the march attendees

A march organiser who has been an activist for quite some times mentions how the number of threats she used to get has reduced. She says she doesn't get much hate for supporting the March but recalls how she used to defend the March on X. After a while, she stopped responding to these hateful comments and now chooses to block as most people just want to trigger a response from her. Another organiser comments that although Aurat March continues to face so much resistance in the form of state resistance, backlash from conservative groups, and denial of NOC, it has only grown stronger.

One male volunteer points out that since the march does not define who can participate in the movement or who cannot, the presence of LGBTQ+ community at their events exacerbates problems for them; especially reducing the support of online influencers, who might have supported if the March did not lend support to gender and sexually diverse individuals. Since they built their personal brand on online reputation, when followers see them supporting such movement, they might accuse of them promoting immorality.

Another organiser acknowledges that there is a huge backlash on social media,in 2018 when the slogan mera jism meri came out.She posted in support of this on Facebook and received tonnes of backlash.She highlights that despite being part of a progressive circle she does not know many women who attended the march.Male

figures in her family have not been welcoming of her attending the march but she continues to take her daughter along.

4.49 FGD AM Lahore

A FGD was conducted with organisers and volunteers of Aurat March Lahore online. Originally I wanted to conduct FGD's with Lahore and Karachi aswell, but since Karachi team did not respond I was only able to Aurat March Lahore. The purpose of including Lahore chapter in my thesis was to understand the kind of resistance it faces and how it has overcome these challenges. The Islamabad Chapter also looks up to Lahore chapter for guidance related to performances, fundraising events, considering the Lahore chapter showcases plays, murals and art pieces which are often shared onlien. A total of 4 women were present to discuss their perspectives on how the March has evolved. Aurat March Lahore has been active since 2018 with the movement primarily coming into being after a Facebook group was formed to discuss on how to march. Initially, the march did not have a lot of supporters but the turnout on march day exceeded their expectations.

4.491 Strategies to deal with backlash

One respondent recalled that the first time they received backlash was in 2019, and they did not really know how to respond to it. So, they reached out to WAF and the first tactic was to post pictures with the hashtag #whyimarch and #iamamarcher. This way they were able to engage with a lot of people. Not calling themselves organisers was another way they were able to detract people from sending hate to one person, as no one was the face of the movement. However, she said just calling yourself a

feminist even if you do not support Aurat March can generate a lot criticism. She said that whenever someone mentions feminism in Pakistan it is automatically linked to Aurat March, it doesn't matter if you take part in it or not.

City administration also creates barriers for Aurat March by not giving NOC. On the day of the march, YouTubers come to sort of infiltrate that space, to make the march controversial for likes and views. So, attendees are resisting through multiple ways. She recalled that during the first march a journalist remarked that she doesn't look like an activist. This took her by surprise but over the years she has learned to resist these types of questions and not be as forthcoming as she was before. She recalls that in 2019 and 2020, YouTubers would not respect personal boundaries by getting really close to females and asking them questions. This is something they have worked on to teach men how to conduct themselves in their spaces she said.

Another respondent explained how organisers were told not to mention that they were involved with Aurat March at their workplace. She recalled how in 2021, her workplace got a call from intelligence agencies questioning her involvement in the march.

The online backlash that they face is a recurrent struggle where they are at the point where they make up fictional scenarios on how to counter this hate, or even where they do not end up saying anything that can be tainted as problematic. Even the communities they visit have negative preconceived notions where they ask *'Acha aap wohi Mera Jism Meri Marzi wali Hai*' translating to 'oh you are those my body my choice ones'. Then in terms of online spaces, people have established brands on

berating Aurat March to build their online following. Courts have also filed petitions against them and levelled blasphemy charges as well.

The legal complaints were a bit frivolous this year but in 2021-a respondent recalled-the complaints peaked as blasphemy allegations were imposed against them. She thought that the intensity had decreased and judges don't take them as seriously either. People are not going to the dangerous root that is filing a constitutional petition. One respondent shared that a major challenge was to stand her ground in front of her family because of online backlash as it was a difficult process to explain why it's important. So, backlash is multi-layered and institutionalised.

4.492 Social media and its relevance

4.4921 Broadening reach

The march did not have any social media accounts prior to 2019, however, after 2019 they decided to strategize and create social media accounts so that people could follow them. From 2018 to 2019, a respondent mentioned that they experienced a drastic change when they gave the call for volunteers online and more than 200 people responded. She recalled how 2019 was the best march because it was quite radical. Despite Covid-19 and so much backlash people still manage to come on international women's day to show up for the march.

It has its pros and cons in a way she said. Aurat March 2018 was coordinated online, but she was aware that only a certain portion of society has access to social media. So, being online is just one form of occupying spaces but there are other spaces to infiltrate as well. Disinformation and backlash exist but they are able to reach a lot of

young feminists through it,she says. Gatekeeping, associated with activism previously, has reduced noticeably as none of the volunteers and organisers are related to each other, one respondent mentions. These people have developed a feminist consciousness because of social media and the conversations happening online. So, she reiterates it does increase their outreach and it allows for a lot of conversations to take place that wouldn't happen otherwise.

''Even the language that we use is deeply rooted in the kind of internet culture and humour that is trending on the internet from placards to the posts, they disseminate on social media'' reflecting how social media trends determine the kind of content they include in placards and posts.

4.4922 Less restrictions in online spaces

While organisers believed that social media is important for getting one's message across or putting out statements, it is not the sole space for activism. One organiser said that because online activism is not restricted to that space but often leads in person demonstrations as well it is important. Using examples like the Palestinian crisis, she highlighted how it gave it her a whole new perspective on Israel's role in the crisis. She recalls how #Metoo movement was a turning point as well when women were able to disrupt spaces although pushback was there in the form of people asking why they were airing their dirty laundry in public and why were they using social media for it. So, even if backlash is there, they cannot take these spaces away from marginalised communities.

Another organiser pointed out that they have to use social media out of necessity because on news channels they have adhere to the format of the talk shows, who try

to sensationalise the march by inviting representatives from religious groups and feminist to come face to face with each other. So social media gives them some sort of control because whatever they are saying, its articulated by them.

4.493 Online activism

4.4931. Access to supporters

Organisers highlighted that they get most volunteers from Instagram. One organiser points out that it's difficult to mobilise people by going to different communities to convince them to support the cause. So, social media gives them better reach although trolls will always be there but they have to go figure how to make interactions more meaningful. Another organiser states that online mediums have been very beneficial for increasing volunteer reach. Some artists have even shared their art works with them because of online platforms, so it helps connect them with people and find a community.

4.4932 Narrative control

Aurat March Lahore, like other chapters has put out a lot of statements. When asked about the intention to put out these statements online and whether they seek to increase support for their cause, An organiser clarifies that the person is not to get support for their cause but to amplify the message of those individuals,groups who feel that their voices are ignored. A respondent mentioned that the purpose off issuing statements is to extend solidarity, as opposed to it being transactional. She mentions it was important for them to take an organising position sometimes, so at times they might join people already engaged in organising such events.

4.4933 Organised campaigns against AM online

On the flip side, online mediums also give opposition groups an opportunity to connect with each other and advance their views on the march. This feels threatening to organisers who view their opposition as being stronger than them. To avoid their posts being filled with negative comments Aurat March organisers try to avoid responding to widely known critiques of them.Maria B,Youth Club and Senator Mushtaq Ahmed have orchestrated online hate campaigns them,one organiser claims.Although they have social media accounts on all platforms, they avoid posting their views on X due to fear of being called out, according to her.

4.49331 Translates to in person support

One FGD participant also felt by portraying the march against Islamic teachings and social norms personalities like Maria B,Raja Zia Ul Haq have gotten access to spaces where Aurat March organisers are not welcomed like schools, colleges and universities. Another respondent said that their personal brands wouldn't exist and their following, sponsorship expanded because of certain algorithms where they compete for saying outrageous things about the transgender community and feminists. These kinds of profiles have given them leverage in offline spaces as well, where they are able to control the narrative surrounding the purpose of the march and its organisers, impacting support for the march negatively.

Another respondent accused Maria B of using this anti march narrative to profit her brand, where one post will be about the gender identity crisis or Palestine and the next one will be on buying her clothes. She also has the backing and support from followers of PTI which gives her the ability to influence people and convince them

that she is some sort of saviour. One respondent claims, that through her online activism she has been able to connect with likeminded people and build the platform called ‘Mothers of Pakistan’ where she along with her team is propagating the agenda on gender identity crisis and how it is ruining family structures by imposing western propaganda. So, social media is two-way street for coalition building where both opponents and supporters of the march can further connections.

4.494 X and Activism

4.4941 X ban

An organiser shared that due to the X ban, both backlash and support for the march have been limited. The laws governing digital spaces are very draconian so this was bound to happen. It is an important platform to engage in political conversation and there are a lot of conversations on feminism that do happen on X spaces.

4.4942 X distinct features

A respondent states features of the platform such as quoting public figures have to a certain extent increased accountability. Using hashtags to start trends and create these sort of X storms has been beneficial for organising she says. Critique is also present on X which is a vital aspect of figuring out areas for improvement in the coming year another respondent shares. In the early years of the march, it played an instrumental role in mobilising people as well, recalls one participant and there’s this presumption that political conversations should take place on X.A participant mention that whenever something happens in the country Aurat March organisers are held accountable on X. People ask why they didn’t issue a statement and if they do put out

a statement, they accuse them of not being angry enough. She further stated that Aurat March is used as a scape goat for whenever anything goes wrong in the country.

4.495. Hate speech online

4.4951 Parody accounts

None of the participants have experienced their account getting reported or getting suspended against the March but one respondent said that the parody account of Aurat March Lahore has a lot of engagement. People have mistakenly taken it as their actual account and sometimes they have more engagement on their posts rather than from the actual account.

4.4952 Legal action

In terms of legal action against hate speech, a respondent shared that going to courts is not only a daunting experience bur lawmakers refuse to take them seriously. Complaints have been filed but courts have not proceeded with them further. One organiser cited that it is difficult to get hateful posts removed from X as compared to Instagram. Despite getting no outcome, Aurat March Lahore continues to document their struggles online so that viewers can see the hindrances they face.

Chapter 5 Discussion and conclusion

In this chapter I will be looking at the findings from both primary and secondary data and linking it with conceptual framework. In this chapter findings will be analysed as to how they relate with theoretical underpinnings.

5.1 Secondary data

5.11 Placards

Placards at the March are influenced by the socio-political concerns in online discussions and shape the slogans of on-ground activity as mentioned by focus group participants of Lahore chapter. Aurat March reposts and posts certain placards on their social media accounts to reignite online discussions. Castell mentions how the power of images is paramount, as they create a virtual environment where youth and activists come together around shared ideas and meanings (Castells, 2015, p. 109). These placards constitute a major portion of the online repertoires of action employed by the movement to confront patriarchal norms, transphobia and gender based violence.

In both Marches of 2023 and 2024, their most talked about slogan ‘mera jism meri marzi’. was used to make a statement that despite all the negative connotations associated with this slogan, the March organizers, participants would not stop saying it (@Aurat_marchisb Aurat March Islamabad, 2023c).The slogan itself is an example of a personalised action frame march supporters use to demand bodily autonomy and protest gender based violence.The slogan has been used in the form of hashtags,

posted on placards all over social media, even used by some individuals to share personal experiences of harassment.

A key component of Aurat March is the intersectional approach it adopts by involving individuals and groups who have been marginalised in conventional feminist spaces. Despite facing online backlash for it by the likes of Maria B and other conservative activists it continues to speak up in support of transgender individuals and their rights([@Aurat_marchisb] Aurat March Islamabad, 2023b).By being vocal about the trans- community's rights, the movement utilize the association affordance of X to connect diverse groups together.

Aurat March Islamabad has expressed global solidarity from the Iranian protest for Mahsa Amini (see Figure 13) to the hostilities in Gaza happening since October 2023 (see Figure 14). By expressing transnational solidarity, they resist local and global censorship, to align themselves with the global struggles for justice and freedom by specifically focusing on women who have been disproportionately impacted in both situations making this a feminist issue. Iran and Gaza are Muslim majority areas so sympathy towards their issues emerges from a religious point of view as well. The Palestinian issue has been documented online therefore using placards and wearing traditional Palestinian scarves, organisers attempt to show their voices are being heard across borders. Mahsa Amini who died after suffering from police brutality for objecting to Iran's strict dress code (Asif, 2022) resonates with the purpose of Aurat March as bodily autonomy is a major part of the movement.

Placards when uploaded online evoke emotions like outrage, disappointment and fear on themes related to gender inequality, domestic violence, honour killings and

workplace harassment. Castell mentions that images have the power to evoke emotions that activists of a movement could rely upon to connect with the population at large (Castells, 2015). Challenging dominant discourse through placards disrupt the cultural and emotional norms of not only those people participating in the movement, but also those people witnessing it(Kamal, 2022b, p. 223).

Placards visualise patriarchal norms and while critics point out that they derail the public from the original purpose of the March and promote a western agenda the whole process of making these placards is an open event, so these claims are nullified as anyone can take part in this activity (@Aurat_marchisb Aurat March Islamabad, 2024b). As (Kamal, 2022) mention in her study placards are a tool of violating proprietary societal politics, they are in a way re-programming network codes by showing the arbitrariness of these propriety norms and forcing society to confront internalised notions of patriarchy. It is these placards that invoke uneasiness among the population by challenging narratives surrounding misogyny in the public and private sphere. These placards exercise count power as whenever a placard is posted, photographed it connects to others through its content that includes text, images, satire. Visual imagery gains traction online and reassert feminist demands within the network whenever they are shared and defended online.

While this broadened visibility can work for and against the March,hate tends to be compounded on social media.Although the concept of algorithmic bias is not discussed explicitly in any of the concepts mentioned in the conceptual framework, (Leonardi & Vaast, 2017) mention it in their research that social media creates echo

chambers where individuals seek out to interact with those people that share same opinions.

Echo chambers increase polarisation against march participants, when opponents engage in spreading doctored images of placards to make them viral on X (Qureshi & Husain, 2020), lack of content moderation to address the spread of disinformation might decrease support for the march. Since the acquisition of X by Elon Musk a 50% hike in weekly hate speech has recorded(Hickey et al., 2025).While backlash may decrease support for the March, it increases visibility as well, as March organisers have to clarify their stance to observers, which sometimes draws support from neutral spectators.

Hence, placards give this sort of persistence to the March where they question social, cultural, and economic barriers for not allowing women to participate in an equal footing as their male counterparts. Although these placards have brought trouble for March attendees in some instances, they have made the March viral and provided organisers massive visibility in broadcast media as well(‘Aurat March 2021: Check out Some of the Best Placards of This Year’, 2021). Protest tactics like these utilise the power of social media to create cultural relevance by shaping puplablic perception, so that individuals can relate with the demands of attendees.

5.12 Newspaper articles

Incorporating newspaper articles is an important factor for my research as print media has played a vital in developing the ideologically divided and polarized opinions on Aurat March(Nishat & Hussain, 2022).A recent study in Pakistan examining the public perception regarding social media shows that 57% respondents agree that it

tends to spread fake news and disinformation (Toor et al., 2024). Therefore, newspaper articles are an important unit of data collection due to their perceived authenticity and role in opinion building.

Opinion pieces from Urdu newspaper show that authors of these articles are aware of the hindrances placed in the way of protestors. In a way, they agree with March organisers who have been saying that state institutions are biased towards them. While one article covers a counter protest to Aurat March by the name of 'strong women, strong family'(' خواتین کے عالمی دن پر مارچ جماعت اسلامی کی بھی ریلیاں اسلام آباد میں تلخ کلامی"On [International Women's Day, rallies of Jamaat-e-Islami in Islamabad led to heated exchanges]', 2023), the author tries to maintain a neutral stance by including women's day celebrations all over Lahore including universities, along with a paragraph detailing the events that happened during Aurat March Islamabad.

Articles in English and Urdu do not portray the March in a negative way and try to provide explanations on why these protests are taking place in the first place. One publication in English explains the meaning behind slogans that have been misinterpreted to censor the March and build propaganda surrounding it (Lutfi, 2023). Thus, these articles recognise state repression on March organisers in Islamabad and how female struggles in our country our intersectional in nature. When news outlets are supportive of the March, it influences public perception(Nishat & Hussain, 2022).

The articles in Dawn reflect the authors narrative and their own experiences with patriarchy and how it shaped their understanding of these slogans. These authors (Amir, 2023; Hassan, 2023; Lutfi, 2023) used personal action frames by using individual stories to relate to broader demands of Aurat March. They articulate their

personal grievance and build networks of feminist solidarity leveraging social media affordances related to visibility and association. By sharing their lived experiences so that others can resonate with them, they build a movement of loosely connected individuals who converge around their personalised call to actions. Urdu publications avoid this subject and focus on the legal and economic aspects of why women are marginalised in comparison to men (Pirzada, 2023).

Although both types of news outlet avoid in engaging sensationalising the march, English newspapers offer a broader coverage of the march. Articles in English newspaper (Amir, 2023; Lutfi, 2023) explore counter discourses to the march and explore their ingenuity. Urdu publications tend to focus on on-ground events that took place ,while one article holds men accountable for creating propaganda against the movement(Pirzada, 2023).There is very little of the demands of participants in Urdu newspaper articles as well ,without mentioning the movements objective and just focusing on controversial aspects readers may think the movement exists to create civil disorder. The difference in coverage of Urdu and English media show these outlets frame incidents differently forming favourable and unfavourable narratives which can influence participation.

Lack of autonomy over the kind of narrative that is pushed across by news outlets has led march organisers to use their social media accounts to report events as they are happening online. Although organisers do hold press conferences with news outlets, much of the information is communicated online. As highlighted by Castell while discussing the Occupy Wall Street Movement, print media did provide legitimacy to the movement, but it did not ensure their views were presented transparently(Castells,

2015). Organisers had to turn to social media, along with creating their own websites to provided them narrative control on their activities and stances. During meetings with organisers of Aurat March Islamabad, many organisers citedco the need to create a website to address misconceptions surrounding its purpose. However, despite these discussions they do not have a website. Currently, print and social media function as information disseminators to highlight events happening during and after the march.

5.13 X posts related to the march

As this research aimed to looked at X's role in movement building, X posts for both 2023 and 2024 shortlisted based on their relevance to themes related to research question since the theme was announced till one week after the March.Aurat March has been quite active on the platform both this year and last year, despite the X ban in 2024. To build momentum, Aurat March starts sharing events that take place before the March such as press conferences, meetings with government officials, interviews, and mobilization drives.March organisers and supporter use it to share their stance and express solidarity with different causes,Aurat March opponents use the platform to make the it provocative and against religious and cultural norms.

Hateful X posts are on a rise before in the month of march as organisers start sharing their mobilisation efforts across the city. This hate is multifaceted involving misogynistic remarks, partisan activism, western agenda and how it is against Islamic values. Often times, the comment section becomes infiltrated with negative comments instigating people against the march.

March organisers do not respond to much of the backlash online, but do reply to doctored images and offensive remarks by content creators and political personalities

(S. G. [@ShandanaGulzar] Khan, 2023). One aspect that I observed while going through X posts by Aurat March Islamabad, was the repetitive use of hashtags such as #merajismmerimarzi[#mybodymychoice] and #AuratMarchIslamabad. There is a trending section on X and using these hashtags frequently might make the March trend on the platform, increasing visibility. While opponents have used the same hashtags to post memes and content mocking the March due to mass self-communication –where individuals can create and disseminate content rapidly(Castells, 2015, p. 6-7). The multitude of voices on social media might cause the original meaning of a post to be diluted.

Hijacking of narratives is an important issue that March organisers have dealt with in previous years where they often find themselves defending slogans and placards both online and in face to face interactions as well. In this battle to remain relevant on social media platforms especially X, PTI supporters and party workers have reframed conversations on women's rights in such a way, that no conversations on this topic can take place without acknowledging the struggles of their female political workers in jail.

March organisers are in a precarious position where they have to maintain political neutrality while not disregarding the plight of PTI supporters. Despite PTI leadership being sceptical of the March, organisers did protest against the Iddat case verdict, when Imran Khan's marriage to Bushra Bibi was declared illegal(Munim, 2024) .

Aurat March Islamabad is a non-partisan, independent collective but PTI workers assume that they receive funding from donors. Due to limited resources and security issues, it is not possible to arrange physical protest on every injustice happening in

the country while PTI may have a lot of news channels and journalists online (Hussain, 2024), highlighting their struggles and receiving financial backing from various businessmen and donors.

Aurat March Islamabad does not receive the same coverage, or the same funding and support needed to arrange frequent protests. The issues Aurat March Islamabad has come out for in the past were related to protecting the rights of marginalised voices such as Afghan refugees, enforced disappearances, and minority killings. As compared to the aforementioned issues, arrest of political workers of PTI has been covered extensively on mainstream media and YouTube as well. PTI workers and followers should abandon this narrative that they are the exclusive victims of the system and anyone who mocks them or stays silent, sides with the government.Despite its struggles, Aurat March has managed to receive attention from international media outlets.

After Aurat March posted videos of police brutality it faced in the 2023 March on X, a lot of local news outlets, human rights defenders and feminists reposted and commented on these posts to show solidarity with them as shown in Figure 27. Castell points at how video-reporting of police brutality during Occupy Wall Street Movement helped counter the narrative that demonstrators were violent and built pubic sympathy towards them (Castells, 2015, p. 193).Similarly, videos emerging from the March managed to gain sympathy with audiences, human rights organisation, progressive movements, and politicians alike (Correspondent, 2023).

Aurat March exhibits the traits of a transnational movement, since its posts are visible across borders showing the resistance this movement faces.It has helped them build

associations as well as a leftist coalition in Aachen, Germany came out to lend their support to Aurat March Islamabad, raising slogans in Urdu ([@Aurat_marchisb] Aurat March Islamabad, 2023a).Social movements are emotive according to Castell. Videos of Islamabad police ruthlessly beating unarmed protestors, especially transgender individuals evoked emotions of outrage, empathy, and frustration against state authorities. According to Castell since movements tend to speak on behalf of society to maintain their legitimacy the have to juxtapose their non-violent character with the violence of the system (Castells, 2015, p. 254).Aurat March continues to emphasise that counter marchers with sticks are not subjected to violence, but unarmed protesters of Aurat March continued to be baton charged.

While discussing the Egyptian Revolution, Castell points out how repression cannot be continued against a movement that is the subject of global media attention facilitated by communication networks, unless the government is fully unified and has sustained foreign support(Castells, 2015, p. 62).Soon after Aurat March Islamabad took place in 2023,organsiers requested followers to post using the hashtag #SackSPNausherwan calling for the dismissal of the superintendent of police, the X hashtag became viral (@Aurat_marchisb Aurat March Islamabad, 2023b). Federal Minister of Interior Rana Sanaullalah condemned the behaviour of this police officer. He took notice of these actions and senior leadership of the police was summoned and the police officer suspended. Social media, thus functioned as a tool for accountability where March organisers and supporters question the state's role in propagating violence on un-armed protestors.

Utilising hashtags,videos and images Aurat March continued to post videos of police retaliation in March of 2024 ([@Aurat_marchisb] Aurat March Islamabad, 2024). While Haya March was allowed to proceed without any obstructions (The Khorasan Diary, 2024), the starting point for Aurat March was cordoned off by the police. Aurat March received more than 100 comments most of them from opponents appreciating Islamabad Police for blocking their route ([@Aurat_marchisb] Aurat March Islamabad, 2024c). While organisers use X posts to show their frustration towards Islamabad Police, the comments are rampant with hate speech against them. Given the nature of social media, it allows people with similar posts to aggregate views so criticism is compounded where some comments accuse them of being a western agenda, engaging in selective activism, and challenging Islamic values. However, comments showing support and shaming Islamabad Police are quite few in comparison.

Organisers continued to share posts dedicated to Palestine and were seen wearing Kuffiyeh and dancing to traditional Palestinian songs (Shirazi, 2024). The Palestine issue has triggered a wave of protests in Pakistan, with videos of human rights abuses making rounds on social media. Palestinians have to rely on social media due to severe threats to journalists on the ground by Israeli Defence Forces. Aurat March, thus is a global movement that not only talks about injustices happening in Pakistan but all over the world as well.

Placards highlighting how women in Gaza are giving birth without medical assistance, shows how females are disproportionately impacted in times of conflict. This relates to the concept of Networked Feminism as Aurat March views the fight

against patriarchy to exist beyond Pakistan as well. As March organisers and participants view the graphic videos emerging from Gaza online, they request the government to not join forces with other western imperialist powers depicting how Aurat March encapsulates aspects of Networked feminism where feminist struggles are interconnected. Shedding light on this cause aims to provoke audiences as to what national and global policies perpetuate inequality.

While social media helps build transnational networks of solidarity online at times opponents of the march use X posts to engage audiences towards conservative ideologies by redirecting discourse (haya_leads_to_jannah, 2023) as observed in X posts of Aurat March Islamabad. Despite not being on X, many opponents of the march use hashtags such as #Haya_March underneath posts and comments criticising the March. The counter protest to Aurat March Islamabad, Haya March does not get gethat much coverage online although it does have a YouTube channel(Jamia Hafsa Official, 2024) and most students taking part in their march are students of Jamia Hafza-an Islamic university based in Islamabad.

Mass self-communication in digital spaces gives the opportunity to everyone to post and comment underneath public posts. In this case, March opponents and conservative groups might use hashtags and insulting comments mentioning Haya March to trigger hate speech against the March. People viewing these comments and clicking on these hashtags will be able to find more hateful content against the March, fuelling polarisation. Considering the algorithm of X is such that it curates feeds according to the person's interests (*Personalisation and Data / X*, n.d.), people clicking on these posts might be exposed to more anti-March content. Hateful content

thus functions as a switcher to propagate narratives of conservative movements and lesson the March's reach.

Another challenge Aurat March faces is staying in the public eye considering the transient nature of social media. March organisers decided to announce a press conference against the opposition it faced from Islamabad police ([@Aurat_marchisb] Aurat March Islamabad, 2024a), but it was only attended by few participants. Aurat March utilizes technology as an organizing agent encompassing aspects of a connective action movement, but one challenge associated with such movements is sustaining momentum. Using personalised action frames such as slogans and images that resonate with audiences may motivate people to engage with the cause, but this engagement is temporary at times. The movement lacks a strong collective identity which leads to fleeting involvement, due to the low cost and low commitment nature of digitally mediated movements (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012).

March organisers continue to repost posts of people attending the March after 8th March and sharing their experiences to stay relevant online (Hassan, 2023). Relating this to Treem & Leonardi, 2012 concept of affordance helps give persistence to the march by creating a historical archive of protest activities. In the concept of timeless time, the boundaries between past, present and future are blurred, since pasts events continue to be shared and discussed online, which has redefined temporal restrictions and given persistence to the movement.

The use of X as shown has led to on-ground action by making people aware of the resistances march participants face and leading authorities to take action. It has also led the movement to build transnational networks of support in the past. Despite the

ban on the platform march organisers continue to use it for information dissemination. On the flip side affordances such as visibility and association can be used by opponents to critique the march and dilute messages of posts. While X has lowered mobilisation costs and safety concerns associated with in-person gathering, increased visibility leads to online backlash aswell. The collective needs to come up with effective social media strategies to fight the resistance it faces online.

5.2 Primary Data

5.21 Interviews

Organisers of Islamabad agreed that Aurat March is largely coordinated online and it allows for a broader reach. Organisers cited limited resources and threats to their security as being one of the main reasons for relying on online activism. Organisers sought to increase in person mobilization specifically targeting rural and middle-class communities. These initiatives are expected to not only impact turnout but also make the decision-making process more inclusive, according to them.

Participant and volunteers traced back their involvement with the March to multiple factors but very few were motivated by social media posts. Most interview participants expressed that because Aurat March continuously takes a stand against marginalised groups who are ignored by traditional actors such as the state and mainstream media, they felt compelled to join the movement. Some volunteers also showed up because of their previous involvement with progressive causes and saw Aurat March as a physical manifestation of a feminist revolution they had talked and read about.

Another trend among volunteers in Islamabad was their prior engagement with progressive causes that mobilised them to contribute towards Aurat March. Some female participants had personal experiences with harassment and character assassination that motivated them to attend the March. Since the March is vocal about their stance on a variety of issues, supporters have different motivations not solely based on their online engagement.

Most interview participants believed that social media bridges the citizen government gap and it is especially important for disfranchised individuals, who do not have any other platform to voice their concerns. In terms of Aurat March, one participant shared that it doesn't bridge the gap as Aurat March posted a lot online every time but she could not see much changing.

Aurat March organisers used emotions such as fear and anger to channel them to a movement that allowed them to express patriarchy women experience in both public and private spheres while marching on the streets was a way to increase their visibility in spaces traditionally dominated by men. Technology offered the infrastructure for turning these emotions into a movement by giving them a medium to communicate by bypassing state and right-wing groups.

The Islamabad chapter traces its origin back to a progressive party, as it was organised by WDF prior to 2022. The clash between holding a sit in gathering and marching to D-Chowk,caused a split within the movement and organisers of Aurat March Islamabad decided to form a separate collective. Aurat March Islamabad became independent of Aurat Azaadi March and had to create new social media accounts to start mobilizing people for their cause. Social media thus gave individuals

visibility in contrast to the marginality they were experiencing from progressive movements off-line.The state's response towards Aurat March is not conducive according to organisers, as is evident from court cases, police baton charging, and labelling the March as indecent by government representatives. Participants think that false images and videos continue to circulate online maligning the March. A legal representative of the Islamabad chapter mentioned that most of the accounts posting malicious content were registered in countries outside Pakistan, so the only option left is to report them on social media apps. Aurat March, according to most participants needs to be more active in curbing these doctored images and videos, by carefully navigating online spaces.

Organisers agree that X is an important platform to voice one's opinion and upload statements on political issues. Considering X is banned in Pakistan, organisers do not want to restrict their activism to only this platform. State surveillance of online spaces is a significant challenge for movements which are primarily coordinated online. Therefore, organisers in both chapters are thinking of other ways to broaden their reach such as organising regular in person meetups.

Most participants were generally active on platforms other than X whereas those that were active on X, expressed that having to use a VPN to use X discourages them from being active on the platform. One respondent shared that because of the massive impact of X, it has been banned to suppress narratives that go against the state. He also mentioned that despite people thinking that X does not have many users, its spill over effect on other platforms dictates what type of conversations take place online.

Most participants and volunteers shared this common view that instead of online engagement, the March needs to focus more on in-person mobilization to increase turnout. Some even term it as an elitist movement that is disconnected from the working class. Weak social media management is another issue some attendees felt the March needs to work on, where details on routes and March timings need to be announced on all platforms days before the March.

Aurat March has become synonymous with adopting a confrontational approach to activism, which is different from prior movements. Some female participants have voiced their concerns over Aurat March Islamabad causing a rebellion by raising slogans against state authorities. Such acts, according to them are performative and discourage policy makers to engage with them. Organisers have time and again stated that they will not change their slogans to make them culturally acceptable to force society to introspect on these uncomfortable untruths.

Activists and political workers from the left voiced for more unification among progressive movements in Islamabad, since ideological rifts do not strengthen their cause. Despite internal disputes, some activists attended the march in an individual capacity or by representing their affiliated party. While volunteering, I came across many volunteers who were affiliated with other progressive movements such as AWP, WDF, and Student Solidarity March. Some even mentioned that they to reach out to people in WhatsApp groups when Aurat March Islamabad required volunteers or logistics related support. Progressive outlets also extend their support by reposting and quoting posts on their X accounts, extending their support to Aurat March

Islamabad. These reposts function as switchers by increasing reach of the movement towards supporters of progressive causes.

Organisers, participants, and volunteers agree that mobilisation should not be restricted to just social media. Respondents agree that while maintaining a digital presence is important for Aurat March, in order to become a grassroots movement, it needs to focus more on in-person mobilization. Most respondents think that the X ban does not have that much of an effect on Aurat March, as organisers can switch to other platforms. However, participants agree that the government deprives them of several important conversations that take place on the platform on different subjects ranging from culture, politics, and issues that rarely make it to mainstream media.

5.22. FGD Aurat March Lahore

Aurat March Lahore has aspects of a connective action movement as it was started after taking inspiration from Aurat March Lahore. Hashtags like #WhyIMarch were used as personalised action frames to share motivations for marching and encourage people to join the movement. Organisers point out that the visibility available to them via online spaces has helped them increase volunteer reach and has built associations with artists, activists to forge a community. Although march organisers are aware of the affordances available through social media they believe only a certain segment of society has access to it. Greater focus needs to be placed on in-person mobilisation to broaden impact.

Respondent mentioned how social media gives them narrative control as they autonomy over the kind of message they want to put across. Whereas on news shows they are usually accompanied by representatives from religious parties who

sensationalise the march. Previous research also suggest that those talk shows that discuss controversial and culturally insensitive content get more views, than those that cover the march with neutrality (Tabassum et al., 2023, p. 636).Thus exhibiting aspects of connective action movement the march is able to nurture their goals without their agendas being co-opted by news channels (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 759).

As far as X activism goes organisers believe there is this general understanding that political conversations need to take place on the platform. It has also been used to increase accountability for march organisers, as whenever something happens march organisers are reproached for their silence. One of the distinct features of X that March organisers particularly find useful are spaces and hashtags. March organisers point out how on X you can aggregate stories under the same hashtag, which is a means of exercising counter power as pointed out by Rosemary Clark ‘‘one person’s narrative, when shared and connected with many others, makes power visible so that it might be deconstructed and challenged’’(Clark-Parsons, 2022, p. 80).

Due to ban on X organisers believe that resentment and support for the march has decreased. March organisers mention that they receive more engagement from other platforms such as Instagram in comparison to X. Due to the difficulty with reporting hateful content on X a parody account of their march has amassed more followers than their actual account. Maintaining relevancy is a challenge march organisers face yet they continue to believe X gives more space to progressive voices by calling out their opponents.

Organisers do point out that their slogans are inspired by the kind of internet culture and humour trending online, Aurat March Lahore organisers are aware of the limitations of online activism therefore they do not want to restrict their activism to social media platforms. Conservations that take place online shape the kind of issues the movement wants to represent on their placards, which function as discursive interventions when they get re-posted and shared by their followers.

Significance of research

This research provides evidence that social media can function as a conducive space for an online movement that challenges established gender norms and power structures. The freedom to post on social media can create echo chambers for both hate and support. Since organisers are fewer in number, online propaganda against them can lead to decrease in support. Despite online backlash, Aurat March has been able to sustain itself since 2018, not only through online spaces but my arranging protests on different issues and showing solidarity with other causes.

This research also fills the existing gap that currently exists in terms of applying this theory of The Network Society towards a contemporary social movement in Pakistan. Since discovering this theory, I had wanted to use it to evaluate how social media use facilitates protests and civil unrest considering incidents like 9th May were taking place as well and the Capital Riots were largely coordinated online(BBC, 2021). The power of social media cannot be overlooked and more research needs to be done on how movements coordinated online lead to physical demonstrations. Leonardi & Vaast, 2017, have urged research to apply the affordance approach beyond

organisation towards studying movement trajectories. So this research fulfils this requirement by using this framework beyond corporate settings.

Lastly, this research sheds light on how the X ban aims to restrict freedom of speech. Pakistani authorities are not being held accountable for this ban enough but it can have massive repercussions for social media in general. The government is considering banning VPNs as well by broadening ambit of the PECA ordinance (Khilji, 2024). Such steps would exacerbate problems for activists and organisation who depend on social media for information dissemination and coordination. Analysing how these new amendments in the digital space restrict civic freedom is another topic that requires further exploration. As the question remains if social media apps like X weren't powerful why would the government ban them in the first place.

Limitations of study

A major limitation of the study is that the opinion of Aurat March Karachi could not be included into the research. Since Aurat March was initiated in Karachi, it would have been ideal to include their opinion in this research. Another limitation is that all interviews including focus group discussion with Aurat March Lahore were conducted online. As a result, observations may not be as detailed and nuanced as those of in-person interactions.

Another limitation of using this theory was that most of the application has been done in countries where the influence of religious and right wing forces is not that dominant on matters governing internet use and adoption. In Castell book *'Networks of Outrage and Hope'* most of the movements mentioned led to political,

technological and cultural transformation whereas Networked feminism is not discussed as much, therefore while Castell's previous work does not considerably mention feminism activism in this book and the previous trilogies, this study attempts to extend his ideas to address how gendered mobilization is taking place in digitally media society.

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"On خواتین کے عالمی دن پر مارچ جماعت اسلامی کی بھی ریلیاں اسلام آباد میں تلخ کلامی [International Women's Day, rallies of Jamaat-e-Islami in Islamabad led to heated exchanges]. (2023). *Nawaiwaqt*.

Appendices

Appendix A

Interview Guide

Aurat March Interview Guide Participants/Organisers

Introduction and purpose:

I,Sania Ahmed am currently pursuing an M.Phil. Development Studies at PIDE and this interview is a component of my thesis research. The topic of my research is the role of X (formerly Twitter) in shaping mobilisation, activism and censorship within Pakistan's Network Society-in the context of Aurat March. In order to gain in depth data on the role of X

in influencing these decisions, I will be conducting interviews.

Consent

Before we proceed with the interview I want to ensure that you are comfortable participating in this study. This interview will be recorded and transcribed, after I conclude my research I will delete the recording. Your answers will be kept confidential and will only be used for this study.

1. Aurat March purpose

Can you tell me a bit about your profession?

Since when have you been attending the March?

What do you think the purpose of Aurat March is?

Do you think participation in the March has decreased since last year and what could have contributed towards that?

Have you faced any backlash for attending the March from your workplace and people from outside?

Could you highlight any post or image that you found especially relatable that you motivated you to attend the March?

2. **Women's right and social media**

Do you think posting on social media is important to highlight issues that women and marginalised communities face?

Do you think maintaining a social media presence facilitates turnout for the March?

Have you read the charter of demands and do you think the march organisers have been vocal about these causes throughout the year? `

Do you think social media bridges the citizen government gap?

Do you think online hate translates into physical hate aswell?

3. X significance

Do you have a X account?

Do you post regularly regarding the March on X?

Do you think that because many political figures are on Twitter, its more effective in terms of sharing events that happened during the March?

Have you experienced any of your posts being reported or account being suspended for posting against the march.

Are you aware of the X ban and do you think these restrictions impede growth of the march?

4. Future of the March

Will you be attending next year's March?

Why do you think it Is important to attend such events?

Appendix B

Focus Group Guide

Hello I am Sania Ahmed currently pursuing my M.Phil. in Development Studies and the topic of my research is how the use of Twitter shapes mobilization, activism and resultant censorship within the Pakistan Network society a case study of Aurat March. I will be conducting this focus group discussion in order to understand how coalition building, group solidarity basically how Aurat March functions as a collective better.

Before we get started I would like to go through the following instructions:

- Kindly try to speak one person at a time.
- I will be recording this discussion and transcribing it after which the recording will be deleted and this data will only be used for this research.
- You can use each other's first name during the discussion, however this will not impact anonymity of participants.
- I will ask probing questions if I believe a point requires further clarification.

1. Involvement in the March

What sparked your involvement in the March?

How do you think the march has evolved from when you first joined?

Out of all the categories of demands put forward this year, which one resonates with you most and why?

I am aware that AM Islamabad has a legal team for petitions filed against it and have these complaints decreased or increased progressively?

Do you think Aurat March is inspired by western feminist's movements such as the #Metoomovement?

Considering the organising committee does not have a hierarchal structure how do you approach decision making and resolve conflicts among team members?

2. Social media and the fight for women rights

As organisers of the March why do you feel Aurat March needs to be active online?

Do you use social media for getting volunteers and which platform has proven to be the most effective?

Do you think social media has helped sustain the movement despite the backlash it receives?

Do you think the use of social media impacts turnout for the March?

Has social media use allowed you to from networks with individuals and other likeminded movements both in Pakistan and overseas aswell?

Aurat March often endorses calls of protests from other chapter online, do you think maintaining a united front is important for gaining strength for the movement.

Why does the Aurat March support social media post from leftist political organizations, despite its vocal stance against affiliating with any political organization? How does this alignment with leftist ideals contribute to your cause?

Often times Aurat March has been accused of neglecting issues of periphery regions, and instead focusing on topics already receiving extensive media coverage. As a member of the organizing committee, do you oppose this accusation and why?

Has the emergence of right wing accounts such as Maria B, Qaiser Raja on social media impacted the turnout of the March both in 2023 and 2024?

This year and previous year aswell the organising sets up art installations why do you believe these are important?

Aurat March Islamabad is attended by a lot of Youtubers who posts sensational content regarding the march to gain likes and make the march controversial, how have you dealt with this issue in this year and previous year aswell?

3. Twitter as medium for mobilization

In your opinion is Twitter an effective platform for advocating your cause in 2024 and 2023 also?

Are there any particular features that make it more relevant in comparison to Facebook and Instagram for advocating your cause?

How has the Twitter ban effected your social media posting strategy for this platform?

The team regularly hold spaces to address public concerns and doubts regarding its purpose both this year and last year, do you think spaces are important?

Aurat March Twitter account regularly shares their stance on multifaceted issues not directly related to the March. Why do you think it is important to speak up on these issues?

How often do you find yourself defending the March against a hateful comment on Twitter this year and last year aswell?

Out of all the platforms do you think Twitter is more relevant for posting your stance regarding issues because of its shorter character limit, direct interaction with policymakers?

Have you ever had the government or police contact you via Twitter about something you wrote, or the government or policymaker contact you over a Tweet?

4. Future of the March

What steps has the March taken to address online hate speech and disinformation against its supporter's organisers and volunteers?

Where do you see the March in the future?