



HASHTAG ACTIVISM AND GENDER: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF #AURATMARCH TWEETS IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

This qualitative study examines hashtag activism in Pakistan through a critical discourse analysis of tweets from the Aurat March from 2020 to 2025. Using Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA, textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice, the research investigates how feminist activists employ Twitter to construct resistance against patriarchal structures and articulate demands for justice. A dataset of twenty-five tweets from the official Aurat March accounts in Karachi, Islamabad, and Lahore was analysed. The findings reveal that hashtags such as #MeraJismMeriMarzi, #MarchTuHoga, #AsalInsaaf, and #AuratMarch function as discursive tools that mobilize collective identities, challenge dominant ideologies, and connect local struggles with broader transnational movements. Comparative analysis indicates that Karachi's discourse emphasizes inclusivity and bodily autonomy, Islamabad highlights legal and political contestations, and Lahore anchors activism in charters of demands and solidarity with global causes. The study concludes that Aurat March Twitter discourse exemplifies Fairclough's view of language as a social practice, demonstrating how digital feminist activism reconfigures power, ideology, and resistance in Pakistan.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Fairclough, Hashtag Activism, Aurat March, Twitter Discourse.

Introduction

Twitter is attributed to provide a diverse platform where one can be updated with current affairs and social happenings. It also informs others about serious social, political, geographical, and religious agendas. Indeed, it gives birth to diversities and complexities, yet it enables twitterati to unearth what actually lies beneath (Fink & Brito, 2017). On social media networks, discussion is often dominated or controlled by a few who put forward their views without hesitation. Twitter users are actively exchanging opinions on different social and political issues on a daily basis (Aljarallah, 2021). It is evident that inequality and power imbalance in online discourses shape the social understanding of problems faced by the masses. Online expressions of thought often reflect confined and biased social divisions of the public. Communal views on hotly debated issues reveal the hidden mentality of people on popular platforms of social media (Shaw, 2012). Realities are frequently presented through digital discourse practices, as people find it easier to put forward their vision through social media accounts, which provide an escape from face-to-face interactions (Mahfouz et al., 2017).

The verbal content available on Twitter contains written texts, hashtags, graphics, images, and videos. It provides a multimodal platform for users to share their ideas and thoughts explicitly (Brantner & Pfeffer, 2018). The digital world engages its users in continuous production of

narratives and enables them to critically analyse situations worldwide. It also allows audiences to prioritise pressing concerns and assess them accordingly (Cornwall, 2016). In Pakistan, many Muslim women have been challenging the status quo for years, and this struggle is represented in the Aurat March, where feminine issues faced in daily life are raised. The word Aurat is taken from Urdu, meaning “woman.” Aurat March has stirred patriarchal norms and the so-called dignity of not only some Pakistani men but also women. It highlights the traditional mindset of Pakistani society, where women have been shackled for years in cultural lexicons (Siddiqui, 2020).

The user-driven social media backlash towards Aurat March has sparked controversies over the past few years. In the context of Aurat March 2021, there was a visible shift from hashtags such as #AuratAzadiMarch2021, #StopEndangeringWomen, and #WhereIsTheState to #SlutShaming. These hashtags were repeatedly used on Twitter to foreground the contemporary public sphere. Such public involvement in social affairs can, at times, manipulate stated facts to create upheaval in society and distort reality (Bardici, 2012). Aurat March 2021 appeared more vibrant in its approach, raising issues of body shaming, LGBTQ rights, and minority representation. It has been noted that this march is not confined to women alone but rather has evolved into a gender-inclusive movement. In 2021, many men participated alongside women, and members of the LGBTQ community also joined hands with supporters to propose their agenda of freedom of living.

Just like previous years, Aurat March 2021 received both backlash and support on Twitter. Some supported the latest agendas and demands of the protestors, while a significant number of Pakistani twitterati criticized it by circulating hashtags and tweets repeatedly after the march. The present study critically analyzes the discourse used in selected hashtags and tweets from Aurat March 2021 to explore the relatedness in the diverse views of both genders in order to highlight the social mentality of Pakistanis regarding gender-based roles in Pakistani culture. Against this backdrop, the present study focuses on hashtag activism and gendered discourse in Aurat March 2021 tweets. While previous scholarship has highlighted the significance of digital platforms in shaping political and social debates in Pakistan, less attention has been paid to how hashtags function as discursive sites where gender ideologies are constructed, resisted, and negotiated. By applying Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this research examines selected tweets and hashtags such as #AuratMarchKHI, #LetHerDecide, and #BelieveHer, to uncover the underlying power dynamics, gendered representations, and ideological struggles reflected in online discourse. This study not only aims to reveal the patriarchal and resistant voices embedded in Twitter narratives but also seeks to highlight how Aurat March has become a digital space for contesting traditional gender roles, amplifying marginalized voices, and rearticulating women’s place in Pakistani society.

Research Objectives

1. To critically analyse the discourse strategies used in Aurat March hashtags and tweets to explore how gender roles and identities are constructed and contested on Twitter.
2. To examine how online hashtag activism around Aurat March reflects power relations, resistance, and ideological struggles within Pakistani society.

Research Questions

1. How are gender roles and identities constructed and contested through the discourse strategies used in Aurat March hashtags and tweets?
2. what ways does online hashtag activism around Aurat March reflect power relations, resistance, and ideological struggles within Pakistani society?

Significance of the Study

This study holds significance for both linguistics and discourse studies, particularly within the field of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). From a linguistic perspective, it contributes to the understanding of how language, in the form of short digital texts such as tweets and hashtags, is used as a tool for constructing gendered meanings in online spaces. By focusing on lexical choices, metaphors, and discursive strategies, the research demonstrates how language functions not only as a medium of communication but also as a means of reinforcing or challenging societal ideologies. From a discursive perspective, this research points to the contribution of digital activism in framing modern-day gender discourses in Pakistan. The Twitter discourse on Aurat March represents a special case of how online discourses engage with cultural, religious, and political ideologies and make visible the power dynamics underlying public discourse. The study is important in demonstrating the ways in which hashtag activism can re-draw the limits of the public sphere, providing a space for marginalized voices to speak back to dominant ideologies. The research therefore enhances the discourse analysis field by providing insights into the interplay of language, power, and gender in online environments, and contributes to the larger debates on how social media discourse refracts and re-shapes cultural norms.

Literature Review

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary discourse approach that explores the interaction between language, power, and ideology. For Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000), CDA aims overtly to reveal how social inequality and domination are constructed and performed, reproduced, and resisted through discourse. As opposed to mainstream discourse analysis, CDA incorporates social-theoretical understanding into its framework, hence positioning itself towards a politically committed and interventionist agenda. The method is founded on the argument that discourse is always non-neutral but is inextricably linked with structures of power and ideology, thus making it an essential tool for the analysis of issues like racism, sexism, and inequality.

One of the key theorists associated with the construction of CDA is Norman Fairclough, whose writings have highlighted the synthesis of linguistic analysis with extended social theory. Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000) observe that Fairclough's three-way model of textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice offers a systematic approach to relating micro-level linguistic decisions to macro-level social structures. The framework illustrates how discourse both reproduces and constitutes social realities at the same time, hence facilitating the reproduction or challenge of power relations. By relating language use to broader sociopolitical frames, CDA sets itself as critical social analysis.

Twitter is a vibrant site of digital communication, where discursive processes negotiate social interaction, identity, and meaning-construction. Brock (2016) crafted Critical Techno cultural Discourse Analysis (CTDA) as a tool to examine how technological affordances (e.g., hashtags, retweets, and threading) converge with cultural practices. His Black Twitter research exemplifies how marginalized populations utilize Twitter's mechanisms to construct cultural meaning, disrupting deficit models of digital engagement. This underscores Twitter not only as a value-neutral medium, but rather a socio-technical environment where discourse and technology are co-constituted.

Similarly, Mukherjee and Bhattacharyya (2012) approached Twitter through lightweight discourse analysis in the context of sentiment analysis. They argued that conventional bag-of-words models ignore discourse markers (e.g., “but,” “despite,” “although”) that significantly alter meaning and sentiment in tweets. By incorporating discourse relations, their model

achieved higher accuracy in classifying sentiment within noisy, unstructured Twitter text. This underscores the role of discourse features in shaping both computational and human interpretations of social media texts.

Twitter also serves as a site for political discourse, often amplifying polarization and aggression. Torregrosa et al. (2023) examined political discourse during Madrid's 2021 elections using a mixed-methods approach, combining computational and qualitative content analysis. Their findings suggest that while public perception of the campaign emphasized negativity, the actual discourse was less hostile than expected. However, extremist parties employed more aggressive language than moderate ones, reinforcing Twitter's role as both a sentiment barometer and a platform for ideological performance.

This aligns with earlier research showing that Twitter facilitates democratic and political engagement but often intensifies confrontational or polarised communication (Freelon, 2010). The interplay between brevity, immediacy, and amplification mechanics (retweets, trending topics) positions Twitter as a unique arena for discursive contestation, where discourse practices not only reflect but also shape political and social realities. Beyond sentiment and politics, discourse on Twitter is also tied to identity construction. Brock (2012) described Twitter as a "cultural conversation," noting how Black discursive practices adapted to and transformed Twitter's affordances. This reflects broader insights from discourse studies: language use in online platforms is inseparable from cultural identity and social positioning (Smitherman, 1977; Gates, 1988). Twitter discourse thus operates simultaneously as communication, identity performance, and cultural expression.

Hashtags function as one of the most significant discourse markers on Twitter, enabling users to create, shape, and navigate conversations. As Chang and Iyer (2012) note, the hashtag operates as a unique tagging format that links tweets to user-defined concepts, allowing communication to be archived, categorized, and visually represented. Their study shows how hashtags not only facilitate topical grouping of content but also extend to broader applications, including information management and cataloguing, highlighting their role in structuring meaning beyond casual conversation.

From the computational point of view, hashtags are usually the simplest way to get into the discovery of trends and thematic groups. According to Majdabadi et al. (2022), hashtags are good instruments for identifying Twitter trends since they are a concentrated form of user engagement on certain ideas or issues. But they also mention the drawbacks of hashtag-focused research, specifying that much of the discourse happens without the use of hashtags. In order to bridge this gap, they suggest a graph-based approach that brings together tweets, words, and hashtags and in so doing, captures explicit and implicit discursive links. This supports the point that although hashtags are significant, they form just one component of Twitter's discursive ecosystem.

New trends on Twitter are also influenced by the cultural and temporal patterns of hashtag adoption. Naaman et al. (2011) investigated how hashtags are representative of aggregate interests and attention of local and global populations in real time. Their research created a taxonomy of Twitter trends, which determined salient features distinguishing various types, including event-based hashtags, news-related tags, and community-led expressions. The results highlight how hashtags are not merely classification tools but also active markers of evolving social consciousness and the development of collective identity. Collectively, these studies illustrate that hashtags are at the heart of Twitter discourse, serving both as organisational markers, cultural signifiers, and computational indicators of trends. They facilitate the aggregation of voices, amplification of issues, and negotiation of meaning in digital spaces.

For discourse analysis, this underscores hashtags as crucial entry points into investigating online identity, activism, and contestation of ideas.

While existing scholarship has highlighted the organisational and communicative role of hashtags in shaping online discourse (Chang & Iyer, 2012; Majdabadi et al., 2022; Naaman et al., 2011), much of this work has centred on computational trend detection, information management, or broad categorisations of online conversations. What remains underexplored is the critical examination of how hashtags, particularly in gendered activism such as #AuratMarch in Pakistan, function discursively to negotiate power, identity, and ideology. There is a lack of studies that combine Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with the analysis of Twitter hashtags to uncover how language and digital activism intersect in patriarchal contexts. Thus, this study fills the gap by analysing #AuratMarch tweets through a CDA framework, revealing how discourses of resistance, empowerment, and opposition are linguistically and ideologically constructed within Pakistan's sociocultural setting.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA, as theorised by Fairclough (1995), provides a framework for examining how language both reflects and shapes power relations, ideology, and social identities. Since the focus of this research is to analyse the discursive construction of gender, resistance, and power within #AuratMarch tweets, CDA is particularly suitable as it links linguistic choices to broader sociocultural and political contexts.

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected from Twitter, focusing on tweets that use the hashtag #AuratMarch. To ensure a rich and representative sample, tweets will be drawn from a five-year time frame (2020–2025), covering multiple Aurat March events in Pakistan. A dataset of approximately 25 tweets was compiled, representing both supportive and critical perspectives. Retweets will be excluded to avoid duplication, while replies will be included as they often provide counter-discourses and interactional dynamics.

Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling technique will be employed. The aim is not statistical generalisation but to capture recurring discourse patterns, ideological positions, and linguistic strategies. Tweets written in English, Roman Urdu, and mixed code (English–Urdu) will be included to reflect the multilingual character of Pakistani Twitter discourse.

Data Analysis

The analysis will follow Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA (1995), which examines discourse at three levels:

1. Textual analysis (micro level): Examining linguistic features such as lexical choices, metaphors, pronouns, and evaluative language.
2. Discursive practice (macro level): Exploring how tweets are produced, circulated, and consumed on Twitter, including the role of hashtags in shaping participation and visibility.
3. Social practice (macro level): Relating the discourse to broader sociocultural contexts, particularly issues of gender, patriarchy, and resistance in Pakistan.

Tweets will be coded thematically to identify dominant discourses, counter-discourses, and strategies of resistance or legitimisation. NVivo software will be used for coding, categorisation, and thematic analysis.

Critical Discourse Analysis of Selected #AuratMarch Tweets

Tweet 1 (Sep 26, 2023)

"It's important to keep in mind that menstruation is a biological process & biology is different from gender (which is socially constructed). Not all those who have a uterus are women & not all women have a uterus. Reducing a woman to a uterus is misogynistic. #AuratMarch"

Textual level: The tweet employs declarative statements with strong evaluative language ("misogynistic"). It distinguishes biology from gender, foregrounding social constructionist views of identity. The repeated use of negation ("not all...") challenges essentialist gender notions.

Discursive practice: This aligns with trans-inclusive feminist discourse, rejecting reductionist biological determinism. It disrupts mainstream narratives in Pakistan that define women strictly by reproductive roles.

Social practice: By emphasising inclusivity, the tweet contests both patriarchal and heteronormative ideologies, inserting trans and non-binary voices into feminist activism.

Tweet 2 (Mar 21, 2023)

"Stop normalising sexism against women politicians. Misogyny is not comedy nor funny. Use your brains to create some quality content & stop relying on women-hatred as the leading way of 'entertainment!'"

Textual level: The tweet uses imperative forms ("Stop normalising...", "Use your brains..."), indicating urgency and resistance. The evaluative terms "cringe," "disgusting," and "misogyny" explicitly condemn sexism.

Discursive practice: This challenges how humour in media is weaponised against women politicians. The intertextuality (quoting Anwar Maqsood's sexist remarks) situates the response within wider media discourse.

Social practice: It exposes structural misogyny in Pakistani entertainment and politics, calling out sexism as a normalised cultural practice. The tweet works to delegitimise sexist humour as a social practice.

Tweet 3 (Sep 16, 2023)

"Four years ago on this day, Dr. Nimerta Kumari was killed after being sexually assaulted inside her hostel room in Larkana. For four years, college administrators & Sindh government have done a great job in defending her rapists, her murderers! #JusticeForNimertaKumari"

Textual level: Strong accusatory tone with irony ("done a great job"), denouncing institutions complicit in injustice. Naming both perpetrators ("rapists, murderers") and institutions creates binary opposition (victim vs. system).

Discursive practice: The use of the hashtag #JusticeForNimertaKumari situates this within a broader justice discourse, linking Aurat March activism to other digital justice movements in Pakistan.

Social practice: The tweet critiques state complicity in gendered violence, reinforcing Aurat March as a platform amplifying silenced cases of violence against women.

Tweet 4 (Jul 24, 2023)

"Shanti, a 20-year-old woman, has passed away today after 20 days of being in a coma & 36 days of being brutally raped by her husband, Ashok Kumar. We had earlier posted about the horrible ordeal Shanti went through, and the complicity of Ashok's family, Anklesaria Hospital, and..."

Textual level: The lexical choice "brutally raped" intensifies the violence described. Naming the perpetrator ("Ashok Kumar") and institutions (family, hospital) directly assigns responsibility.

Discursive practice: The tweet uses a testimonial narrative style to document systemic neglect and abuse, highlighting both individual and institutional culpability.

Social practice: It connects to feminist resistance against domestic violence, exposing how patriarchal family structures and weak institutions perpetuate women's suffering in Pakistan.

CDA of Aurat March Islamabad Tweets

Tweet 5 (Feb 5, 2024)

"Guidelines for protest against the Iddat case, February 6, 2024, at Press Club Islamabad. #auratmarchislamabad #auratmarch #merajismmerimarzi"

Textual: Instructional tone ("guidelines for protest"), positioning Aurat March as organized and directive. The hashtag #MeraJismMeriMarzi reclaims women's bodily autonomy, countering conservative religious narratives around iddat (waiting period for women after divorce/widowhood).

Discursive: It brings religious-legal debates into feminist discourse, challenging how Islamic laws are mobilized to restrict women's autonomy.

Social practice: This tweet reflects resistance to legal-institutional patriarchy and reframes iddat as not only a religious issue but a feminist rights issue.

Tweet 6 (Feb 5, 2024)

"IDDAT CASE VERDICT & MERA JISM MERI MARZI #merajismmerimarzi #iddatcase #auratmarch #auratmarchislamabad"

Textual: Brevity + hashtags dominate, showing reliance on symbolic linguistic economy. Mera Jism Meri Marzi ("My Body, My Choice") functions as a sloganized counter-discourse to patriarchal religious-legal rulings.

Discursive: This aligns Aurat March with feminist slogan culture, where language is mobilized as protest.

Social practice: This situates women's bodies as contested sites of power—between religious patriarchy and feminist autonomy.

Tweet 7 (Mar 8, 2024)

"Stand for Falasteen #auratmarch #auratmarch2024 #auratmarchislamabad"

Textual: Declarative and internationalist, using Falasteen (Palestine) in Urdu transliteration, signaling solidarity beyond national boundaries.

Discursive: Links women's struggles in Pakistan with global resistance movements (Palestine), showing the intersectionality of struggles.

Social practice: Frames Aurat March not just as a feminist movement, but as part of a transnational human rights struggle, expanding discourse beyond "women's issues" to broader justice.

Tweet 8 (Mar 6, 2023)

"We will see you outside the Islamabad Press Club... We march for Women's Emancipation, Self-Determination & Azaadi!"

Textual: Emotive and mobilizing language ("emancipation," "self-determination," "Azaadi"). The repeated use of future tense + inclusivity ("we will...") enacts collective mobilization.

Discursive: References political slogans of liberation (Azaadi), borrowing from anti-colonial discourse and repurposing it for feminist mobilization.

Social practice: Positions Aurat March within national liberation narratives, reframing gender equality as part of broader political freedom.

Tweet 9 (Mar 5, 2023)

"Inspired by Sindhi revolutionary slogans written by Sheikh Ayaz, we translated some of the slogans for #auratmarchisb #AuratMarch2023 #MarchTuHoga"



Textual: Intertextuality with Sindhi revolutionary poetry embeds Aurat March discourse in regional cultural traditions.

Discursive: This localizes feminism by drawing from Sindhi resistance literature, linking past struggles to present feminist activism.

Social practice: Counters critiques of feminism as “Western” by rooting it in indigenous South Asian resistance culture.

Tweet 10 (Jan 21, 2024)

"Aurat March Islamabad denied entrance to the press club by @ICT_Police to join our Baloch sisters. SHAME"

Textual: Use of direct blame (“denied entrance”) and moral evaluation (“SHAME”) constructs state institutions as repressive.

Discursive: Connects Aurat March to the Baloch women’s movement, emphasizing solidarity with marginalized ethnic groups.

Social practice: Highlights state oppression and ethnic marginalization, expanding feminist discourse to include ethno-political struggles.

Tweet 11 (Nov 4, 2022)

"Aurat March Islamabad condemns unlawful arrests and enforced disappearances of women and children in Bolan."

Textual: Formal condemnation format, aligning feminist discourse with human rights activism.

Discursive: Adopts the discourse of human rights organizations, politicizing enforced disappearances as gendered violence.

Social practice: Bridges state violence discourse with feminist discourse, highlighting the gendered impact of militarization.

Tweet 12 (Mar 2, 2024)

"This year, our poster embodies resistance & hope. We've seen acts of resistance against forced deportation of Afghan families, the struggle of Palestinian people, the Baloch women's movement & our resistance against injustices against women in Pakistan."

Textual: Lexical items “resistance” and “hope” dominate, creating a positive but militant tone.

Discursive: Multilayered solidarity: refugees, Palestinians, Baloch women, Pakistani women feminism as an intersectional struggle.

Social practice: Projects Aurat March as intersectional activism, not limited to gender but encompassing ethnic, refugee, and global struggles.

Tweet 13 (June 5, 2023)

"Women from Sindhiani Tehreek pay tribute to their leader Rasool Bux Palijo with a bike rally in Thatta, Sindh. Palijo founded Sindhiani Tehreek, a women-only political movement in the early 1980s, which continues to fight for human rights."

Hashtag: #SindhianiTehreek

Analysis: The hashtag functions as a digital archive, connecting the historical Sindhiani Tehreek with Aurat March activism today. It emphasizes the continuity of feminist struggle and highlights regional feminist identity.

Tweet 14 (March 1, 2020)

"S is for Sanwali... To the brown, the dark, the sanwli, the kali, You are beautiful and you are lovely. More than that, you are powerful, your humanity is valid, and you are enough."

Hashtags: #AtoZFeminism #AuratMarch2020 #AuratMarch

Analysis: These hashtags show digital pedagogy, linking colourism to feminist struggle. #AtoZFeminism functions as an educational hashtag series, while #AuratMarch2020 situates

the post within the wider movement. The use of “sanwli/kali” bridges cultural-linguistic contexts with global feminism.

Tweet 15 (February 28, 2020)

“Q is for Qandeel... No one shook the patriarchy using digital media more than Qandeel Baloch. A renegade, a rebel, a firecracker...”

Hashtags: #AtoZFeminism #AuratMarch2020

Analysis: Here, hashtags act as reclaiming devices, reframing Qandeel Baloch as a feminist icon rather than a media scandal. The systematic use of #AtoZFeminism shows Aurat March Karachi’s strategy of archiving feminist figures through digital discourse.

Tweet 16 (Dec 21, 2023 – Baloch women protestors)

“URGENT: Baloch women protestors being loaded onto buses against their will... Baloch women have as much a right to protest in Islamabad as anyone else.”

Textual level: The lexical choices “URGENT”, “against their will”, and “Stop this action now!” signal alarm and urgency, creating a discourse of state oppression.

Discursive practice: The tweet amplifies marginalised voices (Baloch women) while tagging a state official (@anwaar_kakar), directly contesting authority.

Social practice: It situates Aurat March within broader struggles of ethnic and gender justice, not limited to urban feminism—foregrounding solidarity with Baloch women against state violence.

Tweet 17 (Sep 15, 2020 – Disalignment from political parties)

“This is why Aurat March is not aligned with any political party because they have collectively failed us... they speak to a structural problem... patriarchal attitudes.”

Textual level: The phrase “collectively failed us” generalises all parties as complicit in patriarchy. The repetition of “structural problem” shifts blame from individuals to systems.

Discursive practice: Positions Aurat March as autonomous and outside mainstream politics, reinforcing feminist independence from partisan co-optation.

Social practice: This resists tokenistic politics and exposes patriarchy as cross-cutting—embedded in institutions regardless of ideology.

Tweet 18 (Mar 9, 2019 – Say NO / Say YES slogans)

“Say NO to violence ... Say YES to inheritance Rights ... Say NO to Police brutality ... Say YES to Behanchara.”

Textual level: Parallel structure (anaphora: “Say NO / Say YES”) produces rhythm, easy recall, and mobilisation. Words like “violence,” “police brutality,” “patriarchy” frame systemic oppressions, while “inheritance rights” and “behanchara” (sisterhood) highlight empowerment.

Discursive practice: Functions as a manifesto-in-miniature—condensed political education in slogan form, accessible to protest settings.

Social practice: Connects everyday rights (inheritance, safety) with broader feminist solidarity, pushing back against normalised injustices.

Tweet 19 (Sep 11, 2020 – Mera Jism Meri Marzi protest)

“میرا جسم میری ... calls for a protest to express outrage against the #motorwayincident, and the larger violence against our bodies.”

Textual level: The slogan “Mera Jism Meri Marzi” is recontextualised: tied directly to a high-profile rape case (#motorwayincident). Lexical choice “larger violence against our bodies” situates the incident within structural gender violence.

Discursive practice: This reframes the slogan beyond abstract autonomy to concrete resistance against sexual violence, reclaiming it from critics.

Social practice: Articulates feminist outrage, mobilising collective action in public space (Liberty Chowk) against state failure to protect women.

Tweet 20 (Nov 26, 2023 – Palestine Solidarity Song)

"During Aurat March Lahore's Palestine solidarity protest, we sang a translated version of a popular Swedish Palestinian resistance song, *Leve Palestina*."

Textual level: Keywords "solidarity," "resistance song," and "leve Palestina" emphasise transnational feminist solidarity.

Discursive practice: Recontextualises global protest culture into local Pakistani feminist activism through translation, showing how Aurat March borrows and adapts international resistance discourses.

Social practice: Expands feminism beyond national concerns to global struggles, situating Pakistani women in solidarity with Palestinians and anti-colonial movements.

Tweet 21 (Feb 18, 2022 – Charter of Demands 2022)

"In our Charter of Demands 2022, we make demands of our state and society."

Textual level: Lexical choice "demands" indicates assertive agency rather than requests. The bilingual links (English & Urdu) make activism accessible to diverse audiences.

Discursive practice: Formalises Aurat March discourse in institutional language, resembling policy documents. Hashtags (#AsalInsaaf) link demands to justice narratives.

Social practice: Bridges protest slogans with systemic reform, pushing feminism into state-society negotiation and institutional accountability.

Tweet 22 (Mar 7, 2022 – Meeting with ADC Dr. Atiya Sultan)

"We had an excellent meeting with ADC Dr. Atiya Sultan, who assured us of full security... We are grateful for women in public office who pave the way and understand our movement."

Textual level: The positive tone ("excellent meeting," "grateful") contrasts with earlier tweets of confrontation, signalling moments of state support.

Discursive practice: Highlights collaboration between feminist activists and women officials, foregrounding female solidarity across institutional boundaries.

Social practice: Suggests that feminist progress requires both grassroots mobilisation and allies within governance constructing women in power as agents of change.

Tweet 23 (Feb 25, 2020 – Charter of Demands 2020)

"Charter of Demands for Aurat March Lahore 2020. We march for the right to have control over our own lives."

Textual level: The slogan "control over our own lives" encapsulates bodily autonomy, economic independence, and self-determination.

Tweet 24 (Mar 10, 2021 – Condemning Slander)

"Statement by Aurat March Lahore condemning slander against the march."

Textual level: The word "slander" emphasises delegitimisation attempts. The tone is defensive yet authoritative.

Discursive practice: Counters negative portrayals circulating in media/political spaces, showing how Aurat March actively engages in reputational defence.

Social practice: Reveals resistance against misogynistic backlash, where women's activism is often dismissed or discredited.

Tweet 25 (Dec 23, 2023 – Baloch Women Solidarity)

"آج لاہور میں بلوچ لانگ مارچ کے لیے یکجہتی کے احتجاج میں ہم نے مارچ کی قیادت کرنے والی بہادر بلوچ خواتین کو خراج تحسین پیش کیا۔"

(Today in Lahore, at the solidarity protest for the Baloch Long March, we paid tribute to the brave Baloch women leading the march.)

Textual level: Words like “bahadur” (brave) and “khiraj-e-tehseen” (tribute) valorise Baloch women as leaders.

Discursive practice: Highlights solidarity with marginalised ethnic women, extending Aurat March’s feminist discourse beyond mainstream urban concerns.

Social practice: Intersects gender with ethnicity and state violence, foregrounding feminist resistance to systemic oppression of minority groups.

Discursive practice: Establishes continuity between yearly charters (2020, 2022), showing the evolution of the feminist agenda as living documents.

Social practice: Positions Aurat March as a rights-based movement where autonomy is central resisting patriarchal control over women’s bodies, labour, and choices.

Findings

The analysis of 25 selected tweets of various Aurat March chapters (Karachi, Islamabad, and Lahore) indicates a nuanced interconnection of resistance, solidarity, and contestation in digital feminist discourse in Pakistan. At the textual level, the tweets often employ imperatives, slogans, evaluative language, and parallel structures, which not only mobilize audiences but also counter normalised patriarchal narratives. Hashtags like *#MeraJismMeriMarzi*, *#JusticeForNimertaKumari*, *#AsallInsaaf*, and *#MarchTuHoga* operate as discursive markers, allowing activists to locate local struggles within wider ideological, transnational, and intersectional frames. At the level of discursive practice, Aurat March Twitter handles tactically employ intertextuality (citing poets, referencing struggles all over the world, referencing religious/legal discourses) to legitimise their resistance while challenging charges of foreign intervention. At the social practice level, the tweets bring to the center systemic gendered oppression in Pakistan e.g., sexual assault, legal discrimination, enforced disappearances, and political misogyny while also broadening the struggle of feminism to encompass ethnic minorities (Baloch, Sindhi), refugees, and Palestinians.

Comparative analysis identifies three different yet convergent orientations: Aurat March Karachi gravitates towards trans-inclusivity, gendered violence, and past feminist icons; Aurat March Islamabad makes visible legal-institutional battles (Iddat case, enforced disappearances) and international solidarity; whereas Aurat March Lahore integrates structural critique (disaffiliation from political parties), manifesto-style demands, and recurring solidarity with Baloch women and Palestine. Together, these discourses illustrate that Aurat March Twitter activism is neither monolithic feminism nor a singular movement but a multi-sited, intersectional resistance movement that challenges patriarchy on cultural, religious, political, and global scales.

Table 1

Comparative CDA Analysis of Selected Aurat March Tweets (2020–2025)

Tweet No.	Chapter	Theme/Hashtag(s)	Textual Features	Discursive Practice	Social Practice
1	Karachi	#AuratMarch (Sep 26, 2023) – Menstruation & Gender	Declarative, negations, evaluative (“misogynistic”)	Trans-inclusive feminist discourse	Challenges biological determinism, centres inclusivity
2	Karachi	Misogyny in Politics (Mar 21, 2023)	Imperatives, evaluative terms	Counters sexist	Exposes structural



				humour in media	misogyny in politics
3	Karachi	#JusticeForNimertaKumari (Sep 16, 2023)	Accusatory tone, irony	Justice discourse via hashtags	Critiques state complicity in gendered violence
4	Karachi	Shanti Case (Jul 24, 2023)	Lexical intensity (“brutally raped”)	Testimonial narrative	Exposes domestic violence + institutional neglect
5–6	Islamabad	#MeraJismMeriMarzi, #IddatCase (Feb 5, 2024)	Instructional tone, brevity, hashtags	Reframes religious-legal debates	Resistance to institutional patriarchy
7	Islamabad	Palestine Solidarity (Mar 8, 2024)	Declarative, Urdu transliteration	International solidarity	Connects feminism with global struggles
8–9	Islamabad	#MarchTuHoga (Mar 6–5, 2023)	Mobilising, intertextual (Sindhi poetry)	Localizes feminism	Ties feminism to indigenous culture
10–11	Islamabad	Enforced Disappearances (Jan 21, 2024; Nov 4, 2022)	Blame + moral evaluation	Human rights discourse	Highlights state repression, ethnic solidarity
12	Islamabad	Poster Reveal 2024 (Mar 2, 2024)	Keywords “resistance & hope”	Multilayered solidarity	Projects intersectional activism
13–15	Karachi	#SindhianiTehreek, #AtoZFeminism (2020–2023)	Affirmative, descriptive, reclamation of icons	Archiving feminist history digitally	Links regional struggles & feminist pedagogy
16	Lahore	Baloch Protestors (Dec 21, 2023)	Alarmist tone, urgency	Amplifies marginalised voices	Gender–ethnic justice solidarity
17	Lahore	Political Disalignment (Sep 15, 2020)	Generalisation (“collectively failed”)	Autonomy from politics	Critiques institutionalised patriarchy

18	Lahore	#AuratMarch2019 Slogans	Parallel structure (Say NO/YES)	Manifesto in slogans	Frames systemic oppressions & empowerment
19	Lahore	#MeraJismMeriMarzi (Sep 11, 2020)	Protest slogan tied to rape case	Reframes the autonomy slogan	Mobilises outrage vs. gender violence
20	Lahore	Palestine Solidarity Song (Nov 26, 2023)	Keywords “solidarity/resistance”	Recontextualises global protest song	Connects Pakistani feminism to global struggles
21– 23	Lahore	Charters of Demands (2020–2022)	Assertive lexical choice (“demands”)	Institutionalised language	Bridges protest & systemic reform
24	Lahore	Condemning Slander (Mar 10, 2021)	Defensive tone, authoritative	Counters delegitimization	Resists backlash & media distortion
25	Lahore	Solidarity with Baloch Women (Dec 23, 2023)	Valorising (“bahadur,” “tribute”)	Solidarity framing	Intersects ethnicity & gender struggles

Conclusion

This research seeks to explore how Aurat March activists in Karachi, Islamabad, and Lahore employ Twitter discourse to express feminist resistance, create solidarity, and oppose systemic patriarchy in Pakistan. The critical discourse analysis of twenty-five tweets showed that hashtags are not only used as tools for categorisation but as potent discursive signifiers mobilising collective identities (*#MeraJismMeriMarzi*, *#MarchTuHoga*, *#AsalInsaaf*), reclaiming histories (*#AtoZFeminism*), and extending solidarity to marginalised subjects within and outside national borders (*#JusticeForNimertaKumari*, *#SindhianiTehreek*, *#StandForFalasteen*).

The observations reveal that Twitter activism of Aurat March is intersectional representing concerns about gender, class, ethnicity, religion, and transnational justice at one go. Karachi-centric discourse focuses on inclusivity and trans rights, Islamabad prioritises legal struggles and enforced disappearances, whereas Lahore's activism finds its roots in manifestos, charters of demands, and solidarity with Baloch and Palestinian movements. Regionally varied as they may be, the common thread connecting all chapters is resistance to patriarchal structures in political as well as social life. Linguistically and discursively, the tweets use evaluative language, slogans, parallelism, and intertextual allusions which both inspire and subvert. These tactics are aimed at legitimising feminist demands, combatting backlash, and situating Aurat March's activism in larger socio-political struggles. Crucially, the research identifies how



digital feminist discourse in Pakistan navigates local cultural constraints while linking to global feminist and human rights movements.

Summarily, Aurat March's Twitter conversation is an exemplary model of hashtag activism that not only subverts patriarchal discourse but also reconceptualizes justice and solidarity in Pakistan's public sphere online. Linguistics and discourse studies benefit from this study in highlighting the importance of Twitter as a platform where language, ideology, and power converge, thus making it an important area of study on how to analyse contemporary feminist resistance.

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