

**Aurat March in the Digital Age: Exploring the  
Intersection of Social Media, Public Opinion, and Scope of Aurat  
March in Pakistan**



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Islamabad, Pakistan

(2024)

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A thesis submitted to the National University of Sciences and Technology, Islamabad,

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Master of Science in

Development Studies

Supervisor: Dr. Rabia Zaid

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
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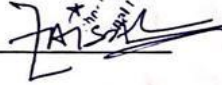
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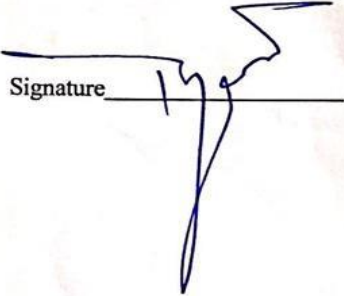
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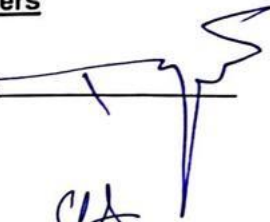
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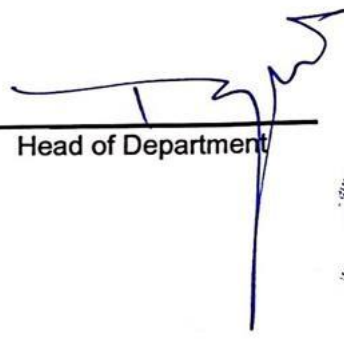
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## ***DEDICATION***

*This thesis is dedicated to my beloved Abbu and Ammi (grandparents), whose unwavering love and support have been the guiding lights in my life. Their constant prayers and belief in me have shaped who I am today. I am eternally grateful for their unconditional love, especially during the most challenging times, including my Ammi's courageous battle with cancer. Her strength and resilience inspire me every day. A special dedication goes to my late father, whose memory continues to inspire me.*



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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

API: Application Programming Interface

CDA: Critical Discourse Analysis

PML-N: Pakistan Muslim League (N)

PTI: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf

QTDA: Qualitative Text and Discourse Analysis

## **ABSTRACT**

Pakistan had its first Aurat March celebrated for the first time on the International Women's Day on the 8th of March in the year 2018. It demanded justice for cases of violence against women and a solidarity for women that are victims of violence and harassment by security forces in public areas, at home, and in workplaces. Also, economic justice and women's rights to employment with wages for their work in the economy, maternity leave and day care facilities for women with young children so that they do not have to choose between family and work. The March was met with intense backlash due to its explicit slogans and placards.

Ever since, the March has been seen as a point of contention between the public, conservatives, and feminists. In recent years, the discourse on feminism and women's rights movements has gained momentum, challenging deeply rooted patriarchy, gender bias, and pervasive manifestations of sexism in society. This research seeks to explore the intricate interplay of social media, public opinion, and the evolving dynamics of the Aurat March, a women's rights movement in Pakistan.

This research delves into the influence of social media on the Aurat March. The study employs the theoretical frameworks of Agenda-Setting and Intersectionality to explore how social media has shaped the movement's goals, strategies, and public perception. By analyzing the digital discourse using qualitative methods under Critical Discourse Analysis, the research aims to reveal the underlying values and themes guiding the Aurat March through in-depth interviews with the organizers of the March. This research offers insights into the evolving dynamics of women's rights activism and the unique challenges presented by social media in the context of Pakistan. In its first phase, this research aims to provide valuable insights into the evolving dynamics of women's rights



activism, social media's role in shaping public opinion, and the challenges faced by movements operating within the cultural and political context of Pakistan. Furthermore, it'll be talking about the impact of it on Aurat March.

The results indicate the gap between the public understanding of Aurat March and the organizers of the March. The Twitter<sup>1</sup> Discourse Analysis uncovered three major themes of backlash against the march based on religion, politicization of the march, and support in the name of feminism. The interviews, on the other hand, gave five contrasting themes of massive disconnect between public and Aurat March, use of gender as a political tool, introducing strategic shift multi-dimensional approach, and ensuring intersectionality. The research holds novelty as it tries to bridge the gap between public understanding of a social movement like Aurat March and the ways in which Aurat March operates. This multi-phased study sheds light on how public opinion available on Twitter can bring a shift in a movement's strategy or approach to gain wider acceptance.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Aurat March, public opinion, women's rights, Twitter discourse analysis

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<sup>1</sup> According to Buffer (2023), Formerly known as Twitter has been rebranded to 'X' as Everything App in July 2023 after it was bought by Elon Musk. The research started before that; hence the app is still referred to as Twitter in the thesis.

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background of the Study

The internet has revolutionized communication and information acquisition, with social networks becoming an essential source for individuals. The 2016 UK E.U. Referendum and 2016 US Presidential Election serve as two natural experiments to examine the dissemination of information in social media (Gorodnichenko et al., 2021). According to Allan (1993), "the idea of feminism is described as the promotion of gender equality for both men and women, as well as their equal rights in the society where they live, and the apprehensions in the course of theory and action, not on the basis of sexual or biological orientations and roles but their individual participation and assistance on the basis of equality in society."

Further supporting the implicit and parallel claim made by feminism, Mackinnon contends that the direction and expression of sexuality divided society into men and women, and that this split served as the foundation for all social interactions (Bertrand, 1990). The social process of sexuality produces the social beings known as women and men, whose relationships produce society, and organizes, expresses, and directs the social connections of gender. Further, the use of influencers in commercial marketing, using the 2016 E.U. Referendum and 2016 Presidential Election as natural experiments. It examines the dissemination of information using real users and social bots, targeting specific political messages (Hudders et al., 2021). The study examines the role of social media in shaping public opinion on a popular women's movement like "Aurat March." The findings reveal that the different public opinion has great influence in shaping the discourse of the movement, leading to changes in its strategies. Media plays a crucial role in

influencing society by manipulating public thoughts and maintaining social control. In democratic countries, free media is considered the "fourth estate" alongside legislative, executive, and judiciary branches. Media not only provides entertainment but also communicates cultural norms and values, legitimizing the social order. Language is seen as a multi-layered means of communication, and that influences people in various ways. The Aurat March movement, a series of campaigns for reforms, highlights the role of media in representing and constructing different ideologies, such as women's suffrage, reproductive rights, and equal pay (Baig et al., 2020).

Feminism is an important ideology that opposes the ignoble idea of sex-based discrimination. The initial division of gender responsibilities was centered on who could carry and feed the babies and who could keep food on hand for a lifetime (Werner, 2022). For countless years, there were no disputes over the division; however, it was later challenged. This might be because men take their duties more seriously, which undermines or entirely eliminates female roles throughout the course of their existence. Men were sexist and condescending toward women because of their physical prowess, capacity to hunt (in modern times, their ability to make money), and independence from child-bearing obligations. In this setting, we can observe the emergence of a patriarchal society in which men developed and maintained all social rules, making women a subordinate participant in the process. In recent years, Pakistan's feminist movement has experienced a resurgence, gaining traction across various strata of society (Cheema, 2023). This resurgence marks a notable evolution from its origins as a reform-centric initiative in the 1980s towards adopting a more secular agenda in the 1990s, with a heightened focus on legal matters. Notably, it has transitioned from online campaigns against sexual harassment to large-scale street demonstrations. Commencing in 2018 across multiple cities, the movement, embodied by the

Aurat March, has become an emblematic phenomenon, drawing attention from both proponents and detractors.

However, it's essential to underscore that the feminist wave, embodied by the Aurat March, sprang from the efforts of women collectives running parallel to the international #MeToo movement, and it was inaugurated on International Women's Day in Karachi in 2018. Subsequent marches were organized in 2019 by a collective of individual women known as 'Hum Aurtein' (We the Women) in Lahore. Karachi's annual manifesto addressed a wide spectrum of issues, encompassing domestic violence, children's rights, minority rights, economic disparities, institutional reforms, accountability measures, environmental justice, healthcare access, gender inclusivity, and peace-building initiatives. In 2022, the Aurat March continued to advocate for 'Security, Wages, and Peace.'

One of the key catalysts behind the widespread recognition of the Aurat March has been the advent of social media. In an era where information spreads at an unprecedented pace, social media platforms have provided a digital stage for activists to amplify their voices (Palmieri-Branco, 2021). Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and other platforms have become virtual town squares where ideas and movements converge, giving rise to new forms of digital activism (Fadugba, 2023).

These platforms, however, are not just neutral mediums for expression; they have emerged as battlefronts where competing narratives and ideologies clash. Social media has the power to shape public opinion, often in real-time, and can be a double-edged sword for movements like the Aurat March (Inam et al., 2021). While it offers a space to galvanize support and mobilize individuals, it also exposes activists to online harassment, hate speech, and attempts to discredit their cause.

In this complex digital landscape, understanding the role of social media in shaping public opinion on the Aurat March and its subsequent impact on the movement's goals and strategies becomes crucial. This research seeks to delve deeper into these dynamics, shedding light on how the virtual realm challenges movements for gender equality in Pakistan.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Pakistan, located in South Asia, is predominantly a conservative Muslim country where patriarchal norms and practices have been deeply ingrained in society. Despite significant rights granted to women in the country's constitution, such as Article 25 ensuring equality before the law and prohibiting discrimination based on sex, and Article 34 mandating measures to facilitate women's participation in all areas of life and social activities, women still face numerous obstacles in their pursuit of equal citizenship (Union, 2020). These challenges range from societal scrutiny of their life choices, clothing, and opinions to enduring harassment, violence, and a lack of freedom and safe environments.

In recent years, there has been increasing discourse on feminism and women's rights movements, challenging the reinforced patriarchy, gender bias, and explicit and subtle sexism prevalent in society. Feminist scholars and journalists have contributed to this discourse, exploring feminism in the context of Islam and Pakistan, highlighting its relevance and applicability (Jallad & Barenberg, 2022). However, the women's rights movement, which aligns with Western-style feminism, faces criticism from various segments of society who perceive it as anti-Islam and foreign-funded, especially on social media. This situation creates an intriguing scenario where established norms and practices are being contested, leading to differences of opinion on social media and society.

This study will dive deep into understanding and seeing the social media's role in the discourse present on the Aurat March (Sadaf & Siitonen, 2022). The purpose of this study is to explore the role of social media and public opinion's impact on the Aurat March in Pakistan. Specifically, the research aims to find out how different is public opinion regarding the Aurat March and explore the subsequent impact of this public opinion on the goals, strategies, and future trajectory of the movement.

The study employs a qualitative methodology to analyze tweets related to the Aurat March for a Critical Discourse Analysis. Additionally, in-depth interviews with organizing members of the movement will be conducted to gain insights into the impact of public opinion on the movement's dynamics. By investigating these aspects, this research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between social media, public opinion, and social movements in the Pakistani context.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

1. To explore the public opinion on Twitter regarding Aurat March.
2. To explore how that public opinion has impacted the movement of Aurat March.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

1. How is the public opinion reflected on Twitter when it comes to Aurat March?
2. How has public opinion changed the goals, strategies, and future trajectory of Aurat March?

## 1.5 Significance of Study

This study on the impact of social media on the discourse of Aurat March in Pakistan holds significant geographical and conceptual importance. Geographically, it offers Pakistan-specific insights, shedding light on how social media platforms are influencing the discourse surrounding women's rights in the country. This research is grounded in the context of Pakistan, taking into account the unique cultural, social, and political factors that play a pivotal role in the Aurat March movement (Jallad & Barenberg, 2022). Moreover, the local significance of the study lies in its potential to provide valuable insights for activists, organizations, and policymakers within Pakistan, facilitating a deeper understanding of strategies and challenges related to women's rights activism in the region. Additionally, the regional implications of this research are noteworthy, as Pakistan's position in South Asia allows for potential applicability to neighboring countries facing similar social, political, and cultural dynamics. Social media has become a crucial platform for societal discourse, allowing users to express opinions and participate in political action. However, it also facilitates the construction of the "other" through discussions with like-minded individuals, leading to the formation of online hate groups. Othering in online spaces is a significant phenomenon, encompassing power contestations and abusive behaviors such as racism, Islamophobia, sexism, misogyny, homophobia, and ableism. This study investigates the discourse surrounding the women's rights movement in Pakistan, the Aurat March 2019, using CDA. The movement faces significant resistance due to Pakistani women's structural disadvantaged status and discrimination in legal and economic issues.

Conceptually, this study contributes to feminist discourse by examining how social media platforms are reshaping the discourse of feminist movements in the digital age, a topic of growing global interest (Van den Abeele et al., 2024). It adds depth to the field of media studies and social

activism by exploring the intricate relationship between social media, public opinion, and the success or failure of social movements, which has significant relevance in the contemporary digital landscape (Ivan, 2023). Moreover, the utilization of qualitative research methods in this study, for understanding complex social phenomena and public opinion, contributes to broader discussions on the significance of qualitative research within the context of online activism and social movements. Finally, the research addresses critical ethical considerations in the digital sphere, particularly concerning sensitive topics, contributing to the conceptual framework for conducting culturally sensitive and ethically sound research.

### 1.6 Conceptual Framework

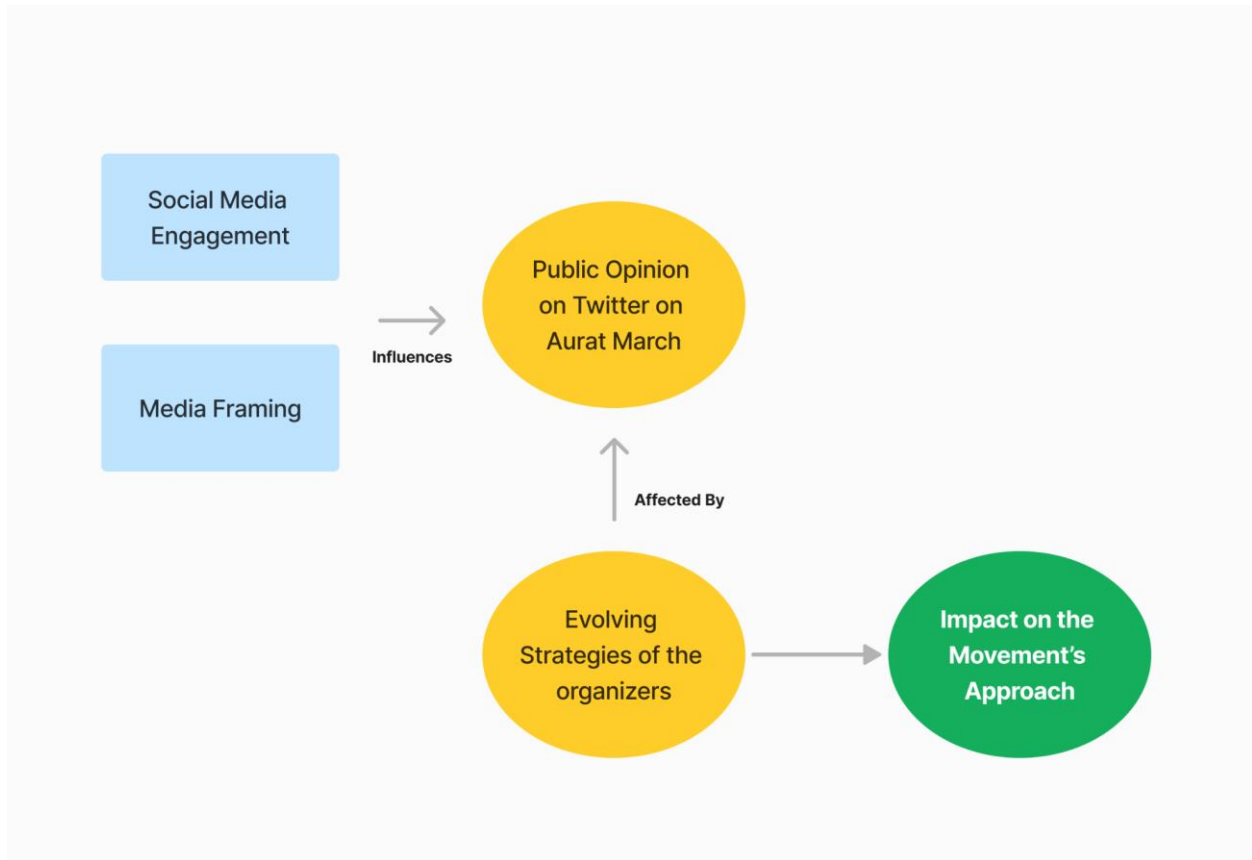


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework



**Source: Author's generation using Figma Design Tool**

### **1.7 Linkages with the SDGs**

This study aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) - Gender Equality. By examining the impact of social media on the discourse surrounding Aurat March and women's rights, the research contributes to the understanding of gender-related issues, activism, and public opinion in Pakistan. The findings of this study can inform and empower initiatives aimed at achieving gender equality, which is a fundamental component of SDG 5 and the broader sustainable development agenda (Nations, 2021). The study's exploration of how digital platforms influence women's rights movements directly corresponds to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as outlined in SDG 5.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW & THEORITICAL**

### **BACKGROUND**

The Aurat March, a yearly gathering in several cities throughout Pakistan, has become a formidable obstacle in the struggle for women's rights, gender equality, and the overturning of patriarchal norms. Many people are talking about and arguing about the Aurat March in Pakistan because of the role that social media plays in shaping public opinion. Findings from this study provide light on the social and political forces reshaping public understanding in Pakistan by delving into the complexities of online discourse and media representation.

#### **2.1.1 Social Media Engagement in Aurat March Discourse**

Social media has significantly influenced the public opinion and dialogue surrounding Aurat March, allowing individuals to express views, share information, and engage in debates. Although the hashtags trending around the march amplifies the voices and attract mainstream media attention. Social media has also enabled diverse perspectives to be heard and mobilized through supporters. Ali & Naz, (2023) suggested online communication in Pakistani social media, focusing on linguistic, sociocultural, and political aspects. It uses qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze user-generated content and examines language choices, argumentative strategies, and discursive patterns. The study also explores the role of linguistic devices like hashtags, memes, and emojis in shaping public opinion. The findings provide insights into the complexities of online communication in Pakistan, offering a nuanced understanding of challenges and opportunities. The study is relevant for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners seeking to understand the impact of social media on society and foster more inclusive online conversations (Ali & Naz, 2023). The rise

of feminism, particularly in Pakistan, has emphasized the importance of social media in combating issues like sexual assaults and body shaming. This study explores the potential of social media for justice and collective mobilization, focusing on its potential to overcome iniquitous issues and synthesize antinomies (Khan et al., 2023). Memon (2021) has done an in-depth study on how Pakistan's Aurat March 2018 placards have shown that they convey linguistic and semiotic meanings, transcending material resources. Lakhani, (2020) stated that Pakistan has a long history of patriarchal values and regressive attitudes towards women, with women facing persistence since 1947.

The Women Action Forum (WAF) emerged in the 1980s to ensure women's rights in legal matters of finance. However, the Pakistani media has failed to fulfill its journalistic duties and has played an agenda setting role in the country's fight for justice. The press has failed to support the suppressed communities, including women, since the 1980s. Agenda setting suggests that public opinion is strongly linked to what the media chooses to publicize. The first women's movement in 1983 by the WAF was analyzed, but today, the mainstream media continues to hate women for selfish reasons. The reception of the women's movement depends on the audience's mindset, and the patriarchal mindset is deeply ingrained in Pakistan. The Aurat March, a peaceful campaign to highlight gender equality, has been turned into a point of hate mongering and the #notallmen train on social media (Lakhani, 2020).

Waqar et al., (2023) says that language influences the ideas on domestic, social, and political issues as the Aurat March 2021 in Pakistan challenged norms and women's dignity. A study found male Twitterati had biased attitudes highlighting the march's role in addressing women's stories. Tabassum et al., (2023) examines the portrayal of women in Pakistan media, focusing on prejudice and their roles within the society. Despite modern feminism and progress,

Pakistani women still face oppression. It has used a qualitative approach in analyzing the data through discussion has shown about the Aurat March, a women's rights movement.

Misunderstood discourse and actually insensitive content contribute to the issue, suggesting media platforms can perpetuate or challenge prevailing prejudices and stereotypes (Tabassum et al., 2023). Nishat & Hussain, (2022) through her study, had shed light on the media's role in shaping socio-political ideologies in Pakistan. It focuses on the Aurat March discourse by Dawn and The Nation, analyzing how agenda-setting and strategic linguistic framing generate ideologically polarized discourses. The research identifies three themes: patriarchy, violence and abuse, and women's rights. Dawn presents a radical stance, while The Nation is conventionalist. The ideological polarization of Pakistani society on the subject is attributed to the ideologically polarized mainstream media's strategic use of language. Rahim & Riaz, (2023) explored the major agendas of the Aurat March, focusing on its development and revitalization in Pakistan. It examines the struggles between feminist movements and the religious community, and the impact of the march on policy making. It in a way sheds light on the influence of these debates on gender inequality in Pakistan. Khushbakht & Sultana, (2023) have studied the relationship between Islam, women's activism for gender justice, and cultural discourses. It focuses on the "Aurat March" and its perception by the nation-state. The research examines terminological and structural complexities, arguing that labeling activists as "westernized" or "secularists" can hinder progress. The study suggests productive activism for women's real issues. Anwar (2023) states that the feminist visual semiotics of protest art from the Aurat March in Pakistan, focusing on posters and street art. It discusses the symbolic, iconic, and indexical signs used to highlight issues like gender-based violence, women's labor, women's health, and freedoms and justice. The paper also highlights the radical nature of the protest art and its impact on Pakistani society. Cheema (2023)

stated that in 2020, Pakistan experienced a unique event leading up to International Women's Day protests. A debate on the issue on a talk show triggered hashtags and debates on Twitter. The paper evaluates how different publics engage with these hashtags, focusing on gendered discourse around #MeraJismMeriMerzi and #WhyICannotMarch. Responses can be divided into conservative and liberal publics, with a rare form of personal disclosures from Pakistani women on Twitter. This counter public aims to rearticulate gender discourse in a Pakistani context. Sahar (2022) addressed that gendered digital activism in Pakistan, focusing on how Pakistani women use technology to challenge cultural determinism and nationalist discourses is conflicted. The author argues that Pakistani women activists are often trapped in a double bind, judged by patriarchy and perceived as victims in Western discourses. It investigates how the voice and silence of the subaltern in gendered digital spaces shape online social networks and offline hierarchies, highlighting the complex dynamics of cyber-power in Pakistani society.

### **2.1.2 Media Framing of Aurat March**

McGregor (2019) stated that public opinion is a socially constructed representation of the public, shaped by methods and data. Social media is used to represent public opinion in news, despite not reflecting the electorate. This practice complements survey polling and vox populi quotes. Journalists rely on social media to reflect public opinion, especially during debates. However, concerns arise about overreliance on social media, particularly curated Twitter feeds. Hybrid information flows between journalists, campaigns, and social media companies influence public opinion (McGregor, 2019).

Ameer (2021) suggested that the portrayal of the Aurat March campaign on Facebook by Pakistani NGOs, focusing on the language used and semantic methods used in the campaign. It

also examines the use of phonetic devices in women's activist development within Pakistan and analyzes content from viral slogans and posters. Riaz et al. (2021) examines the discourse in the 'Aurat March' celebrations in Pakistan, focusing on the influence of Western post-feminism on contemporary society. It reveals that the march's relevance is influenced by Pakistani women's opposing directions, leading them to associate their situation with 'gendered neoliberalism'. The study concludes that activism has endangered women by foregrounding their bodies as objects, and has created chaos in Pakistani society, clashing with religion and culture (Riaz et al., 2021). Khushbakht (2022) examined how marches and women's rights activism contribute to gendered Islamophobia and the impact of the Aurat March on Pakistani women's identity. It highlights how biased representation of Muslim women can either limit or encourage attitudes and stereotypes, and how minor negligence can contribute to Islamophobia and international narratives against Muslims and Pakistan. The paper concludes by analyzing insights to counter gendered Islamophobia in Muslim women's lives and focusing on gender, culture, and religion. Cheema (2023) stated that the "Aurat March" in Pakistan in 2019 and 2020 marked a significant shift in women's activism, highlighting the complex relationship between Western feminism and Pakistan's postcolonial history. The study uses discourse analysis to examine the 'Aurat March' movement and its impact on social, cultural, and religious transformation. It emphasizes the need for women's rights advocates to raise a rational public voice to abolish social evils and challenge Islamic limits on women's emancipation. Munir (2011) suggested that Pakistan has been under authoritarian rule for over half its history, with military leaders using civilian masks to legitimize their rule.

The religious elite and state-controlled broadcast media have been considered as key to this authoritarian regime, limiting dissent and freedom of expression. Although the role of digital media

in organizing collective action and facilitating the democratic struggles during General Musharraf's tenure focused on the social movement from 2007 to 2008 (Munir, 2011). Khushbakht & Sultana (2020) examine women's activism in Pakistan, particularly during the Aurat march from 2018-2020. As it examined the relationship among Western feminism and the Aurat march focusing on the social, cultural and religious transformation of the society.

Naz et al. (2022) suggested that the challenges included the Western notion of feminism and argued that it is insufficient to explain the lives of Pakistani Muslim women. It highlights the interplay between Islamic culture and feminism in Pakistan, a Third World country with postcolonial history. The study interprets Lila Abu-Lughud's philosophy of cultural difference and women discourses to challenge colonialism and promote sociopolitical and cultural freedom in Pakistani feminism. Alam (2021) examined the protest claims of Pakistani women against traditional gender roles and the backlash they provoked. It focuses on the annual Aurat March and analyzes the viral placards and slogans. The author argues that counter-discourses delegitimize the protest and women's issues, highlighting the need for scholarly and activist discussions on violence against women in politics. Akhtar et al. (2021) analyzes the issues raised during the Pakistani Women's March Aurat March 2019, focusing on the participants' perspectives on patriarchy. It finds that patriarchy confines women to traditional roles, objectifies them, and limits their movement and civil rights. Resistance to patriarchal domination includes re-appropriation and redefining gender roles. It further contributes to understanding Pakistani patriarchy and the types of women's voices. Saeed & Batool (2021) stated that the 'Aurat (women's march) in Pakistan has faced resistance against patriarchal structures and demands for accountability, restorative justice, economic justice, inclusion, and access to public space. The march has led to the fourth wave of feminism in Pakistan, but its provocative slogans put organizers and participants at risk. Critics

argue that the march's demands are "un-Islamic and shameful," and that the religion Islam is responsible for these violations. It puts the focus on the anti-Islamic ideologies and secular nature of the march's slogans, urging collective action for women's rights. Anjum (2020) suggested women's activism and political engagement in Pakistan, focusing on liberal and conservative women-led organizations. The study has shown that religious views have significantly influenced women's activism and interpretation of feminism and nationalism in Pakistani society, with liberal women advocating for public engagement (Anjum, 2020).

Women's activism and political engagement in Pakistan differs based on gender roles and feminism, with Islamic values influencing gender and national identity. Liberal women, mostly feminists, advocate for pro-public-sphere engagement, while conservative women are nationalist and anti-feminist. This highlights the influence of religious views on women's activism and their interpretation of feminism and nationalism in Pakistani society (Haroon et al., 2021).

### **2.1.3 Public Opinion towards Aurat March**

Khan et al., (2020) analyzed the impact of Women's Day on women culture in Pakistan since March 2020. The first International Women's Day was held in 1911, with China's program starting in 1949. The United Nations has celebrated Women's Day since 1975, with the goal of giving equal rights to women and treating them as men. The top 10 countries with the highest parity rate are Iceland, Norway, Finland, Sweden, Nicaragua, New Zealand, Ireland, Spain, Rwanda, and Germany. International Men's Day is celebrated on November 19 each year. The United Nations (UN) and International Labor Organization (ILO) focus on women's rights, employment, land rights, and maternity leave. Women's major issues include employment, land rights, and daily life issues. Islam emphasizes women's rights and education, but today, women want to participate in



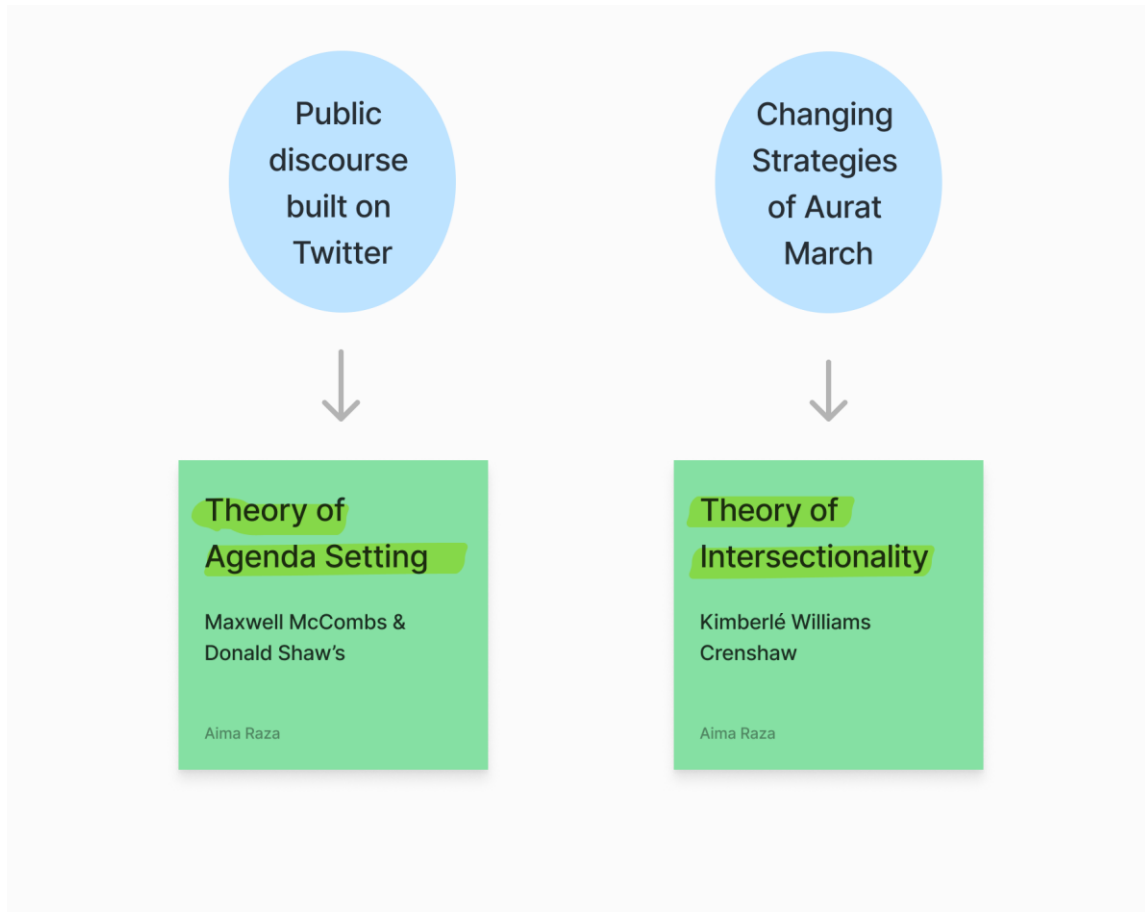
every sector of the ministry and raise slogans for their rights (Khan et al., 2020). Afzal et al., (2021) stated that the Aurat March in Pakistan in 2018 sparked feminist struggle, with Pakistan's patriarchy attempting to suppress rising voices. In 2020, the country faced opposition from countermarches and narratives, driven by patriarchal agency. This paper examines Pakistani feminism within Greenblatt's constructs of power, subversion, and containment, focusing on Bina Shah's novel *Before She Sleeps*. The study reveals that patriarchal agency in Pakistan uses narratives of honor and domesticity to contain the subversion faced by the march, offering negotiation and change instead of surrendering to the normative patriarchal structure (Afzal et al., 2021). Kamal, (2022) stated that the Aurat March, an annual event in Pakistan, has faced criticism from conservative religious and political groups due to its use of placards. The commentary examines how these placards have constituted networks of feminist voices and promoted anti-feminist discourses, creating a space for resistance and struggles over women's participation in public spaces (Kamal, 2022). Khan, (2022) stated that men's involvement in feminist struggles in Pakistan, particularly in the Aurat March since 2018. It reveals that men who participate in these movements not only relate to feminism but also address issues like patriarchy and violence against women. They believe these movements are beneficial for society and can unite diverse groups for women's rights. The study also highlights that not all men are the same and resist gender-oppressive ideologies (Khan, 2022). Rehman & Ghani, (2022) analyzed Khalil-Ur-Rehman's speech during a live TV social talk show on "Feminism and Aurat March." The research used the three-dimensional model from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and found that Khalil-Ur-Rehman used linguistic features to communicate, revealing his low social and cultural background. The incident influenced society, as it rejected Khalil-Ur-Rehman's views. The study aims to understand the textual and social aspects of discourse and how identities are constructed through discourse (Rehman & Ghani,

2022). Bakanova et al., (2021) suggested that Pakistan, a conservative Muslim country, has a feminist movement that began during British India and continues today. Feminist organizations were created by prominent political figures but faced opposition during the Afghan War. Pakistani feminists are represented by classical European feminism, the Nisaiism movement, and individual activists. Feminism in Pakistan has the potential to develop and eliminate chauvinist norms in civil and criminal law, paving the way for future Pakistani society (Bakanova, 2021). Hassan et al., (2023) suggested that the slogans of Aurat March 2020 in Pakistan, focusing on the right of freedom of expression. Using UAM Corpus Software and Halliday's ideational meta-functions, the study reveals that the Material Process is most used in slogans indicating actions, while the Relational Process is prominent, suggesting they were meant to create comparisons between entities. The paper aims to explore the objective reasons behind the criticized slogans (Hassan et al., 2023). Imran & Munir (2018) suggested that Pakistan's Islamization of General Zia-ul-Haq (1977-1988) led to religious fundamentalism, affecting women's freedoms and public participation. This led to rigid Islamic Sharia laws and gender-specific policies. Women, for the first time in Pakistan's history, mobilized an activist women's movement to challenge Zia's oppressive laws. This study provides a historical overview of feminist and oppositional developments during Zia's dictatorship, which have since become organs for socio-political change and women's rights (Imran & Munir, 2018). Ul Haq et al., (2021) examines the use of humor in Pakistan as a creative resistance strategy against patriarchal oppression and rising authorities. It examines the Aurat March protests and their reception on social media. The study suggests that humor can help localize the feminist movement and redirect attention towards economic, social, and sexual justice for women and minorities. However, caution is advised to avoid romanticizing humor and negative cultural framing of protesters (ul Haq et al., 2021). Khan, (2023) stated that

the feminist in Muslim societies, that has included Pakistan are increasingly challenging where cultural norms and religious scriptures that restrict the women's rights such as access to the public sphere, educational and financial independence. Also, they have used the cultural and political like the 'Aurat March' and feminist documentary as tools to challenge these restrictive codes (Khan, 2023). Dossa, (2021) stated that the Pakistani feminists have been using the term "pidarshahi" in urban centers since the Aurat march, a shift in the discourse and activism. Though this chapter has used a multi-methods approach that has included participant observation, interviews and data from social media platforms, to analyze the shift in feminist discourse in Pakistan arguing it supports the creation of "brave spaces" for social justice (Dossa, 2021).

## **2.2 Theoretical Framework of the Study**

The knowledge of theories and concepts that are pertinent to the research study is demonstrated by the theoretical framework. An appropriate research guide that draws from current theory and helps to clarify how to analyze research data by connecting methodology, research questions, and literature as a whole (Grant and Osanloo, 2004).



**Figure 2 Theoretical Framework**

**Source: Author's own creation using Figma Design Tool**

### *2.2.1 Maxwell McCombs & Donald Shaw's Theory of Agenda Setting of Mass Communication*

The agenda-setting theory, which Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw first proposed in 1972, explains the links between the importance that media audiences attach to particular concerns and the attention that the mass media place on those topics (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). One of the most significant mass communication techniques in use today is social media. Social media does,

in fact, have a significant influence on the social agenda. The application of the internet in every sphere, from societal development to political branding, is conceivable.

The most active websites of the present digital age tend to be social networking sites, particularly Facebook and Twitter. The agenda setting strategy created by McCombs and Shaw demonstrates how the media is quite effective at predicting what people would think.

Since posts on Twitter circulate quickly among its users, Twitter was able to create its own agenda with its "top trend lists" following the rapid uptake of smartphones in everyday life. Users can discuss or make comments on a hot topic by doing so. If such a matter is newsworthy; readers can find it in the national press or even media on a global scale. In contrast, national press news can be shared on Twitter and can influence or determine the daily agenda of the virtual world.

The Agenda-Setting theory holds paramount relevance in the context of this study. In the contemporary digital age, where social media platforms like Twitter have gained immense prominence as sources of information and public discourse, this theory finds renewed relevance. Social media allows for instant feedback from users, making it valuable. These platforms are open to user contributions. Developments in communication technologies have turned consumers of traditional media into content producers for social agendas (DEMİR SOY & KARAKOÇ E, 2016). People using social media effectively become social media reporters, sharing news not only about their personal lives but also about social issues.

These platforms are instrumental in not only reflecting the public agenda but actively participating in shaping it. The rapid dissemination and amplification of content through hashtags, trends, and discussions on social media are indicative of their potential to set the virtual agenda and influence the broader discourse on topics such as women's rights. By applying the Agenda-Setting theory to this research, we gain a structured framework for examining how social media impacts the prominence of issues and influences public opinion within the context of the Aurat March and its discourse.

### *2.2.2 Theory of Intersectionality by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw*

In feminist theory, intersectionality has taken over as the primary conceptualization of the relationship between the oppressive structures that create our many identities and the positions of power we occupy within them (Carastathis, 2014). The term "intersectionality" was first used by American critical legal race scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in 1989 and has roots in Black feminist activism.

Criticizing the "single-axis framework that is dominant in antidiscrimination law, feminist theory and anti-racist politics" for its focus on the experiences of the most privileged members of subordinate groups, Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality" to describe the double discrimination of racism and sexism faced by Black women (Crenshaw, 1989).

When several categories of social identity interact with one another, different forms of harm, abuse, discrimination, and disadvantage are experienced by people. This is known as intersectionality, and it is an analytical tool that we use to monitor equality and human rights.

The Theory of Intersectionality, as articulated by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, will be highly pertinent in assessing the findings and the research conducted in this study. This theory offers a comprehensive lens through which to explore the nuanced experiences of individuals, particularly in the context of women's rights and activism. By considering the intersecting axes of identity such as gender, race, class, and more, Intersectionality provides a robust framework to understand how different individuals experience and engage with the discourse surrounding Aurat March on social media.

This theory acknowledges that individuals' social identities are complex and multifaceted, and it helps in recognizing how multiple forms of discrimination and privilege intersect to influence their perspectives and experiences. Applying Intersectionality in the analysis of research findings will enable a more in-depth understanding of how social media impacts various subgroups within the women's rights movement, shedding light on the diverse voices and perspectives that contribute to the discourse.

# CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The chapter presents the research methodology that has been employed to explore the role of social media on public opinion w.r.t. to any social movement, specifically focusing on the case study of Aurat March in Pakistan. The chapter outlines the research approach, design, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques. Everything listed above helped the researcher assess his results and draw a conclusion.

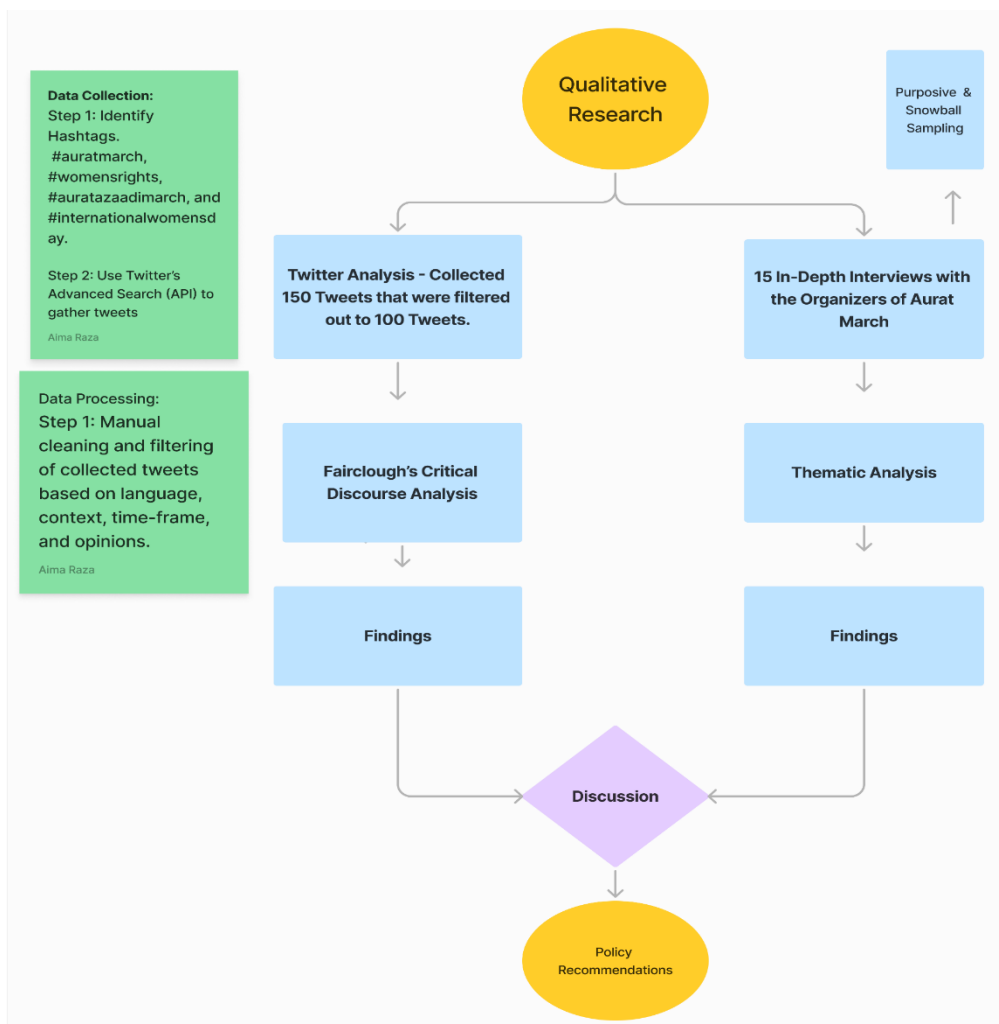


Figure 3 Summary of Research Design

Source: Author's own creation using Figma Design Tool



### **3.1 Research Approach**

An exploratory, descriptive, qualitative approach (EDQ) will be employed which aims at gaining an in-depth understanding of how social media changed the discourse of Aurat March, its impact, results, and challenges faced by the organizers in its implementation. The EDQ approach of research will allow us to look into the already existing public opinion present on social media in the form of comments, likes, shares, etc. Moreover, it'll help to explore reasons behind the success or failure of Aurat March.

### **3.2 Research Design**

The plan of study known as research design directs the investigator in addressing research problems, posing research questions, and verifying findings. The goal of research design is to organize an investigation that aids in identifying variables and the relationships that exist between those variables (Asika, 1991). Exploratory research design is primarily the one chosen to carry out this study on “Aurat March in the Digital Age: Exploring the Intersection of Social Media, Public Opinion, and Scope of Aurat March in Pakistan.” The twitter analysis and population being studied provides information to the researcher aiding in developing this research design. The researcher then used various data presentation tools to summarize and present the data after gathering an excessive amount of information. Following data interpretation, the researcher gained a clear understanding (Orodho, 2003).

This research design is more focused on ‘what and how’ than ‘why’. The study of factors building public opinion on Aurat march that led to changes in the movement’s manifestos and other related factors that have a significant impact on Aurat March’s approach makes this research design appropriate for use.

### **3.3 Data Collection Method**

This study involves both, primary and secondary research. To understand the concept promptly, firstly, the primary research contains the collection of raw data by the researcher him/herself. For instance, when the researcher tends to conduct research on a particular subject that has not been conducted through anybody else is known to be a primary research. Secondly, secondary research is a research method where the researcher obtains the data that has been previously collected by someone else. The focal distinction amid primary and secondary research is whether the research has been conducted earlier or not.

This study involves primary research methods in which data collection is performed through qualitative research methods that are pertinent in understanding the core concern of this research. Strauss and Corbin (1990) refer to qualitative research as “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification”. As this method provides insight and understanding of a problem setting, primary research is acquired to gain knowledge from experts and those who are in charge of making manifestos and implementing them when it comes to Aurat March.

Moreover, the secondary data is also acquired for the purpose of this research through several authentic reports, agenda-setting, and frameworks regarding the impact that public opinion has through social media on any social movement. Furthermore, these findings were then analyzed which also helped in constructing the aims and research questions to conduct this study. This study will focus on understanding the role of public opinion that is present on Twitter regarding Aurat March from 2022 - 2024 that plays a role in disrupting the goals of the movement. By examining

the public discourse, it'll also shed light on the themes or divisions present within the society on Aurat March and their agendas.

### **3.4 Data Collection Procedure**

Targeting and identifying participants who were relevant to my research was crucial during the initial phase of data collection for this study. In the beginning, I began with finding the tweets that showed public opinion of people regarding aurat march and feminism in Pakistan. It was done through Twitter API to filter out the tweets and to put a timeframe on it to easily access the tweets by adding relevant hashtags within a specific timeframe. The Twitter API allows you to manually enter the keywords or hashtags, and time bracket you are looking for data for so it helped a lot. The hashtags that I used were #auratmarch, #womensrights, #auratazaadimarch, and #internationalwomensday. In the end of my twitter analysis, I had collected a lot of 150 tweets that reflected the opinion. However, after filtering out the irrelevant tweets based on the troll accounts, obscene language, or unclear opinions, I was left with a total of 100 tweets. Based on that Twitter discourse and theme fetched out as public opinion, I formed my interview guide. With the assistance of twitter themes, I was eventually able to add to and reorganize the interview guide by changing and adding questions.

Then began the process of data collection through interviews. I started the process right after this year's Aurat March which was on 8th March 2024 to get a raw perspective of the organizers. After my first interview, I tweaked my questionnaire a bit based on the responses I got from my participant. Same process of tweaking continued because each time I interviewed a participant, I got some new finding that I had to include in my questionnaire. Initially I started with purposive sampling by attending the march this year and reaching out to my targeted participant in person. It

was from there that my research switched to snowball sampling as I no longer could access the people so had to use links that I got from my first two respondents.

Conversational interaction with the participants was established with semi-structured open-ended questions as semi-structured interviews are more in-depth and conversational, attempting to grasp the participant's point of view on the given topic. Each interview took around 40-60 minutes, aiding in acquiring a deeper and better knowledge of the participant's experiences and their perspectives on the questions asked.

I learnt how the movement has evolved a lot in these times and while they still hold their ground firmly despite the negative narratives about them, they have majorly changed their strategies. By the end of my thirteenth interview, I saw a pattern of repeated findings. But to be on the safe side, I reached out to two more organizers via zoom call and did a total of fifteen interviews. By the end of the 15 in-depth interviews, I had a plethora of raw information to work on and support my findings.

#### *3.4.1 Twitter Analysis*

Firstly, data was extracted from Twitter using tools for data extraction or direct accessing tool (API), particularly, only the Tweets signifying the Aurat March. This data consisted of the actual text and other necessary accompanying information. The tweets were gathered and filtered for the relevant tweets that reflect the authentic public opinion on the movement from 2022 - 2024.

#### *Inclusion & Exclusion Criteria for Twitter Data*

Inclusion criteria for extracting Twitter data included factors like tweets that were directly related to the Aurat March, tweets published between 2022 and 2024, tweets written in English or Urdu, tweets from active and verified accounts to ensure their credibility.

Similarly, the exclusion criteria were tweets from unrecognized, inactive, or nameless accounts, and tweets that don't reflect any opinion or stance on the movement.

#### *3.4.2 Interviews - Semi-structured*

Interviews are one method of gathering primary data in qualitative research. Small groups of people are typically interviewed to learn more about their opinions on a given problem or circumstance and to gather information about a research subject (Bryman and Bell, 2015). In qualitative research, interviews are thought to be the most effective way to gather detailed information from a variety of rich sources. Open-ended questions are typically used in interviews so that more in-depth information about the topic can be gathered and new questions can be raised. In this sense, I used open-ended, unstructured interview questions in this study. Out of 15, 9 interviews were taken in person and recorded by cell phone and notes were jotted down during the process of interviews and occasionally after the interviews of the key points mentioned by participants during the course of interview. The remaining number of interviews were through a zoom call. The call was recorded with the consent and the notes were also taken during the interviews.

Employing semi-structured interviews acknowledged that each respondent would have different insights that can only be uncovered by asking questions tailored to each individual they interview. The reason to go for a semi-structured interview was because there were some findings from Twitter analysis that needed to be present in the questionnaire. This allowed the researcher

to collect open-ended data and take advantage of opportunities that arise to probe further into respondents' perspectives or experiences about key topics or phenomena.

### **3.5 Sampling**

An assortment of items and observations drawn from the population of interest is called a sample. It is the procedure used to choose a subset of people from a large population (Walliman, 2010). The chosen sample will accurately reflect the characteristics of the total population. This study was carried out through twitter analysis and organizers of Aurat Marcj, allowing for the use of two different types of sampling.

#### *3.5.1 Sampling Technique*

A sample is regarded as a representative sample because it is a small portion of a larger population. Since it is not feasible to include every subset of the intended population in a research study. This study will adopt non-probability sampling, which is a type of qualitative method that is significant for the purpose of this research which revolves around examining and analyzing goals, agendas, and frameworks of Aurat March. Rather than random selection, researchers use Non-probability sampling techniques due to their preference in selecting samples on the basis of subjective judgment (Bhat, 2020).

The following sampling techniques were employed for this study, keeping in mind the aforementioned virtue.

### *3.5.2 Snowball Sampling*

Snowball sampling is also referred to as a chain referral sampling method. It is efficient in reaching populations that are reached due to their perceived socio-economic and legal status in society (Atkinson and Flint, 1998). The technique relies on the identification of the initial participants and their networks.

### *3.5.3 Purposive Sampling*

In qualitative research, purposive sampling is selected when the researcher aims to get in-depth information regarding a particular phenomenon rather than giving statistical reasoning. A subset of purposive sampling, an expert sampling will also be incorporated in order to collect information based on the understanding and expertise of the participants/or respondents.

### *3.5.4 Sampling Size*

In the first phase of the research, that was Twitter analysis, the sample size was to collect up to 150 tweets. Out of the total number of the tweets, 100 were filtered out that were serving the purpose of the research.

The second phase included the participants that were the organizers of Aurat March who have been involved in formulating the Manifestos. The sample size of these in-depth interviews was 15. Although a saturation point was reached after the 13th interviewer, however, the research wanted to continue to eliminate any doubts. These participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling. Questions were drafted in a semi-structured way for the interview - which were important for analyzing the role of Aurat March when it comes to women's rights - after analyzing the tweets and public opinion available on Twitter.

The interviews were conducted with the social feminists who actively take part in designing the goals and agendas of Aurat March every year purposely selected. The basic purpose has been to attain information and knowledge from these experts and to stipulate how the goals have changed over time due to the divided public opinion on social media.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

In recent years, qualitative text and discourse analysis (QTDA) is gaining popularity as a methodological framework because of the diversity of its approaches. Using thematic analysis and discourse analysis in combination assists the researchers to gain a clearer understanding between the levels of interpretation of results. On one side we have “text as discourse” and on the other we have “data as themes.” (Alejandro and Zhao, 2023). Since this study also has two sets of data, hence, QTDA is the methodological framework of data analysis employed.

#### *3.6.1 Twitter - Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)*

Firstly, data will be extracted from Twitter using tools for data extraction or direct accessing tool (API), particularly, only the Tweets with an opinion on Aurat March. Secondly, CDA will be employed to understand, describe, interpret, and explain the relation between language, social realities, and power dynamics found in the sample of the collected tweets. Data collection method is going to be qualitative in nature for this purpose, the data chalked out from tweets is going to be categorized and coded into different themes based on the public perception of Aurat March and its representation on social media. CDA has established that there exists a solid relationship between power, ideology, and the language used. Along with how the world is shown in textual form and how a person thinks about the world. (Baig et al., 2020, p. 70).



### *3.6.2 Framework Analysis*

Tweets have been analyzed step by step on the basis of Fairclough's critical discourse analysis. The analysis is in terms of ideological representation (micro-level), discourse practice (meso-level), and socio-cultural analysis (macro-level) under this model. The tweets and the replies to the tweets are either in favor of the movement of Aurat March as it advocates women's rights in Pakistan or against the movement on the basis of religion being used as a tool. Another frequent trend observed in tweets was the politicization of Aurat March.

### *3.6.3 Locate Data Sources*

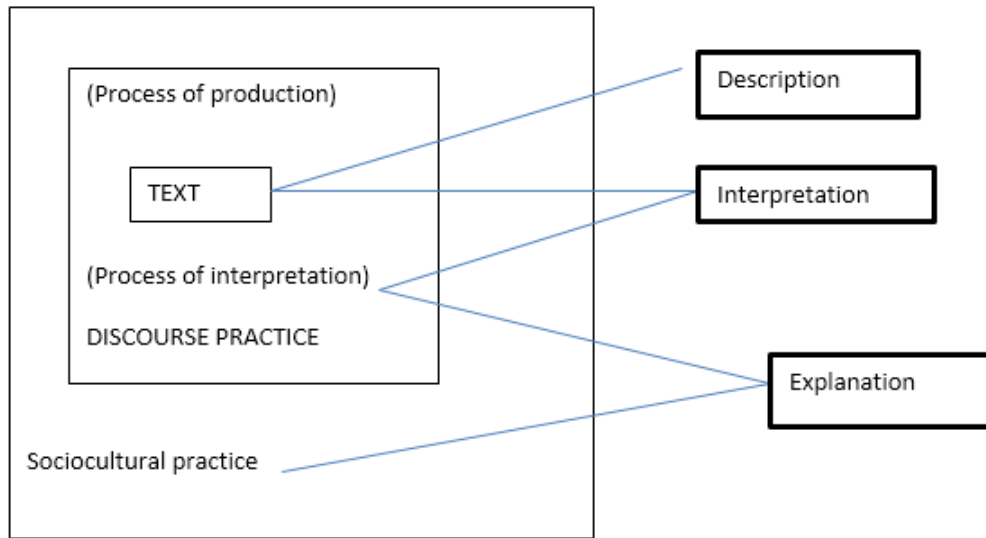
The tweets were collected using popular hashtags that have been trending in 2024's Aurat March. The hashtags were #auratmarch, #womensrights, #auratazaadimarch, and #internationalwomensday. The tweets were gathered manually by using Twitter's Advanced Search by adjusting the filters, keywords, and time frame.

### *3.6.4 Identify Overarching Themes*

The collected tweets were closely examined to identify the elements of material. For instance, overlapping words, sentiment, ideology, opinion, sentences, and overall structure. Those tweets were then related to the patterns and themes relevant to the research.

### *3.6.5 Analyze Data on Different Levels*

Fairclough's 3D analysis framework allows the researcher to analyze data on three levels. These levels are as ideological text (micro-level), discourse (meso level), and sociocultural analysis (macro-level) (Baig et al., 2020). In this case, the language, social reality, and power dynamics of the tweets was analyzed on the ideological, discourse, and socio-cultural level.



**Figure 4 Fairclough's three-dimensional model**

**Source: Retrieved from Critical discourse analysis: the critical study of language (Fairclough, 1995).**

### *3.6.6 Interpretation of Data*

Based on the language of the tweet, sentiment expressed, and contextual knowledge, the themes were analyzed and interpreted.

### **3.7 Interviews - Thematic Analysis**

Thematic analysis is a popular and primary method for data analysis in qualitative research studies, which is why I chose it for my own qualitative data analysis. This approach to data analysis is commonly used in qualitative research and aids in the analysis process (Boyatzid, 1998). Finding themes in your data, characterizing them, labeling them, organizing them, analyzing them, and providing a detailed report of those themes and patterns in your research paper are the objectives of using theme analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006). According to Fereday and Cochrane (2006), there are two methods for conducting a thematic analysis of the data: deductive and inductive. When conducting a theoretical inductive analysis, the researcher attempts to assign codes to the data rather than trying to fit it into an existing coding frame.

Rich descriptions of the data that were appropriate for the research questions were obtained as a result of this analysis, and the coding process allowed the research questions to change. Deductive analysis of the data is an additional method of analysis. This approach results in a less detailed description of the data as a whole, but it provides a rich and detailed description of a particular aspect of the data for a given research question (Braun and Clark, 2006). In order to analyze the data thematically for this study, I have chosen to generate various codes from the data using an inductive approach. This method helps identify various themes from earlier interviews and body of knowledge that are relevant to the main research question(s).

#### *3.7.1 Framework Analysis*

It is possible to generate themes in qualitative data analysis using a variety of analytical tools. Content analysis and framework analysis are two of these tools. In this study, framework analysis—a methodical approach to theme generation—was used to generate themes. The

following are the procedural steps that I went through in this research in order to construct the thematic framework.

### *3.7.2 Transcription*

Mayring (2014) defines transcription as the act of putting a person's spoken words into a textual representation. Transcribing essentially involves turning spoken words and behavioral language into a textual representation. There are several approaches to data transcription, including employing various tools for qualitative data analysis. In qualitative research, transcription is typically written verbatim, or word for word, according to Davidson (2009).

The goal of this study was to create a logical text that captured the various points of view that participants had to offer in creative, straightforward language free from situational complexities (dialectics and non-vocal discourse). It facilitates the researcher's content creation and ultimate conclusion.

### *3.7.3 Familiarization*

Qualitative data can be gathered in a number of ways, including through discussions, documents, audio or video recordings, observational notes, interviews, and more. It is crucial for researchers to understand every single facet of the data they have gathered. Through fieldwork and listening to recordings, researchers learn about the data they have gathered and can create themes from important concepts. I have read every interview in writing at least twice to become familiar with it, and I have paid close attention to the recordings of the interviews. As recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006), data should be carefully repeated again and again in order to gain a deeper understanding and meaning of the data, which is why I have actively repeated the data

numerous times. In addition, as a next step, I thoroughly reviewed the literature, which enabled me to come up with possible themes for my data.

#### *3.7.4 Indexing and Coding*

Once a researcher is familiar with the collected data, he or she can determine what aspects of the data are interesting (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The next step, known as indexing, involves assigning initial codes to data and labeling it with these codes. Data is arranged into some significant conceptual groupings through an analytical process called coding (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Whether the themes originate from theory, or the data will determine this. There are two methods for doing the coding process: manually or with the aid of software. I manually coded the data for the current investigation. The researcher used line-by-line coding for this study, paying close attention to each sentence and line to enable the transcript to paint a detailed picture. The researcher preferred to analyze themes and codes by hand rather than with a computer or any other software analysis tool. Field notes and transcripts were used to create specific codes. A few key points were found in the text and underlined using various colors. Then, the similarity of the same codes was examined, which narrowed them down to broader codes.

#### *3.7.5 Memo Writing*

Prewriting or free writing are terms used to describe memo writing. It is frequently advised to researchers to record memos. In order to provide readers with specific information about their study, researchers typically jot down their thoughts as they code and characterize themes (Strauss, 1987). I had been writing memos since the very beginning of my research, all the way up to the point where I had to identify and describe themes.

### *3.7.6 Identifying and Characterizing Themes*

A theme in qualitative research is an idea that encapsulates a significant aspect of the data that is appropriate for the research questions. The researcher's goal after coding should be to distinguish between various codes and translate those codes into distinct themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Within data, a theme denotes a response or meaning. The identification and characterization of the theme process was carried out in this research study from the beginning stages of data collection to the end stages of the investigation. Reading the transcript at first assisted in coming up with a few possible themes, and I began writing these themes down until the finished paper. Every code had its own thematic chart, which included both the primary and secondary codes. The transcribed data was presented in distinct columns that were arranged according to the codes. Following that, data reduction techniques were applied to reduce the amount of data from each column to the most important keywords. These keywords produced a thorough comprehension of the data, which aided in the creation of thematic categories. A number of codes were condensed into six to eight primary themes. An earlier memo that discussed the connections between various themes on thematic structure identified and described several thematic categories. Only a few significant themes have been chosen from the thematic structure and are thoroughly discussed in the study's finding and discussion chapters.

### **3.8 Ethical Considerations**

This research was conducted with strict adherence to ethical considerations. The names and handles mentioned in tweets selected were blurred out. Every participant received information about the goal of the study, the procedure for gathering data, and the use of their data. They also learned that their interviews would be recorded solely for research purposes. Every piece of data

gathered from the participants was kept private. Participants' privacy will be upheld while gathering data. The study's interviews were voluntary, and participants were free to discontinue participation at any point while it was being conducted.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Aurat March, which started in 2018 in Pakistan, is essential as it provides an opportunity to push for women's rights and to discuss issues concerning gender violence. The study focuses on social media's role in generating social sentiment on the Aurat March, primarily through Twitter. In this way, by comparing tweets with the transcriptions from the interviews conducted with the march organizers, we aim to establish how online talk engages with the planning of the movement.

It adopts thematic analysis of interviews and tweets as part of the qualitative tradition of data analysis and blends it with minimalistic content analysis to quantify public sentiment. Consequently, this paradigmatic approach enables a thorough appreciation of how social media impacts public opinion and how strategy evolves in the Aurat March context.

### 4.1 Findings from Twitter

**Table 1 Findings of Twitter Discourse Analysis**

Themes	Tweets	Linguistic Elements	Ideological Representation	Discourse Practice	Socio-cultural analysis
1. Backlash on Aurat March on the basis of Religion	<i>“One cant find this type of march on women day in any country. Such absolute freedom is not available to men women of any country. Still constantly playing the aurat (march) card to further strengthen their anti islam</i>	<p>“Mera jism Allah ki marzi”</p> <p>“Aurat March ke naam pe Aurat zaat ki barbaadi”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">بيہودہ عورت"</p> <p>(Behuda march)”</p>	Nationalist Islamism	Aurat March	Reinforcing traditional gender roles and adhering social control on women by using religion as a tool.



	<p>agenda.”</p> <p><i>“I demand that aurat march rename their movement to:</i></p> <p><b>“ANTI ISLAM PRO LGBTQ+ MARCH”</b></p> <p><i>Since their name is deceptive and misleads poor women into believing that it is about them while it is not.”</i></p> <p><i>“Aurat March has no control over the women in the March.. SOME women.. I repeat SOME women chant anti Islam slogans, not all. So Aurat March admins should issue apology on their behalf or admit they are not part of us.”</i></p> <p><i>“Malala the Fraudan and her ties to Western agencies, Qadiyanis and Anti-Islam</i></p>	<p>“Sir per dupatta nahi aur haqooq mang rahi hain”</p>			
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	<p><i>cults have been completely exposed in this video. The only support Malala has is from her fellow western funded puppets like Aurat Fraud March &amp; Liberandus who are all agents of destruction in □□ ”</i></p> <p><i>“Qadri urges PM #ImranKhan to ban ‘anti-#Islam slogans’ during ‘Aurat March’</i></p> <p><i>“My name is Haaya Imbisat and I strongly condemn anti Islam and anti Pakistan activities of Aurat March. I demand govt @ImranKhanP TI to #BanAuratMarch and investigate their foreign linkages and funding.”</i></p>				
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<p>2. Support of Aurat March in the name of Feminism</p>	<p><i>“There are so many incredible women talking about the Aurat March on Twitter right now, it's worth your time to listen, guys. Those who are fighting for their rights should be applauded!”</i></p> <p><i>“Neelam Hussain contextualises the #AuratMarch within the longer history of women's rights activism in Pakistan and analyses how the movement is shifting in terms of language and approach and what might be behind the most recent backlash.”</i></p> <p><i>“Aurat March na hua, purge hogaya everyone is showing their real selves by bashing these</i></p>	<p>“Aurat March demands basic human rights”</p> <p>“Aurat March is critical for future democracy of Pakistan”</p>	<p>Feminism, social justice, inclusivity</p>	<p>Aurat March</p>	<p>Advocating women's rights, highlighting the social inequalities, and challenging traditional gender roles.</p>
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	<p><i>people asking for basic human rights. It's like Apartheid, but for women.”</i></p> <p><i>“#Auratmarch will decide Pakistan's future. Aurat march is not only critical for women rights but also for the future of democracy in #Pakistan”</i></p>				
3. Politicization of the March	<p><i>“We condemn the political scircus that has erupted due to the fragile masculine ego of a person who has sabotaged democratic processes just to save the perception of his individuality and to stage a dirty manoeuvre for his comeback to power.”</i></p> <p><i>“another US funded fraud feminist comes</i></p>	<p>کپتان عمران خان کی حکومت کا زبردست ایکشن پاکستان میں ہم جنس پرستی کی تمام تنظیموں پر حکومت نے پابندی عائد (Great action of captain Imran Khan's government The government banned all homosexual</p>	Political Affiliation with a party	Aurat March	Under the disguise of Pakistani politics, the essence of the march seems to have been lost.

	<p><i>out to defend their pay master in name of women rights</i></p> <p><i>sharm b nahi aati na america k ghulam”</i></p> <p><i>“At least 400 booked for disrupting Women's Rights March in Islamabad</i></p> <p><i>400 members of various religious parties, including 11 religious scholars, were booked on Monday for pelting stones and attempting to disrupt the march.”</i></p> <p><i>“Chairman PPP, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari extends his support to Aurat March activists, our right to peaceful demonstrations and further states that the Islamabad district</i></p>	<p>organizations in Pakistan)</p> <p>“Bushra Bibi k liye kahan hai aurat march, ab kahan gaye women’s rights”</p> <p>(Where is the Aurat march now for Bushra Bibi? Where did women’s rights go)</p>			
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	<i>administration should not cause any hindrances in our way!"</i>				
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Source: Author's own creation

#### 4.1.1 Demographic Representation of Tweets

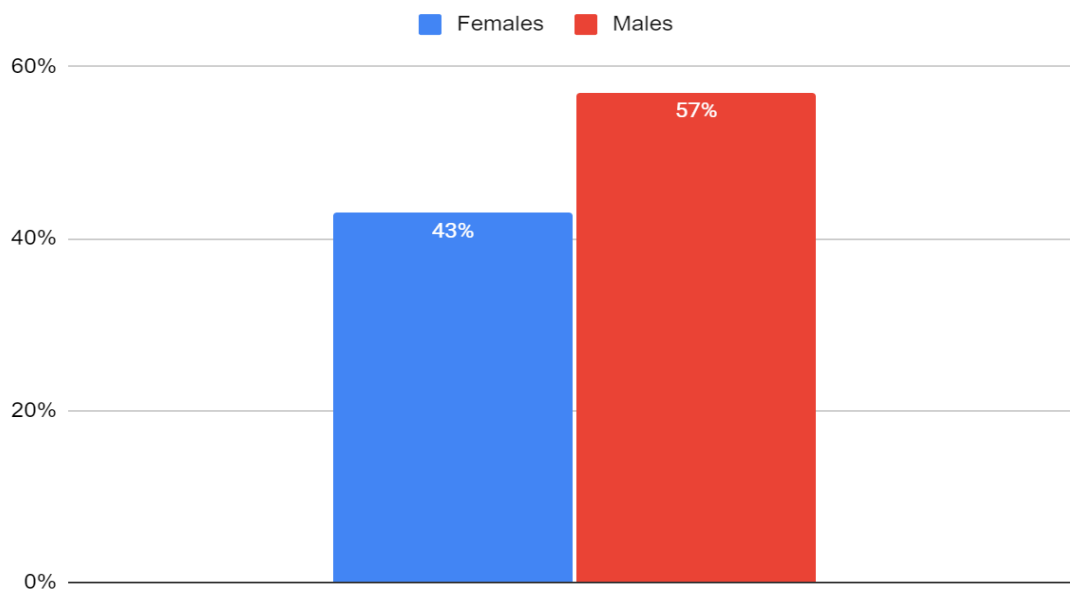
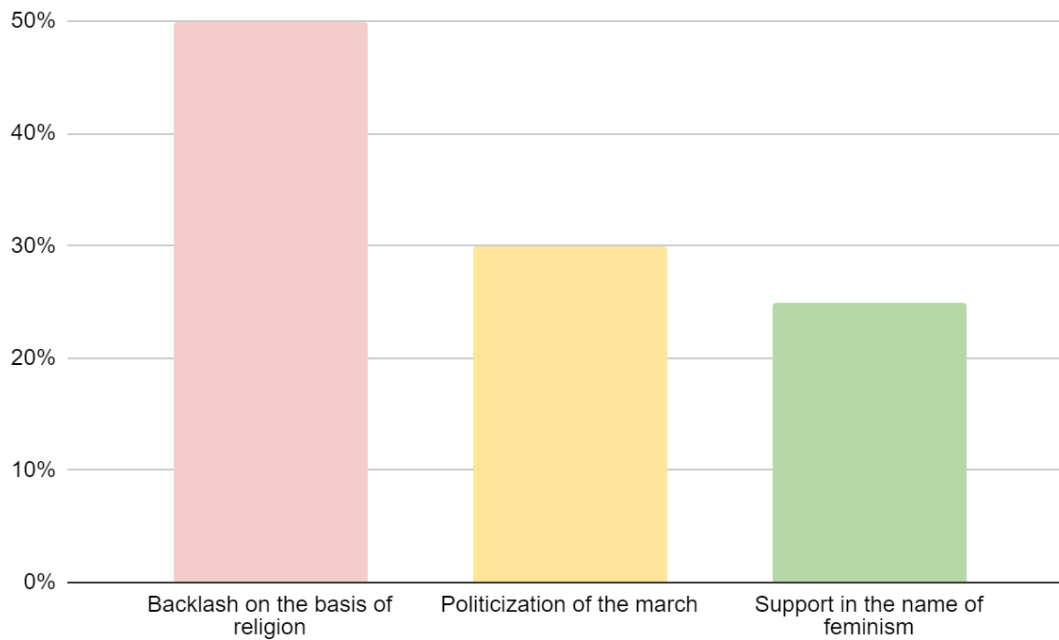


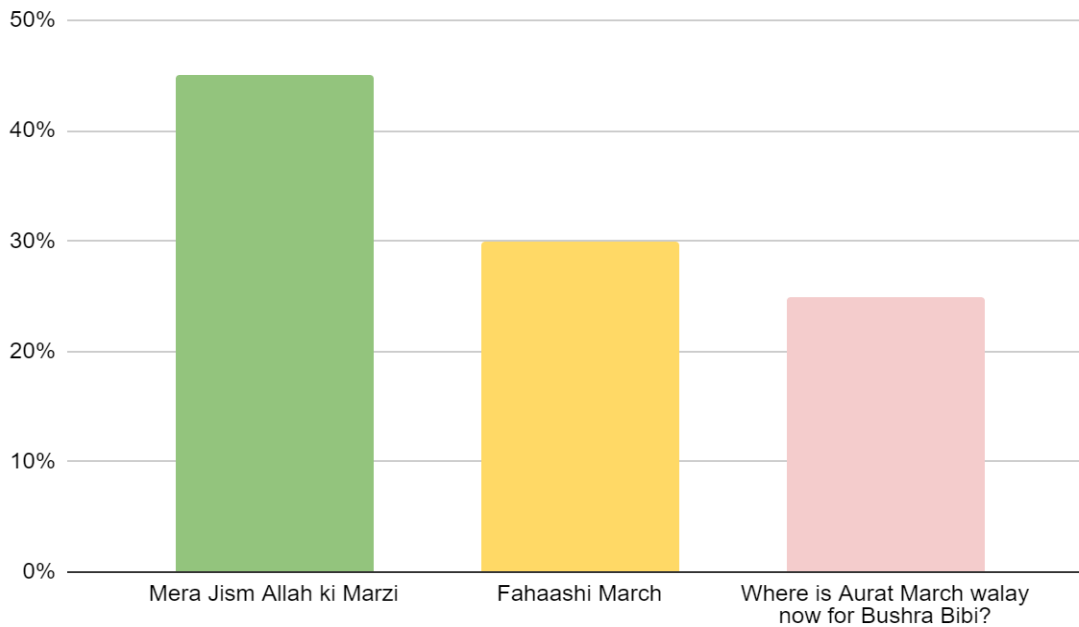
Figure 5 Tweets analysis on the basis of Gender of the user

Source: Author's own creation



**Figure 6 Percentage of the repeated themes seen in Tweets**

**Source: Author's own creation**



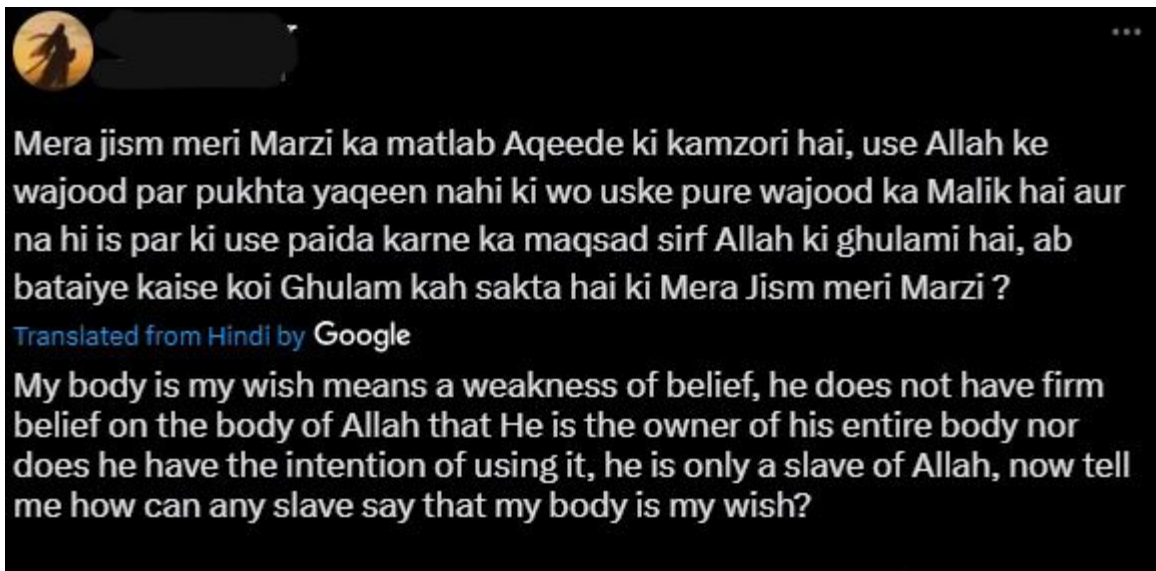
**Figure 7 Percentage of repeated Linguistic Elements seen in Tweets**

**Source: Authors own creation**

#### 4.1.2 Theme 1: Backlash on Aurat March on the basis of Religion

Looking at the main reasons that people oppose Aurat March, it is possible to argue that a significant part of them do not support the march because they want to uphold the conservative standards. They see the march as anti-Islam or a foreign-funded move that is here to disrupt the Islamic values and family system. Under the ideological framework of “Nationalist Islamism,” Aurat March is nothing more than a foreign-funded, anti-Islamic, anti-state, and blasphemous movement led by women who have ties with the West.

Under the theme “Backlash on Aurat march on the basis of Religion” one of the most powerful and radical linguistic elements was the tweets that supported the idea “*Mera jism Allah ki Marzi*” in response to the original placard that was “Mera jism meri marzi.” The socio-cultural analysis of this theme reinforces traditional gender roles and adheres to social control on women by using religion as a tool.



**Figure 8**

**Source: Twitter**





**Figure 9**

**Source: Twitter**

A common perception seen among the majority of the tweets was that Islam has already given women all necessary rights and Pakistan was founded in the name of Islam, so conducting such a March is going against Allah. These thoughts are also supported by renowned religious scholars and members of political parties like Jamaat-i-Islami women's wing. Case in point, it was seen in one of the talk shows of a local channel that has over 11 million subscribers, the religious scholar rhetorically asks the Aurat March organizers who do they demand freedom from? Freedom from their parents, their husbands, their brothers, or the state? (SAMAA TV, 2020).

Another frequent narrative that stood out for its linguistic elements was "*Sir per dupatta nahi aur haqooq mang rahi hain.*" (There's no scarf on her head and she is asking for her rights). The public is sarcastically implying that if a woman isn't covering her head, she isn't allowed to demand any rights. The hashtags and plus signs that follow the statement show that the person is abusing the women who demand rights without covering their heads, hence, he has written it in censored form.

The importance of religion is felt greatly as this is a Muslim country and religious beliefs always influence the people's opinions. In particular, religion to many people is seemingly united with the secular world, with most of its teaching embraced as part of the culture or civilization. The critics of the Aurat March tend to use some religious principles to condemn the march's goals as anti-Islamic. These critics argue that whatever the rights and responsibilities of women as described in religious scripture are, should remain unchanged.

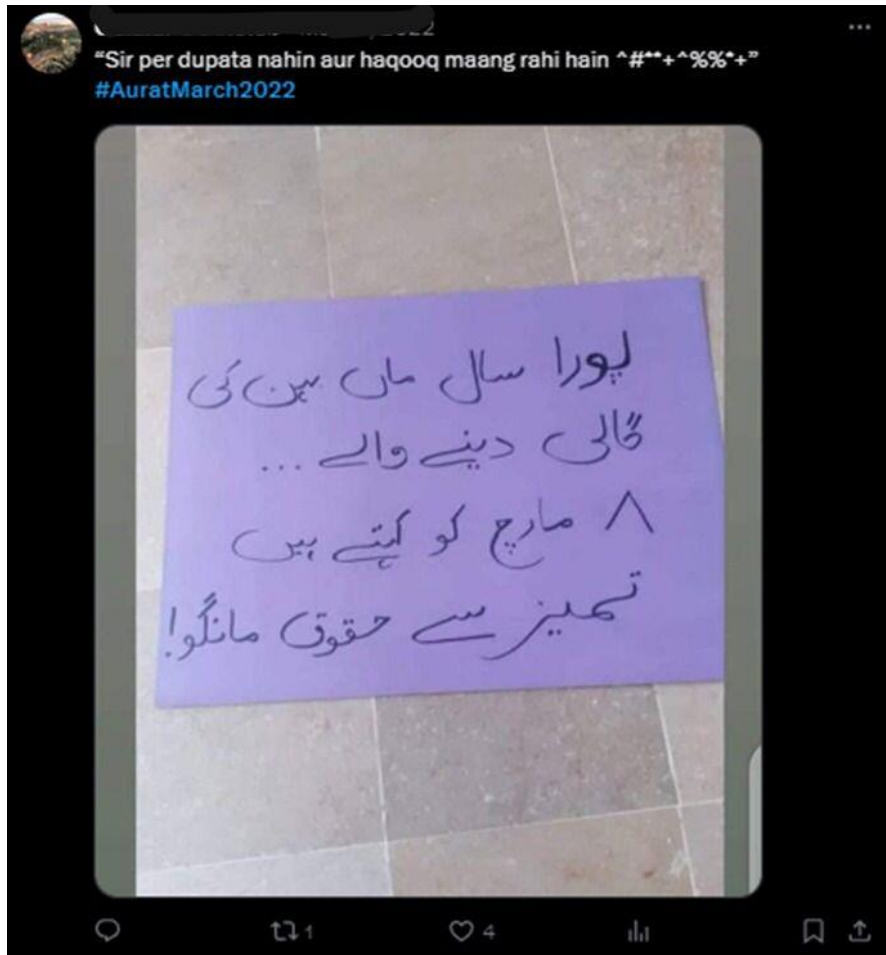


Figure 10

Source: Twitter

These kinds of tweets often express anxiety about the liberalization of norms, and the modern breakdown of the family unit. For instance, there is often a negative reaction saying that desecrating Aurat March is leading women astray with career goals instead of focusing on family responsibility as the enemy of the state supposes that it destabilizes the family and society. A particular message might say, “AURAT MARCH IS A SCAM !!#AuratMarch,” which sums up the idea of toppling traditional gender roles resulting in the disruption of family structures and emphasis on adopting a Fatimi Style in God’s limits.



Figure 11

Source: Twitter

Many tweets under the religious category use the aspects of the religion that prohibit the dressing code and assert that women should dress a certain way and men should dress a certain

way. For instance, the text of a tweet “Seeing these pictures, the heart is crying tears of blood because the country of Pakistan was created based on an Islamic Ideology.” The ideas conveyed in such remarks are that women’s rights activism is inappropriate if it is done in ways that are deemed to be against religious norms and standards.



**Figure 12**

**Source: Twitter**

Opposition to the Aurat March has been based on the grounds that it supports western culture that is alien to Pakistan society. This point of view presents the movement as a force that contributes foreign values that undermine the nation’s integrity and independence.

Self-righteous political and religious leaders have also criticized Aurat March as wanting to turn society upside down by attempting to change norms and turn on authorities. They are against this view to assert that fighting for women rights in what seems to be aggressive and rebellious

manner can cause social disorder and erosion of moral standards. It frequently paints the Aurat March with bullish characteristics and paints it as somewhat of a radical political front that is divorced from the ordinary Pakistani individual.

Taking the Aurat March as an example, it is possible to outline cultural and religious prejudice as well as conservative attitudes to women as the main reasons for the protesting Pakistani women's opposition. Various social norms and religious beliefs, and more often, the conservatives comprise a section of the society that reacts to the movement hostilely. To properly analyze the opinions people have about Aurat March, it is very important to comprehend these viewpoints comprehensively.

Religious beliefs add to this opposition in the following ways: When Islam is counted as a primary component of a society, any movement which seems to act against this religion is heavily punished. Religious sentiments have been used to condemn the Aurat March where the religious precepts argue against the objectives of the march influencing the public against it.

#### *4.1.2 Theme 2: Support of Aurat March in the name of Feminism*

The sentiment of support and solidarity is well highlighted in the sample of tweets analyzed towards Aurat March as it captured a portion of the positive sentiments that support the cause behind the march. This theme captures the images that depict the dissemination of the empowerment messages, the call for togetherness regardless of difference, and the central idea of women's rights. The analysis of the linguistic elements present under this theme highlights the ideas like "Aurat March demands basic human rights."

Under the ideological framework of this particular theme that demands feminism, women’s rights, and social justice in a country like Pakistan, it is usually encouraging that women who are participating in the march are strong, powerful and courageous beings. Statements like; “*Cheers to the woman who inspire, empower and lead everyday*” “#AuratMarch” perfectly illustrates how social media users help uplift women who demand their rights. Such endorsement from the public is important, especially considering that it creates a favorable atmosphere that encourages the female gender to forward the fight for equality and justice. However, it is important to note that a total of only 10% tweets constitute these messages of hope and solidarity.



Figure 13

Source: Twitter



The Aurat March is a cross-cultural women’s protest since women of all ethnicities, color, and backgrounds came together. Tweets within this theme re-echo the essence of the unity while standing for women’s rights irrespective of the difference in individual backgrounds. For example, the tweets like *“This year’s #AuratMarch is dedicated to Palestinian and Baloch women”*.



**Figure 14**

**Source: Twitter**

The support also appears to capture the spirit of the Aurat March since it seeks to include all genders. The diaspora community is often commented agitating for the need for a movement to acknowledge all women. Supporting messages that include bringing the voice of the minority such as people in the LGBTQ+ community, women in the rural areas and women with different forms of disability show that the movement accepts all forms of womanhood. This inclusiveness enhances the movement since it is dealing with the numerous issues affecting various groups of women.



Figure 15

Source: Twitter



Figure 16

Source: Twitter



This analysis of the tweets shows that Aurat March has rallied women of different ages as well as different genders to get together and support each other. The positive sentiments and tone of support evident in these tweets reflect that Aurat March and its advocates are rising up for women's rights in Pakistan. Under the socio-cultural framework, the supporters of the march are highlighting the social inequalities, challenging traditional gender roles, and promoting intersectionality.

#### *4.1.3 Theme 3: Politicization of Aurat March*

Despite not having any official statements by the political parties of Pakistan, the second most tweets were indicating a political side given to the movement. Associating political parties or political figures with the movement has been damaging for the Aurat march till date. Under the ideological framework, the political affiliation of the movement with a certain party became the premise of distasteful tweets that have been circulating under the name of PTI, PML-N, or Jamaat-i-Islami.

In 2022, there was a surge in tweets that reflected an opinion of affiliation with the political party. For example, that year, the vote of no confidence happened against the former Prime Minister, Imran Khan. There were opinions like “We condemn the political circus that has erupted due to the fragile masculine ego of a person who has sabotaged democratic processes just to save the perception of his individuality and to stage a dirty maneuver for his comeback to power.”

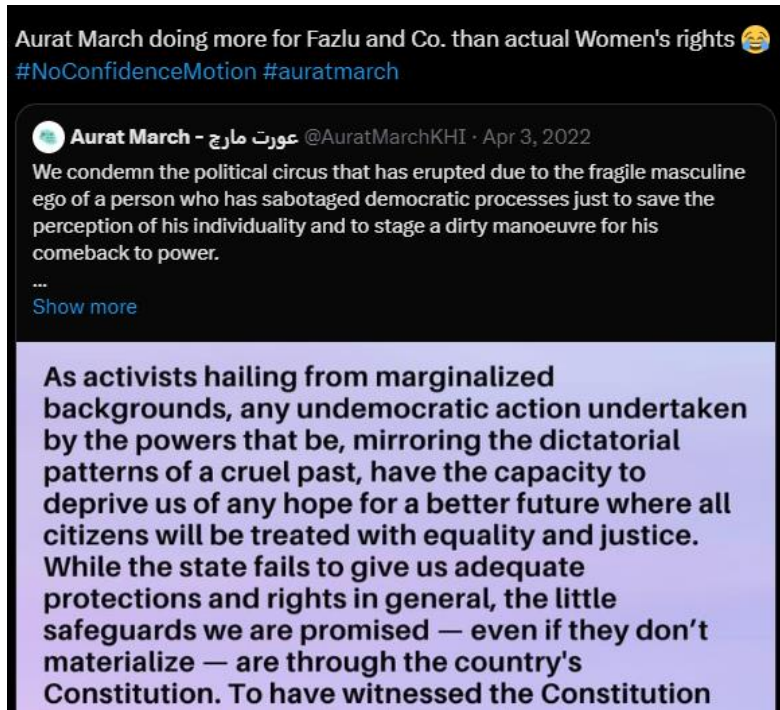


Figure 17

Source: Twitter

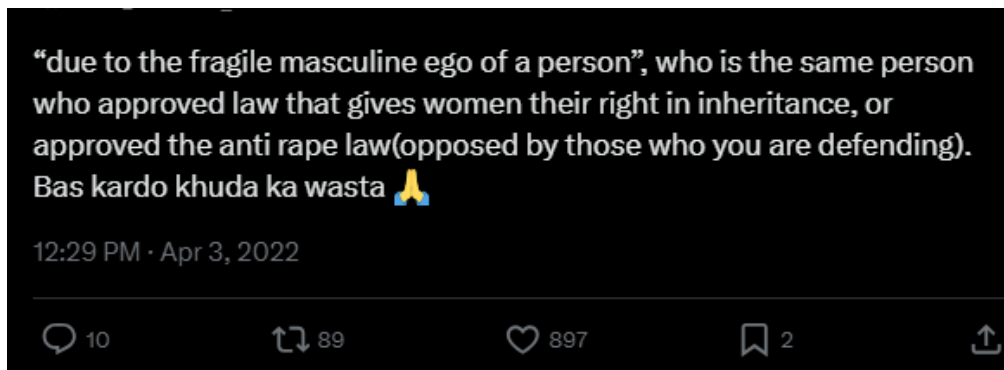


Figure 18

Source: Twitter

Before that incident, there had been repeated tweets through the official platform of Aurat March and through masses too that indicated that Aurat March and PTI, especially Imran Khan were never on the same page. Hence, there was massive lobbying. Considering the fan following Imran Khan has and his radical views about Islamic women, most people were seen siding with him and dissing the entire movement on behalf of that.



**Figure 19**

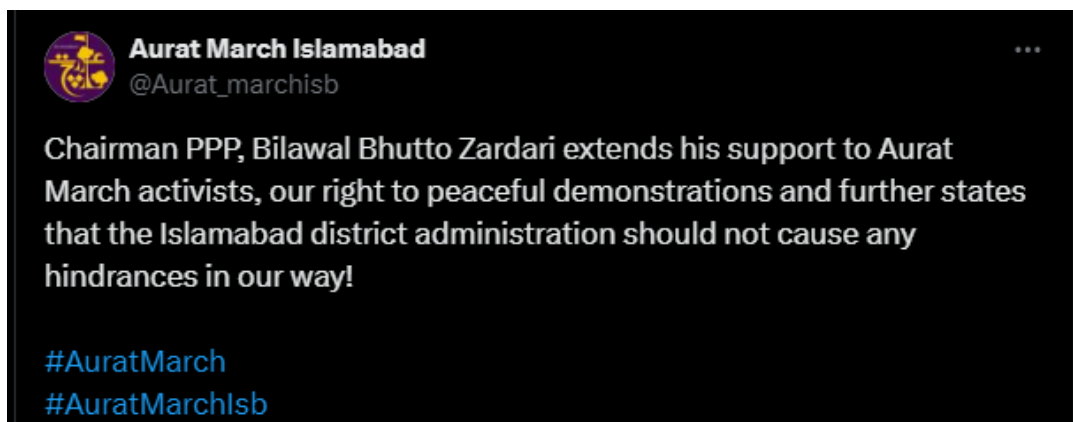
**Source: Twitter**

Under the socio-cultural framework, the tweets reflected that under the disguise of Pakistani politics, the essence of the march seems to have been lost as there is lobbying of political parties who either support the march or they don't. In 2023 and 2024, there were many tweets criticizing the Aurat March for not speaking up on unfair allegations against Bushra Bibi (wife of Imran Khan). That case triggered many debates as Aurat March was blamed of being pro-PPP because of their open appreciation for Bilawal Bhutto on acknowledging the efforts of these women.



**Figure 20**

**Source: Twitter**



**Figure 21**

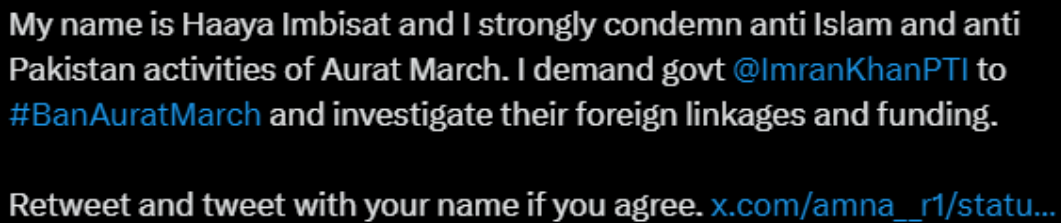
**Source: Twitter**

The linguistic elements present under this theme highlight the grouping between the political parties, public opinion, and Aurat March. The language used in tweets like “*Bushra Bibi k liye*

*kahan hai aurat march, ab kahan gaye women's rights (Where is the Aurat march now for Bushra Bibi? Where did women's rights go)*” explicitly shows that the public thinks that a social movement like Aurat March is picking its sides by not speaking about the rights of the former first lady.

The Aurat March like any other protest or march for women's rights and against gender Bias in Pakistan has not been void of controversies. Another repeated element that was observed in the linguistics of the tweets was ” کپتان عمران خان کی حکومت کا زبردست ایکشن پاکستان میں ہم جنس پرستی کی تمام تنظیموں پر حکومت نے پابندی عائد۔ ” (Great action of captain Imran Khan's government. The government banned all homosexual organizations in Pakistan).” Many tweets were analyzed appreciating the former PM, Imran Khan for being vocal about not supporting homosexuality and banning such activities that were being promoted by the Aurat March.

The theme also highlighted how there was a campaign with unlimited tweets from real accounts of people with a similar script on urging Imran Khan to ban Aurat March. The politicization of Aurat March has gone too far and is doing a direct damage to the movement in a politically charged country like Pakistan.



My name is Haaya Imbisat and I strongly condemn anti Islam and anti Pakistan activities of Aurat March. I demand govt @ImranKhanPTI to #BanAuratMarch and investigate their foreign linkages and funding.  
Retweet and tweet with your name if you agree. [x.com/amna\\_r1/statu...](https://x.com/amna_r1/status...)

Figure 22

Source: Twitter

## 4.2 Findings from Interviews

**Table 2 Findings from the Interviews**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Sub-Themes</b>	<b>Analysis</b>
1. Massive Disconnect between public and Aurat March	Misunderstanding of Aurat March's goals	Dissecting the gap between people and Aurat March goals due to patriarchal norms
2. Use of <i>Gender</i> as a Political Tool	Impact of media coverage in shaping the public opinion	The usage of female gender as a political tool to achieve favorable results
3. Strategic Shifting & Highlighting of manifestos	Adapting Strategies, Communication Adjustments	Evolving strategies to improve effectiveness. Highlighting critical issues to gain support
4. Introducing Multi-dimensional Approach	Mobilization, Refining of messaging by simplification of goals	Strengthening the movement by multi-pronged approach to gain wider acceptance
5. Ensuring Inclusivity & Intersectionality	Solidarity, Inclusive Efforts	Expanding reach through inclusive strategies

**Source: Authors own creation**

#### *4.2.1 Theme 1: Massive Disconnect between public and Aurat March*

The role of a woman in Pakistan's society is very limited and concealed in the name of "honour" and "respect." Most of the women follow religious and cultural values so they don't really oppose the gender roles they have been assigned for years.

Every year, the Aurat March receives harsh criticism not only from the general public but also from the religious clerics of the country. While it is true that the achievements of the movement have led to many laws and policies that support women, it has also been a daunting task for women activists to stand their ground due to the intense allegations and negative narratives surrounding them. In 1983, females came out to protest against Zia ul Haq's fatwas and Law of Evidence in Lahore had to face things like invalidating their marriages or declaring their biological children illegitimate, labelling them as kafirs, agents of international agencies, elitist, and even prostitutes (Hussain, 2019). Sadly, even after decades nothing has changed.

The responses recorded with the organizers of Aurat March and the twitter discourse analysis highlights a massive disconnect between the people of Pakistan and those who support Aurat March. While the general public is a staunch believer that the marchers are here to disrupt Islamic values and the family system of Pakistan, the Aurat March supporters think they are the real victims because they've been through a lot for the last five years. One of my respondents said:

**Punjrush:** "It can be very draining. Nobody finds pleasure in hearing verbal abuse and disgusting things but you know how common it is especially on a platform like Twitter. I genuinely feel the patriarchy isn't just a third world problem, It is universally so deep-rooted and you will get an idea of this by one incident. Sometime ago, a cult sort of following started to abuse the organizers who had

public accounts. They used to hear things like “Chaklay pe ja kar beth ” (Go sit in a brothel) or swearing at their families with disgusting things, calling out names I cannot mention here. And when those girls reported these comments, in return Twitter decided to overshadow the accounts of those people for insufficient proof.”

It is very much plausible that the gap between the movement’s stated goals and the public perception arose from the explicit and straightforward slogans raised in the initial years of Aurat March. The manifesto may be far from reality or complicated in a way that the masses feel unable to relate to all the points mentioned in it. Due to the lack of awareness in our society, some of these slogans like “Mera Jism meri marzi” were not taken well by the audience, hence resulting in intense backlash to an extent where this poster still keeps coming back even in 2024. Upon asking about the common criticisms seen by the organizers on Twitter, one of the participants responded:

**Ilma:** “Ever since there was a placard “Mera jism meri marzi” on social media that wasn’t even from the aurat march. It was a volunteer participant who was trans and the reason to raise such a slogan was to give trans people autonomy over their body. That is not just limited to trans but women and other minorities too. People have not been well about the aurat march after that. They find a reason to criticize it every year.”

Another responded noted:

**Zainab:** “There is a visible gap sometimes between our messaging and public understanding. Some people see Aurat March as a One-Dimensional event, focusing solely on controversial slogans. For example, one of the very first and controversial slogans has been “Mera Jism Meri Marzi ” but a fun fact about it is



that it was brought in by some volunteers in their personal capacity so aurat march didn't come up with it. Secondly, the public has sexualized that placard so much that we have started avoiding to use it in the following years despite being something that stands true till date.”

While there have been some respondents who claimed there has been an increase in the support they have gotten in the last two years. However, the Twitter analysis showed that only 10% responses out of 100 tweets supported the march. To support the claim, one of the respondents said:

**Nishat:** “I would say like I just say that in 2019 or 2020 it was more about questioning the need to come out. Why this why that. Now it is that people sit and wait, and when it happens, they are ready to bash so it has evolved. A lot of people have started supporting us too because a lot of university going men and women have recently joined our team. It has become a learning process for them too and they can relate to it too now. This is something I experienced personally. I used to see girls in my circle saying what's the need of this in 2020 but now they understand the cause. I would say it is because of our consistent messaging and efforts. Now they have started to get the idea. Initially it was only bashing but now if we have made so much progress in terms of positive results so obviously the hate has always increased. In this recent YouTube and Twitter culture, every other person considers them journalists and they are analyzing in their own stupid and inauthentic way. That dangerous public opinion translates to the real-life threats we receive.”

The respondents were asked to give insights on why they think there is a gap between their goals and the public understanding. The answers within this theme ranged from lack of education to the misinformation being spread through the media. On being asked how do the organizers perceive the public's understanding of the Aurat March's goals and slogans? Why is there a big lag between your demands and their mentality? a respondent said that:

**Zoha:**“That is because the problem lies in the lack of education. The masses are not educated enough to be tolerant enough to understand what we are trying to say.”

The same respondent was again asked if they believe there's a loophole in the manifesto that people can't understand the goals and agendas of this movement? She replied:

**Hamna:** “No I don't think so because our manifesto is available in both English and Urdu. And I am sure most of the people don't even read it so we can't say they cannot comprehend it. However, considering the ignorant masses in Pakistan, we have lately started mobilizing a lot. Now, not just on 8th March, but throughout the year, we go out in public spaces, holding our manifestos and making people understand what our goals are. Many times we even translate and make each point easy for them to understand. So we are trying our best so that maximum people can support us and understand what our goal is.”

Since the public understanding is highly influenced by the traditional and the religious norms of Pakistan and anyone who tries to challenge these norms, especially a quiet gender like female whose place is only at home doesn't sit well with mainstream Pakistan.

#### *4.2.2. Theme 2: Use of Gender as a Political Tool*

The responses shed light on the fact that the movement has been subject to moral shocks, especially with critics accusing them of ruining the family system, promoting immorality, and going against Islam. The backlash is mostly fueled by orthodox religious and political groups who have ulterior motives behind it. Similarly, most of the organizers of Aurat March have said that it is not the movement that associates itself with a certain political party, rather it is political parties who have used Aurat March or their gender as a political tool to their own benefit. One of the respondents, upon asking that why do they strongly tweet against Imran Khan, said:

**Zainab:** “Our platform has always been vocal about the injustices, inequalities, and other forms of sufferings that women go through. But we are also vocal about the times when someone in power has helped us fulfil our cause or has caused hindrances for us. Sadly, in this case, Imran Khan has been passing misogynistic comments on women which is directly damaging to our goals considering the crazy following he has got.”

Another respondent was asked, " How did the involvement of political parties influence public opinion about the movement?" The respondent was of the view:

**Areeba:** “The political parties and people who support them are very sensitive to their goals and motives. They also can’t hear anything against these parties. We have never invited or involved any political party. But yes, whenever we have problems under anyone’s regime we do reach out to those governments. For example, we reached out to the government in 2020 because we were being allowed to march despite having NOC. But the state didn’t do anything, so it is natural if we show our frustration against their ways. It doesn’t mean we don’t like PTI for

personal reasons. It is in our right to speak against those who for no reason want to stop the march and in doing so we apparently hurt people associating with any of the party.”

The Twitter analysis revealed that politicization of the march has become extremely common, and people have been picking sides. Considering that, there has been a notion that a certain party supports Aurat March and a certain party doesn't. However, according to the organizers of the march, they don't have any affiliation with any party. They also believe their gender and the entire movement has been used as a political tool to gain something out of it. According to some of them, political parties have also been strategically using female gender as a tool to get public support, shape their political agendas, or tilt public opinion. One of the respondent's noted:

**Zoha:** “This political rhetoric that has been attached to us is very damaging to be fair. During the entire Bushra Bibi iddat case, our social media was flooded because we used to hear disgusting things for not speaking up for her wherein that wasn't the case. We did raise our voices back then too. But as an independent movement, associating us with a political party discredits our efforts because we can never win that war in Pakistan.”

Moreover, the media has been instrumental in the Aurat March, mainly in publicity and communication. These networks include but are not limited to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and even general conversations such as rallies, meetings, and other activities. The mainstream media has done a lot of damage to the march as from the start they have highlighted the march as anti-

state and provocative in a way that they display obscene posters that don't align with the traditions and religion. An interviewee highlighted that:

**Punjrush:** “Social media platforms can be breeding grounds for misinformation and disinformation campaigns aimed at discrediting the movement or specific voices within it.”

The Aurat March has described significant obstacles in the media, especially from the mainstream media that have opposed it. The agenda-setting strategy they have employed has been spreading hatred for very long in the name of politics. The Media plays a central part in defining the social attitude towards events and emphasizing the necessary public relations efforts to overcome false portrayals. One of the participants expressed:

**Nishat:** “I'd say it is lack of awareness and ingrained patriarchy that has ruined the public understanding. Also, in Pakistan's setting the mainstream media has a big role to play. I think the mainstream media sets the tone for social media and that is where the movement gets its negative narratives from. People are having a hard time connecting with the slogans mainly because the minute this mainstream media gives any coverage to the march, it is only to talk rubbish against us and turn people against the marchers. Similarly, during Imran Khan's regime, the media showed the march in a way that made us the flag bearers of behayai and vulgarity. His government went to lengths to destroy aurat march by not giving us NOCs, shelling, and tear gas, and whatnot. Despite all of it somehow, we are the ones who are the reason behind Bushra Bibi being in jail. How is there any correlation?”

Another respondent spoke about the gender being politicized by talking about an incident:

**Sania:** “We have gotten so much hate for appreciating the work done by any party for women. But we also talk about the wrongdoings of any party. My Twitter account got restricted because I had posted something against Maryam Nawaz where she claimed to fund Aurat March or something in the name of support. It was only a criticism in decent language where I had talked about not using the movement as a tool because that has already created many obstacles for us and caused polarization. So it is a fact that no party is sincere to our cause and gender equality isn’t a priority for any.”

#### *4.2.3. Theme 3: Strategic Shifting & Highlighting of Manifestos*

Subsequently, Aurat March has modified its tactics about criticism from the public, addressing the growing public. First, the movement was criticized for its anti-Islam stance and provocative slogans, sometimes needing to be clarified to most people. One of the respondents said:

**Hamna:** “The tone of the movement became quite confrontational which was harming it more.”

This response led to a shift in strategy, where the movement worked towards strategic shifting of social and political problems that masses can relate with. For instance, the 2024 manifesto indicated an ability to form coalitions with activist organizations and address system problems other than women's.

One of the general approaches revealed during the interviews is emphasizing pragmatic activity and service to the community. The interviewees underlined the significance of holding the

workshops, study circles, and raising awareness among young girls. For instance, upon asking to what extent do they believe public criticism and backlash has changed goals of the aurat march? one noted:

**Noor:** “External forces surely did play a part but we are “Dheet Aurtein” as they say it so our goals didn’t change but our strategy surely did. Rather than replying to those tweets or comments, we have started working more on the ground.”

They prove the mobility of the given movement from the activity on the internet to the various on-ground activities and the focus on the outcome. The movement has also changed its message presentation strategy, moving from the details of what it says to a more general population.

One of my respondents was a former organizer of the march who had left it recently. Upon being asked about the evolution in the strategy of the Aurat March after being labelled as anti-state, anti-Islam, and blasphemous, she responded:

**Ilma:** “The Aurat March's evolution reflects the ongoing negotiation between feminist activism and social context in Pakistan. Their initial explicit approach challenged the status quo and ignited public debate. Now, they seem to be adopting a more strategic approach, addressing specific issues and building alliances with potential supporters. This shift is likely a response to changing public perceptions.”

These strategic changes underscore that the Aurat March has been transforming its approach given the public critique and developing more assertive and exhaustive means and methods for achieving its goals and objectives. The changes in the movement's slogans from overt aggression

and potent confrontation to embracing the spaces of grassroots engagement and adapting the strategic communication reflect the fluidity of the movement in this unfavorable and developing socio-political context.

#### *4.2.4 Theme 4: Introducing Multi-dimensional Approach*

The Aurat March movement from Pakistan, which celebrates only once a year, advocates women's rights and social justice, thereby becoming a social movement to reckon with. Another factor that has proved to be an essential strength is its newly introduced 'Multi-Dimensional Approach.' One of the respondent's explains it as:

**Fariha:** "Honestly the core group never really felt the need to "tackle" the public opinion. We knew this would happen when the movement gained momentum. Yes we can say our approaches kept evolving till we found the right one very recently and that was a multi-purpose approach of targeting the practical side of the movement and not only speaking up a few days before 8th March and a few days after it. The need to stay relevant all year, not stop communicating what our manifestos reflect, and practically working on ground has been the utmost concern in recent times."

Another respondent expressed similar views:

**Hafsa:** "I believe the march's win is developing a deeper understanding of how our society operates. In this male-dominant nature, we have been fighting to get the women and children the rights they deserve. In the start, the march had fewer goals to focus on but now as the times have changed, we have seen a crazy amount of



support, and the nature of issues has also evolved, so our approach has also evolved.

The multi-direction approach has helped us focus on multiple issues at once and raise voice about it.”

The answers of most of my respondents reflected that Aurat March, involved in the struggle for women's rights and gender justice, has been concentrating on enhancing its communicational approaches. This also involves reframing its goals, clarifying its messages, and correcting misunderstood information to actively participate in the population's engagement in Pakistan.

Organizational communication is one of the most crucial aspects that must be appropriately employed for the Aurat March to deliver its message to the right audience. Effective use of social media, speeches, and written statements is necessary to express the main goal and objectives of the movement. An interviewee said:

**Punjrush:** “We have started to use simple, clear language in our online posts, ensuring information is accessible to a wider audience.”

People-to-people contacts are very important in community-based mobilization for political activities. This is another area of emphasis of the Aurat March. The focus is on utilizing volunteers and supporters to help advance the movement's goals. One interviewee said:

**Zainab:** “New people keep on adding, and they are free to contribute. Generally, there is a core group of people each year, and under those, we have departments.”

This is a very flexible organizational structure as it can always be penetrated with new people, fresh ideas, and a new perspective on any conditions or circumstances that a movement

faces in a society. The organizers also understand the need to observe the equal importance of everyone as a principle to be upheld in the organization. One participant said perfectly:

**Zoha:** “It isn't that hierarchical. It is a linear process, based on the interest of those participating.”

It engages the volunteers and supporters in handling most of the movement’s activities, thus creating massive solidarity among the masses.

Some of the approaches to achieve this have been considered as follows. They include tackling local concerns concurrent with or with women's issues. For example, this interviewee noted:

**Sania:** “Considering the ignorant masses in Pakistan, we have lately started mobilizing a lot. Now, not just on 8th March, but throughout the year, we go out in public spaces, holding our manifestos and making people understand what our goals are. Many times, we even translate and make each point easy for them to understand. So we are trying our best so that maximum people can support us and understand what our goal is.”

A similar pattern of answers was observed in most of the respondents when they were asked about the impact of religious backlash on the movement’s messaging or strategies. In recent years, they have revamped their strategy after looking at the public opinion to make content in a refined way that could gain them wider acceptance. This could be through their multi-pronged approach where they interact, mobilize, focus on building allyship, communicate, and simplify their goals in a way that appeals to the masses. However, this is an extremely slow and tiring procedure

considering the amount of hatred people have for Aurat March in Pakistan. One of the respondents noted:

**Fatima:** “Now it is more of a “Multi-Pronged approach” The focus is slightly less on the march now but we are working all year long on things for a bigger cause like collaborating closely with our volunteers to create educational material that clarify goals. We went to Baloch camps in Islamabad to educate them and listen to their grievances and become their voice. But we also realize the hate they have for the march is something that won’t go away easily. We have seen people who are so rigid in their opinion that wo zeher ugaltay hain sirf aur muh pe ghaleez baatein keh dete hain (slag off the movement and say disgusting things on our face).”

#### *4.2.5 Theme 5: Ensuring Inclusivity & Intersectionality*

The introduction to intersectionality, recognition of diversity of women, and sexual identities were all a part of the third wave of feminism (Ghorfati, 2015). But, the fourth wave presented a complicated idea of intersectionality. Each year Aurat March takes place to bring together the women of Pakistan in an inclusive march to talk about the oppression and subjugation within public spheres so people become aware. These feminists questioned not just the patriarchal norms but economic, social, religious, and political structures that intersect with women and their positioning in the country.

The Aurat March also experienced change in terms of how it addressed the main concerns, drew public and media attention, and communicated with society. In this way, the movement focuses on problems that would be important to a broad audience and tries to extend the understanding of women's needs and group justice in Pakistan.

Since its start, Aurat March has been formed and focused on several issues that have women, trans, and non-binary people in their center. The frequency and general characteristics of the mentioned keywords illustrate that:

**Mehwish:** “This year's March was all about minority rights, the genocide happening in Gaza, the cruelties with minors working as servants, free and fair elections, etc. So, inclusivity and intersectionality lie at the core of the march.”

These issues range from political and socio-economic and thus show a clear perspective of the movement as one of inclusion and a fight for those most marginalized in society. The movement is relatively free-form in its approach to present and pertinent matters each year. One interviewee highlighted this adaptability:

**Fatima:** “If you look at our published manifestos over the years, you'll see a wide range of themes – children's rights, economic justice, environmental protection, even healthcare access. By highlighting the gender dimension in these issues, we show how deeply entrenched gender-based violence is.”

Time and again, the organizers have upheld the multiplicity of sexual identity, talking about non-binary people. non-productive sexuality. This is a deep reflection of their intersectional goals that are seen in their ideology and in practice too. On being asked that how they deal with the LGBTQ and Trans hate while living in a country like Pakistan because most tweets were a direct representation of public opinion i.e. these marchers are supporting LGBTQ and going directly against Allah, she said:

**Punjrush:** “It is not about supporting LGBTQ, it is considering everyone a human and demanding basic rights for them despite their sexual orientation. This is something reflected in the language as well during the march. Many people use the word “womxn” instead of woman which is just a way of showing inclusivity to non-binary individuals as well. While there has been growing acceptance, there has also been immense backlash. People have called it blasphemous or a western agenda to pollute the society with such anti-Islam narratives. But these people are too thick to understand that we aren’t urging anyone to come out as gay, we are just highlighting the importance of being a human without having to do with his/her caste, sex, color, creed, gender, or anything.”

Most of the respondents discussed the inclusive framework that aurat march has to offer. One of the respondents said that they have been actively working for the minorities, raising funds for Gaza, and raising awareness among people on different matters.

**Nishat:** “At this point I think where the movement is standing, we have never been more inclusive in our mission and goals. Since 2022, the manifestos have shown a growing awareness of how gender issues intersect with other forms of marginalization. For example, highlighting the plight of the transgender community and the Baloch people facing enforced disappearances. Our this year’s march was all about Baloch grievances, the genocide happening in Gaza, the cruelties with minors working as servants, free and fair elections, etc. So inclusivity and intersectionality lies at the core of the march.”

Furthermore, intersectionality and inclusiveness placed under the movement's tent have been embraced by a diverse society. The presence of intersectional Feminism, which asserts that social categorizations are interconnected, including race, class, and gender, has helped expand the movement.

**Manaal:** "Currently the definition of aurat march is "Intersectional Feminism."

Feminism has multiple types like socialist feminism, Marxist feminism, Islamic feminism, and all. So that means race, gender, caste, religion wise makes us inclusive but ideologically we are also inclusive because we are accepting of all sorts of feminism especially when crafting the goals and manifestos."

It is in this regard that the prospects. Feminism allows for considering all the questions of women regardless of their nationality.

#### **4.3 Discussion**

In the first phase, this study seeks to explore the different public opinion that is built on Twitter from the years 2022 to 2024 regarding Aurat March. The purpose of that was to build a connection between the public opinion and its impact on the Aurat March. In the second phase, it has analyzed the correlation between the findings from Twitter discourse analysis and Aurat March's evolved approach and strategy over the years due to strong public opinions.

The discourse of Twitter users regarding Aurat March, analyzed in the period between 2022 and 2024, demonstrates its distinct development and different viewpoints. A total of 100 tweets that were analyzed reflected three main themes of backlash on Aurat March on the basis of Religion, politicization of Aurat March, and support of Aurat March because of women's rights. The Twitter findings demonstrated interesting linguistic elements under each theme that

corresponds to our first research question that is on finding out how different the public opinion on Twitter is when it comes to Aurat March.

The findings fetched out of the interviews gave an in-depth idea of how Aurat March, as a social movement, has employed new strategies as a result of severe backlash from the public. These themes were massive disconnect between the public and Aurat March, use of gender as a political tool, strategic shifting and highlighting of manifestos, introducing multi-dimensional approach, and ensuring inclusivity and intersectionality.

Moreover, the discussion will also draw an interesting contrast between the thought-process of the general public and those who are strong supporters of the march. These findings directly correspond to our second research question that is to identify how public opinion influenced the Aurat March in changing its strategies to gain more acceptance.

#### *4.3.1 Backlash on the basis of Religion & Massive disconnect between Public and Aurat March*

There are two types of school of thoughts and supporting literature present under this theme. One is produced by scholar-activists who supported the developments in the 1980s and 1990s and wrote about religious women who don't associate with any feminist agenda ((Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987). In contrast to that, the second school of thought is written mainly by Pakistani academics from the West who have highlighted the interest in piety movements and feministic approach of pious women in the wake of Islamophobia (Jamal, 2005). The relationship between the two schools that can be seen as "secular" and "religious" women goes into discourses that are supported by the state of Pakistan. At the core of this discourse, feminist movements are seen as anti-state, anti-Islam, and foreign (Khan & Kirmani, 2018).

When it comes to the scholarship of Aurat March, there is an abundance of literature available that is published in journals that reflects the state narrative of classifying the movement as immoral, unethical, against Islam and Pakistan's culture (Khushbakht and Sultana, 2020). Consequently, the most repeated theme in tweets against Aurat March was that it had allegations on the movement of being anti-Islam, spreading vulgarity, and challenging family system.

The Islamic feminists and the conservatives of the society label the women participating in the March as "women gone crazy by the western ideal." This is something explained by Farida Shaheed (2010) that people have a preconceived notion about such women who participate in any movement that they are westernized and ought to be defied. The people have been labelling Aurat March as "too liberal" for the Pakistani ecosystem. There are many moderate women who don't want to associate themselves with the movement or its explicit posters.

For instance, the slogan "Mera jism meri marzi" in particular is misunderstood to mean the defiance of God's orders and instead engaging in unholy desires. So Jamat-e-Islami women's wing countered this slogan by coming up with another one that said, "Mera Jism Allah ki marzi, (my body, God's will)." This was also a repeatedly seen linguistic element in the tweets as it reflected the use of religion as a tool to prove Aurat March unislamic. Raising this slogan is like entering a very dangerous boundary because anyone who comes up with a counter argument or defends the original slogan will be accused of going against Islam and God. In a state like Pakistan where people are intolerant and have little grip over Islam tend to easily lose their calm when it comes to defending religion without testifying the matter.



The ideological roots of such a narrative lie in Nationalist Islamism that rules the entire country. Men in Muslim societies employ Islamism and its derivatives as pathways to actualization and in the most direct sense for issues pertaining to the self, manhood and especially, honour. Thus, it is quite plausible to speak about this expressive trajectory i.e. exercising masculinity through Islamism in Pakistan (Aslam, 2014).

This theme directly contrasts with one of the findings from interviews. It showed that there is a massive disconnect between the general public and the supporters of Aurat March. There could be many reasons for that gap from lack of awareness, to surrendering to years of toxic cultural norms, patriarchy to uneducated masses. What sets Aurat March apart from earlier forms of protest is that it actively questioned and disrupted the domination of society by men and touched upon topics such as women's freedom to enter public spheres, their bodies choices, and sexual liberation, and no oppression and violence (Khan, 2022). These are all the things' men could only imagine women demanding in a society like ours.

For as long as we can remember, women have been seen as a property of men without any rights and autonomy over their decisions, choices, or even bodies. In case of Pakistan, we have seen it repeatedly in different forms of rape, harassment, molestation, child abuse, no consent, etc. The slogan (Mera jism meri marzi) is mere an example of how the control of men over women started to crumble and shake from the mere assertion that women's bodies belong to them only and they don't need anyone to tell them how to sit, feel, stand, think, move, act, or desire. This has altogether challenged the status quo and put patriarchy under threat.

The conflict and divide between people and feminists came when they asked these women to claim their rights within a religious cosmos of multiple meanings. They believe Islam is the core reality under which every Pakistani woman should live. Hence, a march where women come out on streets, chant for the freedom from the shackles of patriarchy and inequalities, raise placards, are considered unislamic and anti-state by majority.

The organizers of the march believe that their approach towards the march is very narrow. They only consider them as women who come out on streets once a year and promote vulgarity. It is visible that there is a huge gap between the public's understanding of the Aurat March in Pakistan and the real goals of the march.

The religious right wing thinks of the movement as western propaganda, a mere conspiracy against values and Islam. They insist on using a religious framework to determine the demands and conduct of the Aurat march when asking for women's rights. In such a politically and religiously charged environment, such views are highly influential and brainwash many minds who are ready to give or take life in the name of religion. This majority section of the society will always look at women's rights within the Islamic moral values derived from Quran and Hadith. They will always look at the idea of independent women as a foreign ideology touted by a group of promiscuous misandrists and consider it an open threat to Islamic or Pakistani society.

#### *4.3.2 Politicization of Aurat March & Use of Gender as a Political Tool*

Another two contrasting findings that were uncovered by Twitter discourse and interviews were the politicization of the Aurat March as seen on Twitter and gender being used as a political

tool to get favorable outcomes was something that was revealed by the interviews with the organizers of Aurat March. The ideological framework under which the politicization of Aurat march works lies on having extreme political affiliation with a certain party that leads the Twitter users to defame the entire movement.

Imran Khan, the head of the ruling party and the Former Prime Minister of Pakistan once stated that feminism is “a Western phenomenon that has demoted the status of a mother”, meaning that it cannot operate here. He has also often described ‘vulgarity’ in the society; the dressing scandalously by women which means unveiling or going naked according to the Shariat laws as well as sexual freedom, liberty and choice are the reasons behind the sexual violence against women that is common Pakistan. In March 2020, Khan specifically called Aurat March ‘divisive’, which he said needed to be eradicated so that the ‘different’ cultures can be ‘wiped out’ so that the country becomes unified (Images, 2020).

It is very easy to draw a connection between the salty tweets done by Aurat March’s official account for Imran Khan or PTI because they have suffered a lot because of them. Similarly, the influence Imran Khan has on people is insane so when a leader passes a misogynistic comment in a patriarchal society, you cannot expect anything better from his followers. The Twitter analysis revealed the hate deep-rooted within the Pakistani social fabric for women’s right movement is fueled by the political figures getting involved.

The linguistic characters like کپتان عمران خان کی حکومت کا زبردست ایکشن پاکستان میں ہم جنس پرستی کی تمام تنظیموں پر حکومت نے پابندی عائد۔

(Great action of captain Imran Khan's government. The government banned all homosexual

organizations in Pakistan) or the paid content of similar tweets urging PM Imran Khan to ban Aurat March reflects the bigotry of masses when it comes to their leader.

The theme contrasted with the responses of organizers of Aurat March where they explicitly mentioned that Aurat March isn't affiliated with any political party neither gets funding from any. However, they believe that their gender, female, is being used as a political tool when it comes to gaining wider acceptance amongst the general public.

For example, some of the respondents believed that one of the reasons why a prominent religious political party like Jamaat-i-Islami gets support is because they have always been vocal with their criticism for the movement. They keep provoking people that a woman is supposed to stay within the four walls of her house but these women who have come on streets are spreading "fahashi (vulgarity)." So by framing the march and its people as a threat to the religion, the party has been able to gather a lot of support.

Jamaat-e-Islami is also that party that hasn't done much for women and their rights. Not even what is asked in the religion. They have been the only party to denounce the law protecting women from sexual, physical, and mental violence. They stated it as a western idea that will disrupt our family system (Gabol, 2016). So, time and again, women and their rights have only been used as tools to maneuver the goals.

The Aurat March has risen to be a rallying factor for the political confrontation in Pakistan. Politicians with right wing policies have always associated the march with un-favorable goals of changing the society and undermining the religious values of Islam. In contrast, progressive parties

have been able to utilize the march to prove their stance on women's rights issues and gender equality. Some of these parties take a very diplomatic stance. This makes it possible for them to stay in the good books of all.

Political opportunities are new shifts in the political environment that make the government newly accessible to challengers' claims. It is necessary to point out that movements do not limit their actions only to the engagement in the government. Political opportunities refer to some form of instability, democracy, divisions within the ruling elite and a regime, a new legislation or a statement from a president with issues such as inequality. Likewise, possibilities can be anticipated in the form of suggestive allies in or out of government that can appeal on behalf of the movement and indications of threats that substantiate the movement's message (Lessons from Social Movements, 2014).

In any society, the media is the bridge between the state and its people. It has a vital role when it comes to conveying information and setting up narratives. After analyzing responses from many of the organizers of Aurat March, it is clear that they partially blame the mainstream media for the negative narrative that is commonly seen amongst the public because mainstream media sets the tone for social media.

The placards, posters, and slogans of the march are more popular among the users of social media and are more frequently discussed on digital platforms. This can be explained as "reverse agenda setting" and Teter (2019) says that this approach is built on a new media atmosphere where

the reach of published journalistic content is also dependent on the feedback of its consumers. Hence, it is mainly the users who influence selection of topics and media framing.

In Aurat March's case, media organizations like newspapers and digital information sites monitor the online portals, search engines, social networks, etc. to track the activity of the majority of people and to identify the trending subjects. Consequently, the hierarchy of topics and issues that are popular among masses impact what's shown in mainstream and social media as a part of the media agenda.

It is a known fact that Aurat March has mostly been seen as a battleground for competing notions of being a man and a woman. It has been important in forming a discourse and influencing many minds into thinking that it is limited to being that. By challenging the norms and traditions of a society like Pakistan on the basis of gender performativity (Hook, 2016), Aurat March has become an easy target for those who want to uphold the patriarchal structures.

#### *4.3.3 Supporting Aurat March & Ensuring Intersectionality and Inclusivity*

It can be described in the way that, in the eyes of feminists, Aurat March is an attempt to bring women's issues into political, parliamentary, social, and journalistic agenda-setting. It has served to raise the issue of women's oppression from the drawing room political debates and discussion to public domain and reflected, the controversies elicited at all levels are regarded as one of the major achievements. Moreover, it has been inclusive in every way as women from all walks of life have participated. It was not just the women from big cities or the towns; women working in factories, housewives and women with professional jobs; the educated, young and the elderly participated in the march as well as artists and writers and the philosophers.

It represented all ideologies of feminism: the rights carrying liberals who want personal freedom, welfarism, and legal rights; the postmodernist radical feminists who want to be set free from patriarchy; socialist feminists who want freedom from both capitalism and patriarchy. About this, the organizers inquire as to why their call for equal opportunities, free from gender brutality, discrimination, and subjugation; responding to matters concerning the politics of the body, forceful conversion and marriages, and control over the public domain are considered as insisting on the extreme.

About 10% of the total tweets reflected support and solidarity for the Aurat March and the concept of feminism in Pakistan. Under the ideological framework of social justice and inclusivity, people see this movement as advocating women's rights, highlighting the social inequalities, and challenging traditional gender roles under the socio-cultural setting of Pakistan.

As the literature supports, the fourth and the current wave of feminism in Pakistan has intersectionality at its core (Saigol & Chaudhary, 2020). The demands reflect the idea of complete social and economic institutions to have a world based on inclusion, equality, and freedom from exploitation. Aurat March encompasses seven broad themes within its framework: Reclaiming public spaces, State, Violence, Accountability, and Judicial Systems, Environmental Justice, Economic Justice, Reproductive Justice, War and Militarization, Rights of Religious Minorities.

From the answers of respondents and the Twitter analysis, it is safe to say that Aurat March gets its support from a diverse group of people due to its openness and inclusivity. The people who come out to support the march are not just women but men, trans, LGBTQ community, minorities,

etc. Although a very small chunk, people do believe in Aurat March creating a safe space and platform for those who have been quiet for their rights for so long.

All in all, the fact that Aurat March faces extreme opposition consistently every year but still somehow manages to hold ground and continue working towards its goals is commendable and perhaps that is the reason for its growing support with each passing year. People who have an influence or are in a position of some power come out and support the march publicly which'll have positive results in the longer run. For example, the partial credit of the Supreme Court of Pakistan recognizing activists' resistance against Afghan deportations goes to the Aurat March movement (Auratmarch, 2023).

#### *4.3.4 Strategic Shifts & Multi-Dimensional Approach*

The Aurat March is a March, which is carried with an intention of expressing solidarity with the oppressed groups of women, has become a massive event. Since it started to happen, a problem has emerged that is still unresolved to this day. More so, two factions appear every year in the month of March, both at extreme ends hence increasing the level of polarity in the society.

Policies regarding relations at the working place, for instance, sexual harassment, domestic violence, childbearing as well as use of contraceptives became issues of discussion. Such discussions were based on testimonies of women and, thus, brought a grassroots prescript to the discourses. The issue of power and transformations remained the overarching themes but shifted and broadened to encompass various aspects of Pakistani women's experiences.



In this case, individuals either condemn or encourage the giving women their full rights. Many people do not know but Islam, which is the strongest supporter of women's rights, grants women equal rights. Religion does not recognize sex as a criterion for division. But wrong beliefs, patriarchy, and low education have been responsible for these extreme public opinions (Farooq, 2023).

The interviews with the organizers of the march indicated that over the years they have realized that the difference of opinion will not help them accomplish the goals. In order to gain wider acceptance, the respondents said that the movement has revamped its strategy and approach when it comes to getting their message across. The strategic shifts included action items like focusing on groundwork, introducing study circles, increasing communication with ordinary people in order to educate them on the matter.

Moreover, the responses also indicated that the movement is gradually slipping into the political space and not just social. For instance, this year's march was mainly about minority rights, unfair general elections, and the Gaza genocide (Gabol, 2024). This is a monumental strategic shift in movement's policy because one of the criticisms they get is that they pick and choose selective issues to speak on, issues that only fulfil their agenda. However, this is a direct answer to those who have such things to claim. This is also a step forward when it comes to garnering support from diverse groups of the country.

Similarly, another theme that highlighted a change in Aurat March's approach due to severe public opinion has been introducing the 'Multi-Dimensional Approach.' The multi-dimensional

shift referred to increased mobilization not just on 8th March but throughout the year, refining their messages in a way that majority can connect with it, and simplification of goals.

When asked, how do you guys ensure doing all this because you're still getting the backlash as of recent march's analysis. They said that the mobilization happens voluntarily in almost every major city where we conduct study circles, awareness campaigns, interactive sessions, and educating people. It is all done on a very local and individual level so it is not broadcasted on social media like one would expect. Furthermore, to gain wider acceptance for any social movement it is important to connect with people and to make a connection it is important to mobilize and show flexibility.

No social movement yields result overnight. It requires support, consistency, and organizational efforts. During that course it is highly important for all the supporters to hold their ground and stay true to the core message. As Charles Tilly says to gather public support and legitimacy, any social movement needs to show Worthiness, Unity, Numbers, and Commitment (WUNC) (Bailey et al., 2023).

Hence, in the case of Aurat March, it is important to understand that a movement that is disliked by the masses will have to put in a lot of effort in order to gain wider support. The challenges that the movement faces from conservative groups, general public, and political entities can delay the process of achieving their goals.

All in all, the findings from the Twitter Discourse analysis and Interviews provide in-depth insights on how contrasting the general public's opinion is with what the organizers of the march think. The results are also a reflection on polarizing views and themes that have an impact on the goals and strategies of Aurat March. The existing literature on Aurat March is mostly on uncovering the role of mainstream media. Moreover, the research done within the context of Pakistan do not offer an unbiased commitment of Aurat March for its cause. It mainly reflects the criticism and backlash the march has been getting since the beginning. Considering that, the results of my research will be helpful to draft policies in a way that keep in mind the sentiment of the public and also focus on evolving strategies of Aurat March for it to gain wider acceptance.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

The analysis of the social media posts shared within the context of the Aurat March and the interviews conducted with the women participants presents the extent to which the process affected public opinion and women's rights in Pakistan. Starting as a march concerning women's rights in general, the Aurat March has since developed into addressing specific and topical problems like sexual harassment at the workplace, violence against women, and reproductive rights. This shift is therefore due to the dynamism in the fight for women rights in Pakistan and the flexibility of the movement in changing agendas in order to suit their intended beneficiaries.

The Aurat March has attracted every kind of response from the public since its first march officially. This study therefore reveals that overall sentiment has been negative through analysis of posts on Twitter. As the movement went on, it was met with criticism and critiques on the basis of its slogans and placards. Critics were quick to critique the westernization of strut and body language while others queried the color inclusiveness of the move. This mixed sentiment explains exactly why it has been difficult for Aurat March to achieve its aim or mission while having to contend with the various perceived and expected audience concerns.

Analyzing the criticism, the Aurat March has changed its tactics in this regard and adopted a new position. This implies conducting local campaigns, the mobilization efforts among the affected communities, and the tackling of individual localized concerns other than the general women's rights situations. Since the Aurat March targets the results that can be achieved in the shortest possible time and provides pragmatic solutions to social problems, it has been able to expand its base.

It has become clear that interaction with the community has become integral to the strategy used in Aurat March. In this regard the movement has managed to seek support by focusing on the issues of the community and engaging the populace in its activities. This has also been an added advantage because by using grassroots the movements have been formed and supported by the communities hence have high sustainability. It can be seen that using this strategy, local events have been made possible and have received the support of the community hence implying that this is among the most effective strategies that can be used in supporting the community.

The media, especially social media, has played a significant part in influencing the public opinion about Aurat March. In this regard, the movement has deployed the social media platforms to disseminate its message, propagate debates and ensure that it responds to false narratives. Therefore, with the help of these social media platforms, Aurat March has better prospects of more people following its call and changing the social narrative.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the Aurat March has kept the conversation regarding women's rights in Pakistan going. By concentrating on the mobilization of the base and community involvement, it can build a popular support following and remain relevant. The Aurat March is not without weaknesses, but it has set the right approach for future activism for women's rights in Pakistan so far. Thus, the findings of this analysis highlight the need to be flexible, be smart in communicating, and engage the community to have social movements run and people's objectives met.

### **5.1 Policy Implications & Way Forward**

To ensure the sustained impact and growth of the Aurat March, several key recommendations are proposed:

- **Find a Middle Ground:** It is essential for the organizers of the march to include flexibility in their ways in order to gain wider acceptance. This flexibility can help them get wider acceptance from the conservatives, religious and political groups, and also the general public.
- **Refine Communication Strategies & focus on Mobilization:** Speaking of simple messages and avoiding various goals' generalization can help to avoid misunderstandings and criticism in terms of perceived as Western imperialism. Strategies of passing information can also contribute to dispute clarification and expansion of the base of the movement. This is why further emphasis on grassroots mobilization and the engagement of the community should be continued. Creating local study circles, workshops, and discussions will create a base in the local communities, and solve local problems, making sure the movement is nationwide.
- **Address Criticisms Constructively:** The Aurat March should listen to points made regarding it, respect them and make changes to its plans if they are appropriate. There is an opportunity to positively build an image and increase acceptance and reception when confronted with criticism.

If the aforementioned recommendations are adopted, the Aurat March stands to become a pole position for women rights bodies in Pakistan while also guaranteeing societal progress and paramount support.

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# APPENDIX A: ETHICAL APPROVAL FORM

## A.1 Ethical Approval Form



S'H

**SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES (S3H)**  
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGY (NUST)

Ethical approval Letter Ref: 0839/Ethic/07/S3H/23/DDS

### Ethics Clearance Certificate

**Project Title:** Exploring the Role of Social Media & Public Opinion: A Case Study of Aurat March

**Investigators:** Aima Raza

**Co-Investigator(s):**

**Contact Details of Investigators:** 0336-5924019

**Discipline:** Dept of Development Studies

**Project Location:** NUST, H-12 Campus, Islamabad

**Project Duration:** 2-3 Months

It meets the requirements and ethical guidelines set out by School of Social Sciences and Humanities (S3H) Ethics Committee. There is no need to take separate informed human participation consent. This project is **Approved** subject to the following conditions:

It is the Investigator's responsibility to ensure that all researchers associated with this project are aware of the conditions of approval and which documents have been approved.

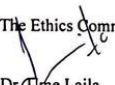
The investigator is required to notify the Research Ethics Committee, via amendment or progress report, of:

- Any significant change to the project and the reason for that change, including an indication of ethical implications (if any);
- Serious adverse effects on participants and the action taken to address those effects;
- Any other unforeseen events or unexpected developments that merit notification;
- The inability of the investigator to continue in that role, or any other change in research personnel involved in the project;
- A delay of more than 6 months in the commencement of the project; and,
- Termination or closure of the project.

Additionally, the Principal Researcher is required to submit

- A Progress Report on the anniversary of approval and on completion of the project.

The Ethics Committee may conduct an audit at any time.

  
Dr. Orme Laila  
Chair of School Ethics Committee  
Associate Professor  
School of Social Sciences and Humanities (S3H)  
National University of Sciences and Technology  
Pakistan  
Date: May 29, 2024

**Chairperson**  
Research Ethics Committee S'H  
NUST, H-12, Islamabad

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## Figure 23 Ethical Approval Form

Source: Nust Approval Committee

## Questionnaire/Interview Performa

### Opening Statement:

Thank you so much for taking time out to give me this interview and for trusting me with this. For this interview, I am looking forward to hearing your views and perceptions on Aurat March and the impact Social Media has had on the goals and operations of the movement. This interview is focused on your opinions, so please feel completely at ease to share with me. You can give your interview in any language you want; Urdu or English, if you are comfortable with it. Also, take as much time as you need and if at any point you feel uncomfortable with the conversation, feel free to let me know.

As informed before, this interview will be electronically recorded. So, I will ask once again; *do I have your permission to attend your interview and record it?* The information you share will remain with me and will not be shared with any third parties.

### Interview Questions:

1. Can you provide a brief overview of your involvement in the Aurat March movement and your role within the organization?
2. How would you describe the goals and the mission of Aurat March?
3. What are some of the most common criticisms or negative narratives you have seen regarding the movement on social media?
4. How do you perceive the public's understanding of the march's goals and slogans?

5. To what extent do you believe public criticism has influenced the goals and manifestos of the march over the years?
6. How does the march navigate the balance between staying true to its core principles and addressing public concerns?
7. What challenges has the movement encountered on social media platforms especially twitter?
8. How has aurat march evolved ever since its inception, particularly in response to changing public perceptions and societal dynamics?
9. Has the march adopted any specific strategies to address those misconceptions amongst people? If so, please elaborate on these strategies.
10. How does aurat march incorporate intersectional perspectives and ensure inclusivity within its framework?
11. In what ways does social media facilitate or hinder the movement's efforts and address intersecting forms of discrimination?
12. Where do you envision aurat march heading in the future, considering the evolving landscape of social media and public discourse?
13. Looking towards the future, how do you see aurat march continuing to engage with public opinion in constructive ways?
14. Do you have any questions for me or what we have talked about?

Thank you for your time and participation.