



Digital Landscape and Social Constructs: Analyzing the Role of Language in Shaping Gender Identities in Pakistan

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Abstract

The article examines how language and multimodal resources influence the creation, negotiation, and challenge of gender identities in Pakistan's digital world. Digital spaces are complex and contested arenas for identity formation, especially in a society where patriarchal and socio-religious norms heavily shape gender roles. While it highlights that certain language aspects and semiotic elements can reinforce or resist traditional gender concepts in Pakistan, few studies have explored how these two areas align or undermine these narratives. This research addresses that gap by applying the Multimodal Discourse Analysis framework by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) to various digital texts such as memes, protest posters, advertisements, and social media posts on platforms like Facebook. Eight posts are analysed as the study sample. Findings reveal that although digital content often reproduces cultural gender norms, it also enables individuals to challenge them through irony, satire, and visual figures of expression. The study concludes that digital media can serve as both a space of restraint and rebellion. It recommends integrating digital literacy into education, promoting inclusive content design, and conducting intersectional research across different platforms. This work aims to foster more balanced digital storytelling and contribute to South Asia feminist digital discourse.

Key words: Gender Identity, Digital Discourse, Patriarchy, Intersectionality, Kress and Van Leeuwen, Digital Literacy, South Asian Feminism

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INTRODUCTION

Gender identities are not biological but are socially constructed. This means that gender is constantly defined by cultural, historical, social, and linguistic forces. Unlike a fixed attribute, gender is expressed through language, actions, and relationships, which are shaped by the standards of institutions and communities (Marhami, 2024). In Pakistan, traditional gender behaviors are closely linked to religious, cultural, and familial subjectivities, and any expressions of femininity and masculinity are often seen through the lens of conformity or defiance of these ideologies (Drew, 2023).

Although the gender role seems like it is based on nature because it has been repeated, social constructionism encourages us to view gender as fluid and changeable. Using this perspective, we can critically analyze how gendered norms are constructed or destabilized through language, power, and discourse (B., 2018). Thinkers like Simone de Beauvoir and Michel Foucault played a vital role in recognizing that social practices and language define gender (Analyzer, 2024).

On a global scale, notable game changers centered around the 1994 Cairo Conference and 1995 Beijing Conference that shifted gender politics, yet traditionalists like the Vatican campaigned against these changes, coining the term 'gender ideology' to oppose progress toward a more inclusive future (Corrêa, 2017). Gender identity in Pakistan depends on historical colonial influences, religious beliefs, and modern politics. Although gender minorities gained rights through policies like the 2018 Transgender Persons Act, their enforcement remains inconsistent due to religious conservatism and structural issues. Online spaces, mainly Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, have become key locations for identity formation and representation. In this context, users focus on shaping their online identities by balancing their image and self-pride (Marko, 2023). On these platforms, users often explore new identities through multiple accounts or pseudonymity, especially among marginalized groups (Akhmad, At, & Muhammad, 2024). Young people, in particular, use strategic digital identity management to navigate between their performative and authentic selves based on audience expectations, trending topics, and how the platform's algorithm will present them (Bhashanjaly, 2024).

Language serves as the mediator between established gender norms and those that are challenged online. Gendered meanings are embedded in hashtags, captions, emojis, and layout choices. The repeated use of gender-stereotyped expressions by users reinforces normative roles, but digital platforms also offer chances to oppose these norms through satire, irony, and remixing (Pawni, 2024). Aspects of gendered communication cultures, such as the tendency to label women's assertive speech as a form of aggression, are intensified in online settings and within the context of user interactions and visibility (Jahan, 2021).

The performance of gender on the Internet relies on multimodal content, such as images, emojis, and videos. Stereotypical portrayals of femininity and masculinity already reinforce limited ideas of gender. However, online spaces have also created a platform for activism movements that challenge existing popular narratives and help build inclusive societies, like #MeToo and #TransRightsAreHumanRights (Teibowei & Therese, 2024).

Online connections across different parts of the world foster an understanding of gender identities and promote cross-cultural education. Finally, digital users expose themselves to non-binary and intersectional thinking as well as engage in fluid debates on equality and justice. Digital users learn about non-binary and intersectional ideas and,

through that, experience breaking free from binary, rigid constructions of gender and contribute to the evolving discourse on equality and justice.

This research advances the discussion on gender studies, linguistics, and media studies by examining how genders are constructed online in Pakistan. It provides insights for academics, educators, content creators, and gender rights advocates on how to promote inclusive and equitable digital media communication practices.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite the rapid growth and wider reach of digital technologies and the increasing presence of Pakistani users online, patriarchal structures and strict gender norms still persist in the digital space. These socially constructed norms, deeply rooted in society, appear through gender representation, communication, and perception on various digital platforms such as social media, websites, and online ads. Although international research has started focusing more on how language and multimodal content shape gender identities, there has been no specific research into the Pakistani digital environment to date. Moreover, little attention has been given to how linguistic choices, visual symbols, spatial practices, and other semiotic resources either support traditional gender roles or enable resistance and change. This gap highlights the need for critical research into how digital communication in Pakistan not only reflects existing gender ideologies but also has the power to challenge or reshape them. Understanding this dynamic is key to revealing how gendered identities are shaped, challenged, and negotiated in the evolving digital landscape.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To investigate how social media constructs, influence gender representations on Pakistan's digital platforms.
- To attempt to answer questions regarding the linguistic features and semiotic resources used in Pakistani digital spaces to construct and perform gender identities.
- To examine how Pakistani users, utilize multimodal strategies (such as spatial layout, fonts, visual modes, and emphasis) to highlight or challenge normative gender roles.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How are gender identities formed and negotiated through language in Pakistan's digital space?
- In what ways does language use in digital spaces reinforce existing gender identities within Pakistan's cyberspaces?
- How do digital landscapes in Pakistan reflect gendered social structures?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is important in many ways. First, it contributes to the growing digital discourse and gender studies by using a multimodal approach to how identity is built online. Second, it addresses a significant gap by offering localized insights into how gender is expressed, negotiated, and challenged in Pakistani cyberspaces, which are rarely discussed in global digital discourse research. By analyzing both linguistic and visual elements, people can better understand how digital communication reflects and shapes gendered social realities. Ultimately, the results of this research are valuable for scholars, media professionals, educators, and gender rights advocates, as they reveal how language and multimodal content can sustain or challenge current gender norms. These insights can promote more inclusive and fair digital communication practices, helping to advance gender sensitivity and social change in digital media environments.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a qualitative and interpretivist research design based on social semiotics and a critical approach to discourse analysis. The interpretivist paradigm allows for a contextual, conceptual examination of linguistic and semiotic resources used in local Pakistani digital spaces to construct, negotiate, and resist gender identities. It focuses on online data collected in natural settings, highlighting the meaning-making processes in real-life communicative situations.

RESEARCH DESIGN

A qualitative, interpretive research design is used in this study to explore how gender identities are formed, negotiated, and represented in Pakistan's digital landscape. A qualitative approach suits this research because it enables a deep understanding of the complex relationships between language and visual elements in creating meaning in digital discourse. The hermeneutic aspect of this design also supports the goal of understanding the subjective experiences and social meanings of gender in digital spaces, where these meanings are socially constructed and influenced by context.

POPULATION, SAMPLE, AND SAMPLING METHOD

Purposive sampling was used to select digital content that explicitly references gender discourse in Pakistan. The sample set includes pages featuring feminist activism, masculinity issues, and gender fluidity in Facebook posts, including official posts from the Aurat March. The data covers the period from March 2023 to June 2025 to ensure its relevance and contemporary context.

The sample includes eight multimodal artefacts, such as protest posters, memes, infographics, ads, and socially generated content on social media platforms. These artefacts were selected based on visual prominence, language richness, and a theme centered on gender representation and discourse. Ethical considerations were upheld by using only publicly available information and anonymizing any identifiable details about individuals.

TOOLS OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

DATA COLLECTION

Manual observation and screenshotting of online posts were used to gather data, and such metadata as the date of publication, platform, and engagement statistics were stored in a data log. The key critical points of every artefact were recorded using a structured data collection sheet on aspects such as text, visuals, spatial setting, colour palette, and communicative purpose.

DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis utilizes the Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) as the main analytical tool in this study. Through MDA, the functioning of different semiotic modes—such as language, images, layout, typography, and colour—in working together to create and communicate gendered meanings can be examined in detail. This can be analysed according to the three metafunctions of MDA: representational (what is depicted), interactive (how viewers are engaged), and compositional (how elements are arranged and prioritized). The multimodal information was analysed in relation to supporting gender ideologies, cultural expectations, and performance practices within Pakistani society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender is not a pre-discursive reality but a performative accomplishment constituted through discursive practice (Butler, 1990). Social constructivist theories maintain that gender identities are formed through the daily discursive practices of people, which refer to

how people reason about themselves and others. These performances stand out in cyberspace due to the multiple communicative modes in digital media texts, as text, images, emojis, and other signs collectively create people's identities (Faigley, Kress, & Leeuwen, 2002).

The study by Coates and Coates (2015) in "Women, Men, and Language" functions as a key text that examines complete linguistic practices and their impact on the performance of gender roles. Through its investigation, the text reveals how gender operates as a cultural system, analyzing language patterns in exchanges and among children learning to speak. The research bases its analysis on multiple empirical studies to evaluate language use across social group interactions without focusing on a single specific population. This investigation holds significant value because it uncovers the social and linguistic effects of gender-based communication methods. The reissue now includes a new preface that discusses postmodern perspectives, thereby maintaining crucial academic value for students studying sociolinguistics and gender studies.

Ullah et al. (2016) examined how Pakistani print media portrays gender by assessing their role in supporting or challenging stereotypes and sexism. Analyzing four Pakistani national newspapers shows their tendency to reinforce gender stereotypes rather than challenge them in their editorial content. The analysis is conducted within Pakistani social and cultural contexts and feminist ideas to show that traditional portrayals of males and females still exist in print media.

Darket et al. (2018) examined gender performance methods that use Facebook self-posted images to depict stereotypical gender traits in users' uploaded content. A literature review analyzing Facebook images with gendered visual features found that males were often shown as dominant, independent, and active, while females were frequently portrayed as attractive and dependent. These patterns support gender stereotypes used in professional media. Social media gives users a platform for gendered impression management that reinforces traditional gender roles. The work broadens current research by exploring how stereotype analysis relates to user-posted social media content.

Through critical multimodality, Hurley and Zoe (2019) examined the affordances of Instagram, including material aspects, conceptual elements, and imaginary components, to explore how female Gulf-Arab influencers engage within digital environments. The analysis looks at how female Gulf-Arab influencers create what the text calls "fantastical authenticity" by interacting with the platform's structural features and cultural context. Research shows that Instagram allows users to blend their regional culture with global, trendy influences. The study demonstrates how supporters and influencers use Instagram to craft meaningful self-presentations within their complex social market environment. Findings provide new insights into the development of social media affordance theory, especially in cultural settings that differ from Western norms, as well as into the use of visual interactions among people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Previous feminist research of the earlier wave is expanded by investigating gendered media contents and structural media gaps in classic news channels. Multiple theoretical frameworks facilitate the assessment of gender presentation in news outlets, hoardings, films, and digital platforms; however, actual structural gaps persist. Through their research study, the authors establish how digital media platforms with online activist activities enable feminist leaders to demonstrate power and self-expression. According to the researchers, academic collaboration between activists must persist in transforming media content while constantly reshaping institutional practices. Modern media environments

require both gender solutions and treatment of marginalization, according to this section (Gadzekpo & Smith, 2020).

An analysis of Pakistani textbooks from the year proceeds to explain how their language practices both refuelled and solidified traditional gender stereotypes that shape gender identity. Sixty-six textbooks that teach English, Urdu, and Pashto languages to students in grades 1 to 10 contain texts that support masculine identity structures and male behavioural authority over women, reinforcing the cultural values of Pashtunwali. The research examines gender representation in textbooks to demonstrate that language choices maintain established sex-based social imbalances throughout Pakistani culture (Tripp & Munson, 2021).

Thomson and Riki (2022) investigated how people in non-monogamous relationships use digital dating services that support mono-normative cultural expectations. The study used a critical multimodal discourse analysis to explore how different semiotic modes in dating profiles reflect and communicate sexual normativity. The research shows that online platform features and user communication practices both empower and regulate their audience through established romantic and intimate norms. The analysis reveals that users of various sexual orientations need to adopt strategic presentation methods to express their true selves while avoiding stigma related to their non-traditional relationships. This research offers an important contribution to understanding how digital platforms intersect with individual identity expressions and social standards in dating communities.

Mustafa and Ameen (2023) examined how Pakistani television commercials depict gender identity through visual messages that help build a shared societal understanding of gender roles. The researcher analysed seven advertisements from major Pakistani channels using the semiotic framework of Gillian Dyer and qualitative research methods to evaluate symbolic and metaphorical representations that either reinforce or challenge traditional gender norms. Several ads serve to uphold gender stereotypes, while others promote progressive stories that oppose patriarchal structures in pursuit of gender equality. This study has added to the gender discourse and offers practical insights that benefit media investors and policymakers. Media plays an essential role in shaping perceptions of gender and advancing broader inclusion.

Mohamed and Ebrahim (2024) examined how gender identity are constructed in humorous Facebook memes through a socio-cognitive and discursive perspective. The researchers analysed 72 Facebook memes created by men and women, revealing ten recurring motifs that reinforce gender stereotypes while portraying both sexes negatively. These negative portrayals of mixed genders align with accepted standards of masculinity and femininity, reflecting cultural norms. Most memes shared on Facebook supported traditional gender authority, but memes with female-liberal themes openly challenged established gender norms. Digital meme dynamics play a complex role in maintaining traditional gender power structures in digital society while subtly undermining them.

Azhar, Butt, and Latif (2025) examined male personas in Monica Ali's **In the Kitchen** to explore how dominant masculine behavior influences a multicultural, patriarchal social framework. The research used textual analysis alongside hegemonic masculinity theory to understand how men from different ethnic backgrounds experience social prejudice when they violate dominant masculine expectations. The study shows how patriarchal authority systems lead to exploitation of both women and men who do not exhibit dominant masculine traits. Masculinity takes various forms, causing power to

operate differently among men. The investigation offers detailed insights into male suppression that develops within patriarchal structures formed by capitalism and cultural hierarchy systems.

While numerous studies have been conducted on language, gender, and digital communication worldwide, there is a notable lack of research in Pakistan on multimodal discourse analysis. Using different expressions of gender is not well recognized on Pakistani social media. Most of these studies pay little attention to images, emojis, or page layout. Given these facts, the way we use digital content to influence gender identity is not well understood.

DATA ANALYSIS

1. SORRY TO WOMEN, I KNOW BETTER AND WILL DO BETTER

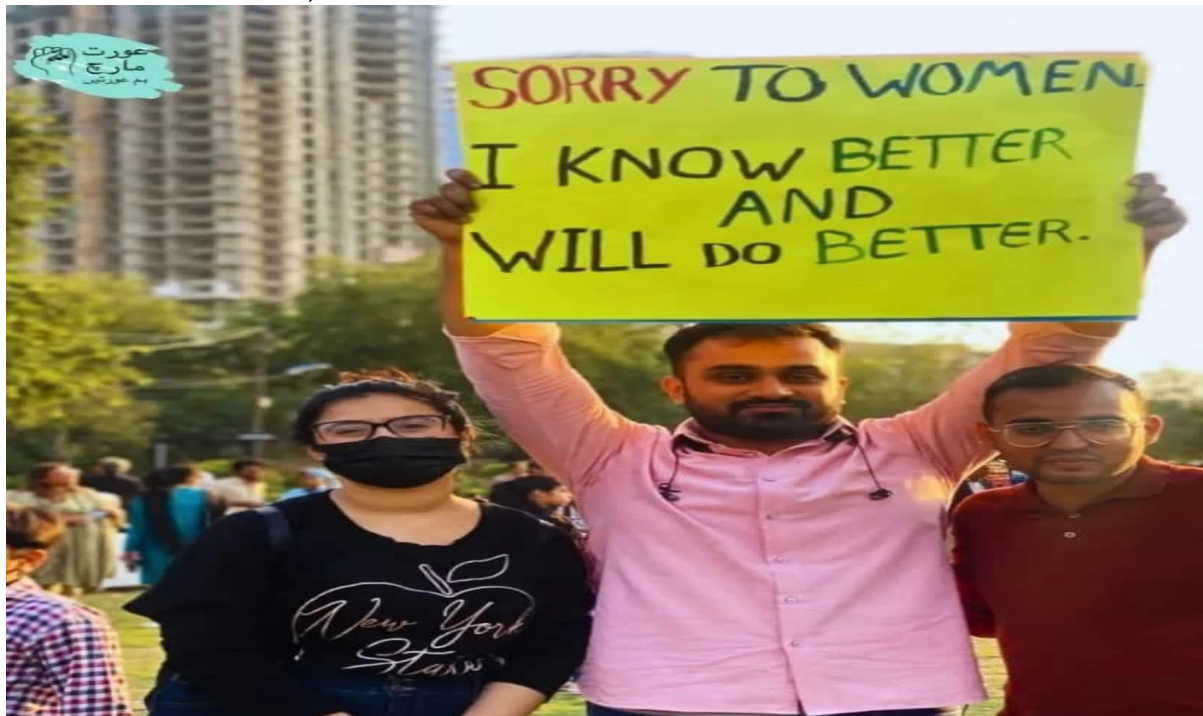


FIGURE 1: SORRY TO WOMEN, I KNOW BETTER AND WILL DO BETTER

REPRESENTATIONAL MEANING

The main focal point in this picture is the man who is pictured holding the sign that has the statement: "SORRY TO WOMEN, I KNOW BETTER AND WILL DO BETTER." The expression has been used as an act of apologizing and a vow to become accountable for earlier mistakes or conduct, especially in terms of gender-related disparities or misogyny. Holding the sign in the street also makes a statement about the man - his determination to be a better person and to contribute to ending gender inequality.

The fact that other people are also in the picture, standing behind the man, might signify that this apology is not a solely personal thought but a smaller part of the bigger and more inclusive trend that assumes the shared guilt of people of all genders to accept the wrongs that were done to the society and promise to work towards its better future. Even the physical placement of the people implies unity with the bigger Aurat March message.

The sign has a bright yellow background that contrasts with the dark text and attracts attention to the apology, representing the urgency of the message. It is also placed in a

bright colour, indicating the optimistic tone of the promise to do better, as the visual perception of the colour is one of optimism and positive change.

INTERACTIVE MEANING

This image creates a dialogue meaning that is achieved by the gesture of the man with the sign that directly addresses the viewer to take an active part in perceiving the message. The hand signal on the part of lifting the sign is a pledge to the words on the sign, which points to accountability. The non-confrontational direct look of the man suggests that this apology is sincere and self-critical and urges the viewer to think about their contribution to solving the issues of gender inequalities and gender-based violence.

Moreover, the body language and posture of the man show that he feels sincere and is willing to change, which means that the apology is not only a symbolic act but also a personal promise to work on his behavior towards women.

COMPOSITIONAL MEANING

The image composition puts the sign in the foreground; thus, it is the focus of the message. The sign has large, bold text because its creators wanted to make sure that the message is obvious and cannot be overlooked. The significant/minor and colour/background differences between the text make the point of the significance of the apology and determination to change.

The fact that the people in the picture are standing, with the man holding the sign at the center, puts his apology at the center of the story. This piece of writing supports the idea that the apology is external and collective, which shows the individual accountability that he is bearing in the framework of gender justice. The individuals around him also help to bring out the feeling of commonness and shared responsibility.

2. ٹھہرک القمر کو اغوا کاروں نے بھی واپس کر دیا



FIGURE 2: ٹھہرک القمر کو اغوا کاروں نے بھی واپس کر دیا

REPRESENTATIONAL MEANING

The main person in the picture is the woman with the sign. The sign is instead a debunking of Khalil-ur-Rehman Qamar through satirical sentences to scorn his attitudes and expose his misogyny. The sentence “اٹھرک القمر کو اغواکاروں نے بھی واپس کر دیا” (Even the abductors of Khalil-ur-Rehman Qamar have returned him) involves hyperbole to convey that Qamar's views are so dangerous that they won't even approve of him who is on the wrong path (represented by "abductors"). His exclusion and alienation are symbolized by the red circle over his portrait in something that lies outside the Aurat March feminist discourse in which he is depicted. This veiled erasure of QA is an ironic attack on Qamar's public persona, suggesting that in patriarchal views and toxic passé in gender equality discussions, Qamar is unwanted.

INTERACTIVE MEANING

The interactive meaning is created due to the direct contact of the woman with the viewer. She is holding the sign without any hesitation, and her smiling face, although appearing empowered, carries the meaning of defiance. Their body posture is assertive and aggressive, and she seems to be one of the active representatives of the Aurat March. Her eye contact and the Puka shell necklace she is wearing are straightforward, as well as her body language: she is asking the viewer to think about their position on the problem of gender inequality and misogyny.

This interaction helps the viewer to identify with this message because the woman in the picture is transformed into a fighter against gender injustice and an activist. The fact that the portrait of Qamar is placed in the red circle and the critique of his actions is printed in bold adds to the impression of rejection and marginalization of the patriarchal figures in feminist movements.

COMPOSITIONAL MEANING

The composition serves so that the woman with the sign is in the central part of the picture and attracts attention to herself as the personification of resistance and empowerment. The text of the sign is big and bold, criticizing Qamar instantly and clearly. The circle around the portrait of Qamar is red, which creates a harsh contrast with the white clothes of the woman and underlines the opposition between the patriarchal principles (symbolized by Qamar) and the ideas of modern feminism (symbolized by the woman).

The red colour surrounding the face of Qamar also shows his rejection in the feminist world. The visual impression that is created by placing Qamar in the red circle implies his marginalization and, therefore, his misogynistic ideas are no longer welcome or tolerated in the Aurat March.

The community aspect and the unity of the Aurat March are also supported by the background aspects of the picture, i.e., other people participating in the march. All these items put the sole woman in the framework of the broader movement in support of gender equality and social transformation.

3. گھر کا کام، سب کا کام



FIGURE 3: گھر کا کام، سب کا کام

REPRESENTATIONAL MEANING

What this image depicts is the male ally as an active participant in breaking down gender norms that have long been organized to benefit men. The words on the sign address the gendered acceptable behaviors expected of women in Pakistan, especially the stereotype that women are the only ones who do work at home. Sounding the alarm of the collective burden of housework, the sign implies the alteration of gender roles, suggesting that the tasks should not be divided along the gender axis but according to the principles of equal distribution of responsibility.

In this regard, the words on the sign are essential to reframe societal rules. The words in the sign not only represent a commentary on household work but are also a compelling opposition to the structural power relationships that reinforce gender inequality. The language used is straightforward and direct, including everyone to understand, words like, everyone has work, are used so as to make it look normal to have responsibilities shared between the genders.

INTERACTIVE MEANING

The interactive sense is done by the positioning sense and the gesture of the participants and how they communicate with the audience by their signage. The two men with the protest signs are at the head of the march and the signs are turned toward the viewer. Such positioning results in the direct address to the audience, challenging them to think about the social constructs of gender roles and obligations.

The fact that the male participant is holding the sign directly towards the viewer seems to imply the active participation in the gender discussion, as well as a certain appeal to the

rest of the people to address the problem of equal domestic work distribution. His position as a male ally bearing a feminist message disrupts the historical account in which men supposedly are the beneficiaries of the gendered social construction especially in the environment where the patriarchy framework dictates social positions.

The sign, which the male participant is holding with a lot of confidence, also erects the gender roles that have characterized men as the ones holding the positions of power or control especially when gender activism is put into perspective. The man is an ally, and by carrying the sign proudly he supports the belief that gender equality is a collective responsibility. Such an exchange provokes the thought that gender identity is crafted not only through the efforts of women but the active participation of men in dismantling the patriarchal traditions.

COMPOSITIONAL MEANING

The compositional meaning goes hand-in-hand with the organizational aspect of the visuals present in the image in order to send a message concerning gender representation. The salience in this picture is attracted to the two men displaying their signs. The signs have bold text in the middle making it easy to read and this is an indicator of the importance of the issue being addressed. The stereotype regarding common housework is spelled out rather well, with the gendered aspect of the common household task being made as a social construct, as opposed to a natural one based on sex.

The arrangement of the men in the foreground supports their direct involvement in the protest, displaying them as the facilitators of change in the flowing discussion of gender equality. The signs also have bright and contrasting colours that make them clear and visible. The arrangement of the signs in the center of the composition makes one focus on the gendered concerns that the signs were addressing, thus the message of gender equality becomes the focus of the picture.

Also, the history of the picture, other people in the protest wearing identical clothes, supports the idea of unity in protest. The people on the background also stress that this is a collective protest and the struggle towards gender equality is inclusive. Other marchers appear in the background and add the feeling of community and unity which is essential in realizing that the issue of gender representation does not concern only the actions of an individual but is also determined by social movements in which both women and men can participate.

جتنی تکلیف عورت مارچ پہ ہوتی ہے اتنی عورت پہ ہونے والے ظلم پہ کیوں نہیں ہوتی۔ 4.



FIGURE 4: جتنی تکلیف عورت مارچ پہ ہوتی ہے اتنی عورت پہ ہونے والے ظلم پہ کیوں نہیں ہوتی۔

REPRESENTATIONAL MEANING

The representational meaning in this case is used to highlight the lack of connection between the display of pain during feminist marches and the injustice that women have to experience in their daily lives. The language use by the participant is sharply criticizing, wondering why people are focusing on the march as an event, yet the same society is not focusing on the gender-based oppression that forms the basis of such open protests. The sign itself asks a question that highlights a hypocrisy present in society - how the suffering and inequality that women experience is dismissed or downplayed, yet when they march to demand their rights, people are usually uncomfortable with it at best, adversarial at worst.

With this sign, the male ally confronts the patriarchal systems that perpetuate such gender inequalities. Such involvement does not only mean that he supports gender equality but also indicates the importance of the male population in dealing with gender-based violence and standing by the women in their struggle to obtain justice. The colour of the background of the sign is red which might portray some sense of urgency and anger to indicate the severity of the matter in question.

INTERACTIVE MEANING

The interactive semantics is provided with the help of the position and gesture of the male participant who is holding the sign. The way he stands at the head of the march with the sign held straightforward and on the visible level reaches out to the viewer and invites him or her to perceive the message critically. The active invitation to the viewer to deal with the problem of gender injustice and the inequality of women in the Pakistani society is formed by the clear positioning of the sign directly in front of the camera.

The straightforwardness of the message of the sign and the gesture of a male ally tends to imply that it is not only a woman who should fight with the rights, but it is their common duty. The man helps to debunk the idea of gender activism being a female-only affair by taking an active part in the protest. His participation in the march and carrying the sign has a strong message that gender equality is not only the duty of women but also of men and that the society, in general, must put an end to the problems of oppression and injustice toward women.

Moreover, absence of the direct look at the viewer stresses that the important is the message not a person who holds the sign in his/her hands. The participant, in its turn, is not trying to gain recognition but is, rather, promoting a social change that goes beyond a personal act and demands a structural change in the way the gender justice issues are approached.

COMPOSITIONAL MEANING

The compositional meaning on this image has been taken by arrangement of the visual elements to convey the importance of the message. The sign is the main images in the picture; its positioning has been done in such a way that the message is the main point of focus. The sign has a bold text which together with the bright red background makes a contrast immediately, thereby making sure that the viewer gets the message easily.

The sign is red, which is clearly eye-catching, and it could be symbolic of anger as well as of the acuity of the concern being expressed- namely, the gender-based violence that is still prevalent in society. The message is written in an easy and straightforward language that makes it accessible to the viewer and compels them to recognize the contrast between the widely accepted view of marches in support of women rights and the absence of such wide acceptance of the injustice that women have to experience in their everyday lives.

The male participant is put at the forefront of the picture, which solidifies his role in the protest as active. The way he is standing confidently with the sign shows that he is dedicated to the cause. The hand, which holds the sign, is a gesture of authority and decisiveness, which is then another indication that this is not a purely symbolical gesture but the demand at a genuine social change. Such body language of the participant and the location of the sign implies an affiliation with the feminist movement, constructing the man as an ally and promoting equal collaboration in the fight against the patriarchal system.

The context of a larger social movement in which the individual is placed is further provided by the background that comprises other participants in the march. It implies that the message on the sign is not a lonely issue but a general attempt to solve the gender inequality issue and violence against women. The garden-like environment, the blue sky, and the sunshine recreate the image of hope and rebirth, giving people a hint that gender justice can be restored with the help of joint activist effort.

5. تیرے ماتھے پہ یہ آنچل بہت ہی خوب ہے لیکن

تو اس آنچل سے اک پرچم بنالیتی تو اچھا تھا

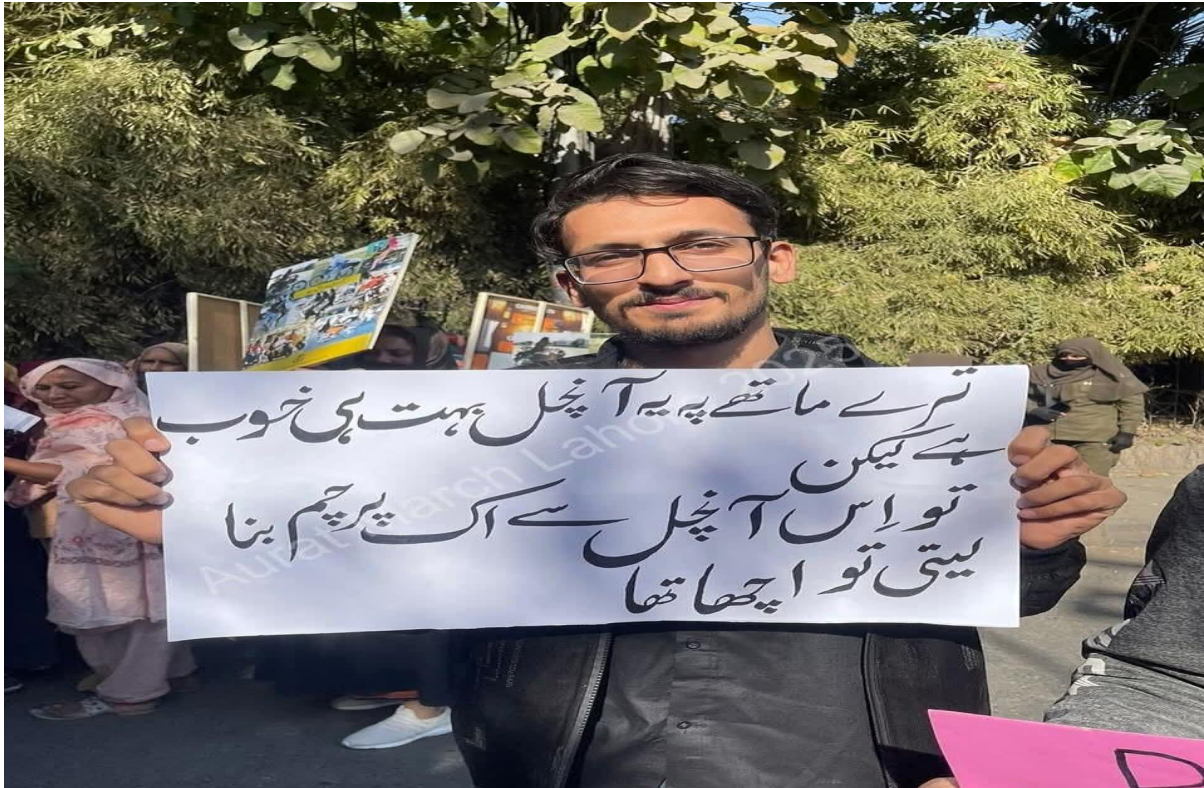


FIGURE 5: تیرے ماتھے پہ یہ آنچل بہت ہی خوب ہے لیکن

تو اس آنچل سے اک پرچم بنالیتی تو اچھا تھا

REPRESENTATIONAL MEANING

The words on the sign allude to the popular lines by Faiz Ahmed Faiz and turn them into an indictment of patriarchal domination. This is because the lines speak of the beauty of the woman's veil (which can also be interpreted as a symbol of modesty), but according to the poem's message, this beauty needs to be empowered and put to better use, just as the flag represents. Considering the context of the Aurat March, the message on the sign can be translated as aiming to transform the role of women, which has traditionally been

confined to domestic areas and beauty standards, into a symbol of empowerment, freedom, and activism. The symbol of the veil, long associated with the subordination of women, is transformed into a symbol of female power in this case, implying that female beauty and strength must be harnessed to build a force of change, just as Faiz proposed to make the veil a flag.

In the transformation of the beauty into a flag, the message also dismisses the idea that beauty is the only attribute that makes a woman, and promotes the idea of creating a society where the power and the ability of women to act and decide upon things are the fundamental indicators of their value. The man in the picture with the sign is an illustration of male support for the feminist mission; it emphasises that gender equality is not a female problem but a social problem shared by everyone.

INTERACTIVE MEANING

The interactive semantics of this picture are achieved through direct contact between the man with the sign and the viewer. The man looks serious but in a supportive kind of way, which is reinforced by his pointing to the sign that he is holding. The proud pose and smile on his face convey a hint of compliance with the Aurat March, encouraging the viewer to consider the symbolism of women in society.

Combined with the direct gaze of the man, the provocative message confronts the viewer, daring them to reconsider their ideas about the role of women and their beauty in society. It makes the viewer think of the potential that is suppressed in women by society and the Patriarchal systems that still chain and restrict them. This message is further enhanced by the presence of poetic lines on the sign, encouraging men and women to challenge the traditional roles allocated to women and to enable them to become more active members of society, roles that are not limited by their beauty or confined to the home.

COMPOSITIONAL MEANING

The image composition places the sign at the focal point, utilising bold text that is both easy to read and visually appealing, thereby grabbing attention. The yellow writing and purple background help the message to stand out, and it is impossible not to notice it. The clash of vivid text colours with the natural shades of the background contributes to the visual aggressiveness of the message, and the criticism of patriarchal structures seems especially urgent and daring.

The man with the sign is standing so that the message is the focus, and it visually indicates that he is also part of this mass movement to transform societal norms. The image of the woman's veil in the world of Faiz poetry is empowered, as the meaning is created in a way that the symbol of a woman's beauty should serve higher purposes.

The history of the picture, which features the participants of the march in the background, reinforces the sense of unity and belonging in the Aurat March, underscoring the notion that it is not an individual endeavour toward gender equality. Nature (the sunlit sky) produces an effect of optimism, conveying the possibility of social reform and gender freedom.

7. اٹھ میری بہن، میرے ساتھ ہی چلتا ہے تجھے

The message here is an appeal for unity and solidarity in support of women's quest for gender equality and liberation.



FIGURE 6: اٹھ میری بہن، میرے ساتھ ہی چلنا ہے تجھے

REPRESENTATIONAL MEANING

The lyrics اٹھ میری بہن (Get up, my sister) openly speak of the past when women were oppressed and, therefore, should stand up against any form of gendered discrimination. It also helps women stand up for their rights and demand their agency, clarifying that their fight for equality is not in vain and should not be disregarded. The term "sister" denotes a strong relationship and unity, meaning that the struggle of women is a family business — something that everybody, irrespective of sex, ought to fight.

The unity in the struggle towards gender equality is also supported by the second part of the text, میرے ساتھ ہی چلنا ہے تجھے (you have to walk with me). It promotes collective efforts, and men have come forward to be partners in the struggle for social justice and the empowerment of women. The statement implies that gender equality cannot be a female battle but rather an ordinary duty that requires the involvement of all people, regardless of their gender.

INTERACTIVE MEANING

The interactive message of the picture is conveyed through the direct contact between the man and the viewer. His pose, confidently holding the sign, embodies solidarity and support for the Aurat March and its aims. His proud stance and the message imply that Aurat March is not merely a female movement but one for all people who believe that justice and equality are the ideals to stand by.

The message 'Get up, my sister, you must walk with me' appeals to the viewer to consider their role in promoting gender equality and encourages them to take action. It also highlights that it is not only the role of women to fight patriarchy, but men must also take up the challenge and become supportive of women's rights.

COMPOSITIONAL MEANING

The image composition is such that it places the sign in a central position, drawing the viewer's attention to the bold and essential message it conveys. The plain appearance of the sign, with its use of bold black font and a plain background, makes the message

understandable without any doubt. The simplicity of the design further supports the message that the struggle towards gender equality need not be complicated but must be learned and practised by all.

The sign man is in the foreground, which means he is an active participant in the cause. The way he looks directly at the viewer, combined with the confidence of his pose, emphasizes the idea that men should take an active part in the Aurat March and the gender justice movement.

عورت کی کمائی میں برکت ہے۔ 7.



FIGURE 7: عورت کی کمائی میں برکت ہے

REPRESENTATIONAL MEANING

The slogan عورت کی کمائی میں برکت ہے contests the conservative, patriarchal idea that women work (whether at home or beyond) is of less value as compared to male work. With the mention of a blessing in the earning of a woman, the sign changes the story, noting that whatever contribution women may make, whether economically, emotionally, or domestically, is worthy and vital. This is especially pertinent to the Aurat March, as one of the event's key focuses is economic empowerment and recognition of unpaid women's labour.

The accompanying drawings also promote the symbolic power of the message. The winged fish can be viewed as the symbol of potential and freedom; hence, the implication is that women ought not to be caged like the fish, but instead, they should be permitted to fly and excel. The simplicity and authenticity ideology are supported by the stick figure of the woman, as it demonstrates that a woman is indeed worth more than the socially defined titles, but rather what she gives back to the world.

INTERACTIVE MEANING

The interactive message of the picture is conveyed through the interaction between the participant and the sign. The confidence and solidarity with the aims of the Aurat March, particularly regarding gender equality and empowerment, are evident in the smiles and

proud postures of the participants. With the sign in hand, the person holds it firmly and makes a direct assertion of their support for the feminist agenda, asking the onlooker to consider what women earn and what they produce in this society and how society must learn to appreciate and honour it.

This act of direct address prompts viewers to reconsider how society perceives the work and contributions of women. The confident posture and the smile create an impression that the work of women and their income is something to be proud of, and the sign itself is a cry for change in the perception and appreciation of the role of women in society.

COMPOSITIONAL MEANING

The image composition makes the sign the focal point, as its large text qualifies against the yellow background. The colours used to make the message visible at once, combined with the plainness of the design with the text positioned in the middle of the sign, make the message evident and beyond doubt.

Minimalist yet symbolic, the sketch of the fish with wings and the stick-figure woman contribute to the overall empowerment message. The winged fish is a token of liberty and indefinite possibilities, and thus, it implies that the income of women ought not to be limited by patriarchal institutions. The stick figure adds another layer of simplicity and truthfulness to the message, highlighting that real empowerment lies in acknowledging the contributions that women make rather than overlaying the ideals of beauty or success on them.

The sign-carrying woman stands proudly in the centre, a symbol of agency and strength. This central placement helps emphasise that her message is not a purely personal statement but part of a broader collective appeal to acknowledge and appreciate the work of women. The background, featuring other people participating in the march, contributes to the sense of cooperation and unity, reinforcing the idea that the Aurat March is a mass movement, one that promotes gender justice.

DISCUSSION ON FINDINGS

The multimodal study of the chosen visual texts of the Pakistan Aurat March 2025 demonstrates the lesser-known potential of the digital and performative performances in the public space to play an important role in the construction, negotiation and subversion of gender identity. Supported by the system of the Multimodal Discourse Analysis described by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), there are numerous representational, interactive and compositional layers of meaning presented by the visuals under investigation that indicate the gradual shifting gender discourses in Pakistan as observed in its digital culture and protest culture.

The most important trend in the entire data is the increased presence and performativity of male allies in feminist spaces, both visual and textual such as Sorry to Women, I Know Better and Will Do Better, Ghar ka kaam sab ka kaam, and uth meri behn, mere saath hi chalna hai tujhe. These depictions indicate a significant change in the presentation of masculinity, a display of power to presentation of solidarity, responsibility and compassion. The Aurat March removes the gendered division of labour in activism by positioning men in the forefront of compositions along with feminist slogans, redefining masculinity as alignment with gender justice pursuit.

The other most salient theme is the satire and cultural critique philosophy through which the author reveals and deconstructs the patriarchal accounts. To illustrate, in the mockery of Khalil-ur-Rehman Qamar, the sentence that provides the title to this poster, as

well as the visual reminiscence invoked by a poster are ironical and lend to the rejection of patriarchal ideologues. In a similar sense poetic allusion as in the case of Tere Maathay Pe Ye Aanchal Saab... creatively transform common symbols of gender oppression such as the dupatta into allegories of resistance and social action. These illustrations help emphasize how different tools of semiotics, including colour, font, image, and gesture, are used to develop a multi-layered meaning that appeals to cultural memory and norms as well as complicates them.

The financial aspect of gendered oppression is also vividly described, which is particularly manifests in the #EndPinkTax poster and the slogan “Aurat Ki Kamai Mein Barkat Hai”. These are protest signs against both the fact that women are commodities and the fact that women and their labour is systemically devalued. The idea of economic empowerment expressed through symbolic drawings and empowering slogans is in line with the key feminist actions to acknowledge and redistribute labour both paid and unpaid in respect to home and public work.

Finally, the group and communal slant of the Aurat March images is continuous across the information. Protests have been depicted visually in a way that frames protestors not as individuals but within groups of people to underline the collective aspect of the protest. The textual decisions such as the bold, centered font, direct stare, and intense colours, keep the text readable and loud. Consequently, Aurat March can be seen as a multimodal space of discourse challenging the power structures through visual and linguistic signs and altering how the concept of gender is understood in Pakistani society.

Overall, this discussion shows that digital and performative spaces of protest enable the construction of a multivocal understanding of gender, where different identities—women, men, and gender minorities—are involved in the ongoing redefinition and challenge of societal norms. The Aurat March content is a response that progresses from passive representation to proactive expression, which should be seen as a key aspect of gender identity within the digital environment of Pakistan.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, the study shows that the current digital space in Pakistan is an active arena where gender identities are constructed, challenged, and renegotiated through multimodal discourse. Using the social semiotic approach of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), protest signs, social media posts, and visual narratives of movements like Aurat March are analysed to demonstrate how linguistic and visual elements work together to support underlying semantic ideologies while also challenging dominant patriarchal norms. The use of colour, space, gesture, and injunctive language, for example, highlights key topics such as male allyship, economic justice, satire, and collective resistance, all revolving around the idea that digital platforms are transforming discussions on gender across the population. These platforms break conventional rules and allow for different expressions of gender, while also reflecting existing societal disparities. Consequently, the study emphasizes the need for a more critical approach to digital content and advocates for greater diversity and equality in gender representation. Educators, protesters, and policymakers should be encouraged to recognize the power of multimodal communication in advancing gender equity in Pakistan.

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