

Qualitative Exploration of Attitude towards Online Feminist Discourse in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study. The present study aimed to explore the attitudes of young individuals towards online feminist activism in Pakistan. Furthermore, the goal of the study was to qualitatively explore how digital spaces serve as an ongoing archive of community voices, and demonstrate the relevance of feminist demands in Pakistani society.

Methodology. An exploratory study was done through eight focus group discussions with social media users ($N = 48$) and five in-depth interviews with feminist activists to identify the attitudes towards online feminist discourse in Pakistan. Thematic content analysis was used to identify the major themes from the qualitative data.

Findings. Through thematic content analysis five major themes were evolved i.e., knowledge about online feminist activism, online feminist practices, positive attitudes and negative attitudes about online feminist activism and myths related to online feminist discourse in Pakistan that were prevailing. The domain of knowledge constitutes experiences and awareness about online feminist movements. Online feminist practices involve the liking and sharing of late feminism on social media. Platforms of awareness about women's rights, a safe place to share opinions, and providing justice to the victim of harassment and oppression were positive attitudes towards online feminist movements. Negative attitudes towards online feminist movements include deviation from culture and religion, promoting vulgarity and westernization, anti-men, limited to the elite class, and misuse for personal benefits. Online movements are funded by western agencies and promoting homosexuality in our society was the most common myth.

Conclusion. The phenomenon has been indigenously explored through discussion with the general population and interviews with feminist activists, the subject matter expert who was not previously addressed in the Pakistani context. Both negative and positive attitudes exist towards the ongoing feminist movements yet Awareness and ongoing women's marches across the country are evidence of the fruitful use of digital feminist activism to change the narratives about feminism in Pakistan.

Keywords: Social Media, Online Feminist Activism, Feminist Practices, Movements.

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Introduction

The visible manifestation of feminism may be seen across different countries in several ways. The most radical movement in contemporary times is the feminist movement, also known as the fight for women's freedom, which redefines the entire social structure and changes the underpinning of social behaviour (Khushbakht et al., 2020). Along with the legislative, executive, and judicial branches, the media's independence is regarded as the "fourth estate" in democracies. By utilizing language as a tool of social control, mainstream media effectively communicates cultural norms and values that legitimize the social order and define the world. It is more than just a way of entertainment (Akhtar et al., 2020). Online activism may take many different forms, from simple participation (such as updating one's social media profile image) to more nuanced engagement (such as authoring in-depth postings about a social issue) (Gomez & Kaiser, 2019). Social media enables online activism in three key ways. As they connect individuals to social movements like #metoo, they first help people communicate their views and feelings (Bradley-Geist et al., 2015; Mendes et al., 2018). Second, they have made it possible for members of the online community to assist, arrange events, and address criticism of their actions (Rdólfisdóttir & Jóhannsdóttir, 2018). One illustration is "vigilantism," in which perceived norm violations (such as misogyny) are revealed and publicly approved (Schwarz & Richey, 2019). This can promote activism inside in-groups and raise awareness. However, it has issues with vigilantism and might lead to enmity between groups (Jane, 2016). Third, social allows serenity to work with others outside of their online group to develop and contribute to new shared realities. Examples of how this may empower communities include women's #freethenipple posts of topless photographs to mainstream unsexualized depictions of breasts and reclaim the female body (Rdólfisdóttir & Jóhannsdóttir, 2018). The emergence of online activist networks is hardly an isolated phenomenon; rather, online and offline activities are usually linked. In fact, by promoting and coordinating offline protest, internet activism helps it (Zhuravskaya et al., 2020).

As the internet provides a more democratic, open, and widely accessible venue for continuous feminist discussions, Pakistan's online spaces have evolved into crucial forms of feminist self-expression. Such discussions provide an important illustration of Pakistan's feminist history and highlight the crucial importance of including the marginalised in the country's historical narrative. Digital spaces highlight the relevance of feminism demands in Pakistani society and serve as a continuous record of community voices (Khan, 2020; Rehman, 2019; Saigol, 2019). Online movements such as #MeToo have gained momentum in Pakistan, as well as posts related Aurat march get highlighted on social media as people actively take part in these movements and also criticize it. It is a need for time to explore the factors that interplay the role in supporting these online movements and criticize them (Rafi, 2019).

Review of Literature

With the development of the internet and ICTs, which provide female users with the ability to create and share their content online in support of social justice and gender equality, fourth-wave feminism has grown significantly (Licudine, 2015; Martin & Valentin 2013; Munro, 2013). Women's movements have been given a fresh push by hashtags, which have helped feminist activists achieve more awareness and support for their movement (Tazi & Oumlil, 2020). One of the most well-known forms of feminist activism is hashtag feminism, which includes creating communities of discourse among diverse Twitter users by utilizing hashtags (the # sign followed by a themed word or phrase) (Berridge & Portwood-Stacer, 2015; Dixon, 2014; Horeck, 2014). Even though the media has focused a lot of attention on hashtag feminism, we still don't fully understand the purpose of phrases like #MeToo or their potential to affect societal change. In one of the research case studies, the #BeenRapedNeverReported hashtag, which peaked in 2014 (Keller et al., 2018), was used by girls and women to share their own experiences with sexual assault and the reasons they chose not to report it to the police in a manner that was strikingly similar to #MeToo.

The Internet and social media's wide audience reach have sparked and given strength to movements (Rafi, 2019). So far, the scope of the online feminist movement may have been small in Pakistan, yet it is the beginning of a revolution. With the growing understanding of concepts that were once 'taboo', and the unleashing power of social media, fueled by a generation that challenges traditional norms and is not afraid to speak up the ripple has begun to spread (Rafi, 2019). Social media has revolutionized the approach towards feminism, not just in Pakistan but globally. A significant manifestation of this transformation is the influential #MeToo movement, which sent shockwaves around the world with its revelations. It transcended racial, social, cultural, political, economic, and other boundaries (Ghadery, 2019). Online platforms have become a repository of community voices, effectively showcasing the relevance of feminist demands within Pakistani society (Saigol & Chaudhary, 2020). The internet has emerged as a fertile ground for innovative feminist expressions, providing a glimpse into the diverse mindsets of "Pakistani feminists" who encompass a multitude of voices. The impact of digital technologies on feminist knowledge production raises questions about the current practices of feminist memory. The numerous accounts of trauma and nostalgia encountered ne, particularly in the context of feminist movements, present an opportunity to galvanize collective history and identity, reinforcing the importance and indispensability of feminist consciousness-raising (Saigal, 2019). Recent advancements in the feminist movement and politics in Pakistan have created a space for generations of feminists to converge and learn from one another. Undoubtedly, digital media has paved the way for new leadership, fostering a potentially more democratized feminist movement. Nevertheless, there is an ongoing debate regarding performative activism and whether online activism genuinely contributes to substantive feminist militancy (Dad & Khan, 2019).

Theoretical Underpinning

Understanding the study phenomenon theory of media and feminism will serve as the theoretical underpinning of the current study. The theory of mediatization (Hepp et al., 2015) and Cyberfeminism theory (Plant, 1994) will be discussed to establish an argument on a theoretical basis. One important idea in the field of media is media. The goal of this theoretical framework is to make it possible for media, culture, and society to interact (Hepp et al., 2015). This idea has been developed from a range of viewpoints, particularly those related to culture and society, leading to a more detailed and comprehensive definition. It emphasizes the importance of the media, which might raise various issues like how human connection and the media produce "communicative figurations" or how media influence established institutions like politics or religion (Hjarvard, 2013). On a three-level scale, the relationship between media and feminist activism takes three different viewpoints thus present study will use this theory to expand upon the current approach. Media practices, mediation processes, and mediatization are useful places to start when attempting to comprehend how the three ideas interact. Macro-level of mediatization is made up of social movement group processes that are connected by shared political ideologies. These mechanisms have the power to influence media and activism (Mattoni & Treré, 2014). This continuous process has a direct connection to mediation. The collectives are regrouped through mediation and feminist waves are being positioned. Some people can join groups of others who share their interests and connect regularly to that collective formation. Mediation enables us to better comprehend how feminists and other social movement actors might engage with the reconfiguration and repair of media technologies and meanings. Mediatization (at the macro level) and media practices might interact with the help of the mediation mechanism. Media practices refer to the media use of each person who makes up the collective. These Activist media practices (Couldry, 2004, 2008) are common social activities that enable feminists to communicate and exchange ideas, where the media consumers can become media producers.

Sadie Plant, the director of the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit at the University of Warwick in Britain, first used the term "cyberfeminism" in 1994 to refer to the work of feminists who were interested in theorizing, critiquing, and utilizing the Internet, cyberspace, and new media technologies in general. The theory describes a particular subset of feminism where women would benefit from using advanced technology in their struggle against patriarchy. At its most fundamental level, cyberfeminism simply

refers to providing women with the skills they need in the information era (Fotopoulou, 2016). With the emergence of cyberfeminism, authors contend that a new (fourth) wave of the feminist movement is emerging. One of the biggest advancements in feminism in the last 50 years has been cyberfeminism, which uses the influence of internet media outlets to promote social justice and gender equality (Martin & Valentin, 2013) and considers the fourth wave of feminism (Munro, 2013).

Purpose of the Study

The emergence of social media and private media channels marked a turning point for Pakistan's feminist movement after 2008 (Saigol & Chaudhary, 2020). Here it is important to address the attitudes of the general public towards the growing activism on social media. Studying gender differences and emphasizing the primary role of the sexes in society is essential to feminism. Unfortunately, Pakistan is one of the nations that have less tolerance for feminism and has argued that it is unnecessary in an Islamic state since it is a Western concept (Zia, 2017). The study aims to conceptualise and contextualized the attitudes of the general public towards the recent wave of feminism on social media. Despite being a witness to the ongoing feminist activism on social media, there's a scarcity of research on this phenomenon, and why it is prevailing in Pakistan, so the present study has qualitatively explored the component of online feminism among the youth. The main objective of the study was to explore and understand the attitudes towards online feminism through focus group discussions with social media users and interviews with feminist activists indigenously. Our research question was

What are the attitudes of social media users and feminist activists towards online feminist activism in Pakistan?

Method

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study was to explore and understand the attitudes towards online feminism of social media users through focus group discussions and interviews indigenously.

Research Design

An exploratory qualitative research design was used to study the attitudes towards online feminist activism in Pakistan. The study includes focus group discussions and interviews.

Focus Group Discussion and Interviews.

Focus group discussions gave a first and deep look into the traits and variables needed to explore the phenomena in depth as a first step in the process of research. Several studies have been taken to address the online feminist movements, but none has looked at the attitude of the general population regarding online feminist movements. The purpose of the focus group discussion was to gain a better understanding of knowledge about the different online feminist movements and attitudes towards these movements as well as how feminists are utilizing social media as a tool for promoting feminism and fighting for equality.

Sample

Respondents for focus group discussion were randomly selected from Quaid-i-Azam University including both female and male students belonging to different ethnicity and areas. Eight focus group discussions were held in this study. Each group had five to eight participants particularly those who use social media (N=48). The reason to select participants from Quaid-i-Azam University is that people here come from different ethnic backgrounds, and rural and urban areas all across Pakistan, it is also known as mini Pakistan for its unique cultural diversity so it was beneficial to have opinions of participants of the different region about feminism and its promotion on online spaces.

Five interviews were undertaken for this study. Participants were approached through the snowball technique through different sources. In-depth interviews with feminist activists were conducted to get further insight into the phenomena of online feminism ($N=5$). Four men and women, and one transgender feminist activist were closely included in the study. Here criteria for a feminist activist are based on the definition of a feminist activist. The definition of a feminist activist would be someone who engages in an organized feminist activity, such as political writing, public debate, and attending feminist conferences and political meetings (Madison al., 2014). Additional criteria have been added that activists must be utilizing social media as a tool to promote feminist activism. Participants were having different educational backgrounds, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and religion. There were two atheist activists rest of them were Muslims.

Focus Group and Interview Guide

After a thorough reading, the focus group guide was developed. Important areas were highlighted, and specific questions were written in such a way that they would generate the most responses. Turner (2010) proposed to use questions that are straightforward and well-worded, with careful attention to language (e.g., avoiding judgmental and evocative wording). Each sub-topic of interest was properly covered by the questions in the focused group guide. The semi-structured interview guide was developed to get the views of different feminist activists on the use of social media in promoting online feminist movements and also their ways of promoting feminism, the motivation behind it and their definition of feminism have also been taken into account to develop a rationale for their activism on social media. Important points were underlined, and specific questions were reworded to obtain significantly more responses. The questions in the interview guide adequately covered each sub-topic of interest.

Procedure

The focus group discussions were conducted in person. The time frame was chosen based on the respondents' comfort level. In this study, participants had an in-depth conversation to ensure that they understood the criteria and probes that were used. The average discussion time was 40 minutes to 1 hour. The minimum time taken for the interview by participants was 30 minutes taken was one hour. The discussions and interviews were audiotaped with the participants' consent. The respondents were given written and verbal information on the study's objectives and purpose. The goal of the study was also explained to the participants, and their verbal consent was obtained. Participants were informed that they could leave the focus group discussion at any time without explaining. Homogeneous groups were developed to obtain the most information in focus group discussions. The basic goal was to establish a trusting environment. Participants were told to respect what other members of the group had to say. Participants were also assured that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential. Participants were properly acknowledged for their participation after the focus group session.

After focus group discussions and interviews, thematic content analysis was used to create categories and subcategories. The basic function of content analysis is to assign a single unit to multiple categories at the same time (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) in a way that ensures homogeneity within categories, coding schemes, and order while ensuring heterogeneity within the domain and among categories in general. Word by word and line by line, data transcription is achieved by segmenting information into understandable elements. All focus group and interview questions were divided to produce the most coding categories possible to obtain such results. As a result, the videotape was reviewed several times until the data was completely examined. Following the discussions, the data was transcribed to identify different categories and subcategories.

Results

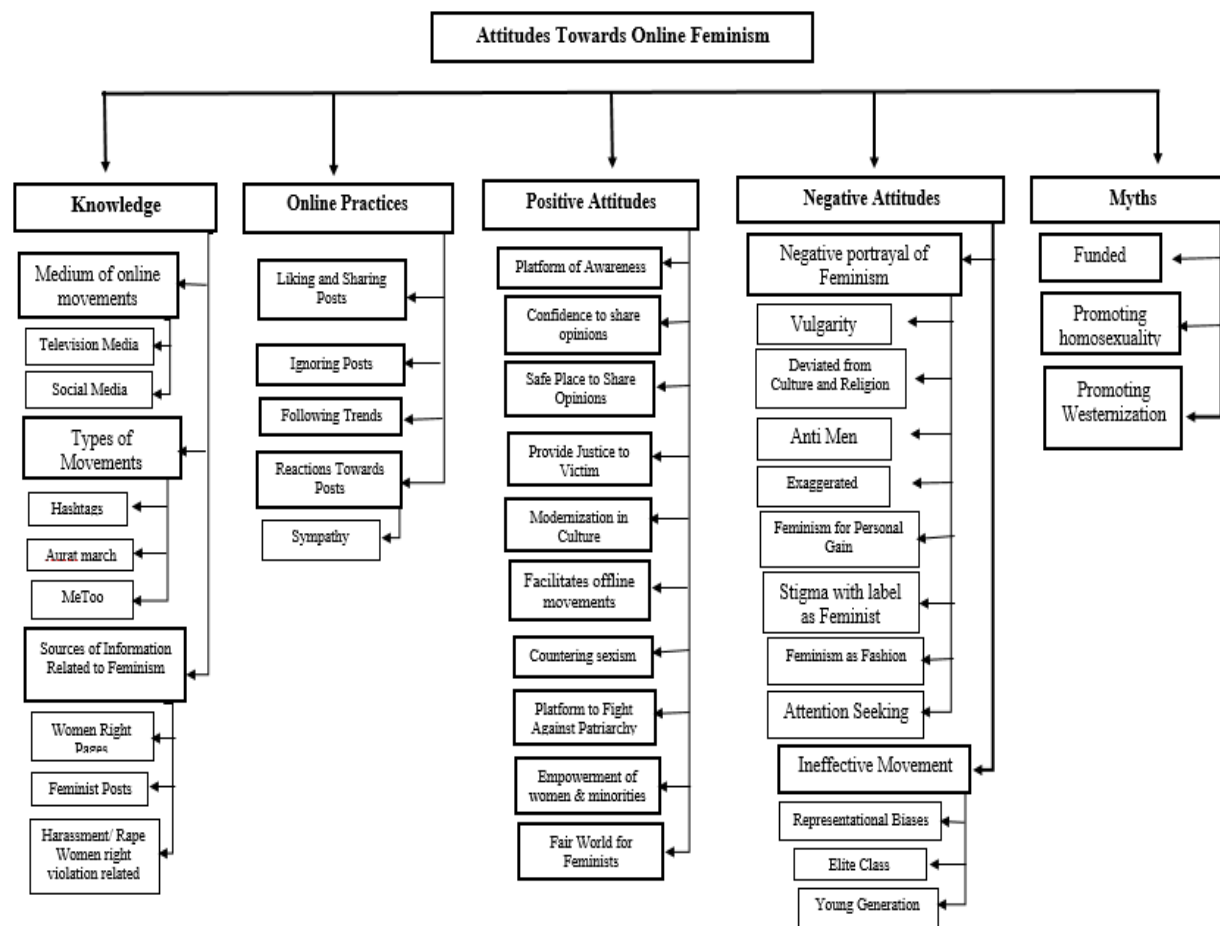
Majorly five themes were discovered through FGDS and interviews. each theme includes categories and subcategories. The overall picture of themes categories and subcategories has been displayed in Table 1 and Figure 1.

Table 1: *Table Showing Themes Categories and Subcategories for Attitude Towards Online Feminism Evolved Through Thematic Content Analyses (N=48)*

Themes	Categories	Subcategories
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Medium of Online Feminist Movement ▪ Types of online movements ▪ Source of Information Related to Feminism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media • Television media • Me too • Hashtags • Aurat march • Women Rights Related Pages. • Feminist posts on social media • Harassment incidents related posts • Rape incident/related Post • Women rights violation related posts.
Online Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Liking and Sharing Posts Related to Feminism ▪ Ignoring the Posts Related to Feminism ▪ Follow Trends/Hashtags ▪ Reaction Towards the Posts Related Incident 	
Positive Attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Platform of Awareness ▪ Confidence to Share Opinions ▪ Safe Place to Share Opinions ▪ Provide Justice to the Victims ▪ Online movement facilitate offline protest or moments ▪ Online Movements are Countering Sexism ▪ Platform to Fight Against Patriarchy ▪ Social media as Fair world for Pakistani Feminists ▪ Empowerment of Women and Minorities 	
Negative Attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Negative Portrayal of Feminism on Social Media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting Vulgarity • Deviated From Culture and Religion. • Anti Men • Exaggerated Posts • Feminism for Personal Gain. • Stigma With Labeled as Feminist • Feminism as Fashion • Attention Seeking.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ineffectiveness of Online Feminist Movements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representational Biases • Elite Class • Young Generation
Myths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Funded ▪ Promoting Westernization. ▪ Promoting LGBTQ 	

Figure 1: Figure Showing Major Themes and Categories Related to Attitude Towards Online Feminism (N=53)



Detail description have been discussed below.

Knowledge Related to Online Feminist Movements

Information from FGDs has revealed that participants know the different feminist movements on social media and the existing knowledge and experiences about online feminism on social media that perceive as components of Online feminism.

Medium of Online Feminist Movements. It was found that there are different sources or mediums for promoting feminist movements in digital spaces.

Social Media. Information from the participants revealed that social media apps such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram are the medium through which people receive and share information related to feminism. Sites like Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and Instagram have made activism simpler than ever by

reducing obstacles related to distance and geography, increasing public discourse, and providing a platform for awareness and change.

Television Media. Participants also talk about how television media is portraying g feminism and how it is representing women and me in our society according to them media portrays our society as male-dominant and intolerant towards any social change they talk about TV dramas that portray a patriarchal society and male dominance. Narrated by a participant that *“Our dramas are even not supporting equal women's rights and it is deeply rooted in our society that we are patriarchal society and intolerance towards feminism”* They also narrated that dramas can bring positive change in the mindset of people related to women's rights and feminism.

Types of Online Feminist Movements. Online feminist movements such as me too movements are considered to be feminist movements on online spaces that spread knowledge about the feminist discourse on social media.

Me Too. Participants have shown knowledge about the me too movement that it is a harassment-related moment that started after the incident of Ali Zafar and Meesha Shafi's case one participant explain it with shows that the start of online feminism has its roots in the me too movement. They consider me too movement to be a feminist movement in online spaces

Hashtags. It was mentioned by the participants that all kind of feminist activism is in the form of trend and hashtags. They consider this as a positive thing as it floats on social media after an incident and make people active in participating in their role in promoting feminism as well as playing their part in raising their voices against women's right violations.

Aurat March. Aurat march is a movement that has civic activism but it gain popularity through its online discourse on social media, information related to the Aurat march is perceived as part of online feminism in Pakistan by the participants.

Source of Information Related to Feminism. Some sources of information related to feminism were explored. These sources were archives of feminist data on social media such as posts, pages, and some incident-related information.

Women Rights Related Pages. Certain pages on social media contain posts like Equal rights /gender equality needs of feminism, and women empowerment that are taken into the context of feminist posts related posts. People also mention while discussing that they have liked some women rights related pages on Instagram and they want to stay aware of current issues, so the pages provide them with information from time to time. Most girls in FGDs have shown that they follow pages on social media to promote feminism. For example, a girl narrated that *“I have seen people do not openly talk about feminism and women's rights, I follow pages related to feminism so that I can be updated”*.

Feminist Posts on Social Media. Posts that contain knowledge and information about feminism theory, different feminist movements such as me too and Aurat March and gender base discrimination were considered feminist posts by the participants.

Harassment Incidents Related Posts. On Based information from participants, they labelled issues related to harassment, posts and any content on social media related to women harassment cases as feminist issues. It was found that every issue related to harassment, violence, rape or discrimination, whenever highlighted on social media people, perceive it as a feminist issue and after that posts that have been sourced on social media sites consider to be feminist as they appear to be the one, and mostly shared by the labelled feminist on social media.

Rape Incident Related Posts. Rape cases either related to women, men or transgender get highlighted on social media as an issue of gender later on posts related to this issue are labelled as feminist posts as it refers and perceived as feminist posts, we're talking about any kind of human rights violation seems to have feminist basis.

Women Rights Violation Related Posts. Domestic violence, gender discrimination and any post that reflects some kind of gender issue are taken as feminist posts as indicated by FGD participants. It was observed that whenever someone talks about online feminism they refer to discrimination and women's rights issues as feminist issues on social media and posts that depict women's right violation are labelled as feminist posts.

Incidents Related to Harassment, Rape and Women's Right Violation Leads to Movement Online. It was observed in the discussion with almost every group that after a certain incident happens people started sharing content related to that issue on social media. After any incident that is related to women's rights being violated or raped, harassment specifically posts started to appear on Twitter, Instagram Facebook and WhatsApp statuses, so according to the participants incident leads to a proper feminist movement on the internet and get everyone's attention. As a participant worded that *"Whenever an incident happens, posts start getting pop up on social media about it and seems like a movement and people start reacting on the particular posts"*. This was something interesting to note that people label every issue that has some kind of oppression, discrimination and violation as a feminist issue on social media.

Online Feminist Practices

When asked about the participant's reactions to the posts that they observe as feminist posts on social media they answer with their specific reason as to why they react to accounts for their online practices.

Liking and Sharing Posts Related to Feminism. People's common reaction to feminist posts was that if they find an appealing feminist post, when specifically, about an incident they like and share them with their friends and followers.

Ignoring the Posts Related to Feminism. A common reaction to the post related to feminism was people ignore them and scroll down to others as it doesn't seem interesting to them, or they don't have any kind of opinion about them.

Follow Trends/Hashtags. It was mentioned by the participants that all kind of feminist activism is in the form of trend and hashtags. They consider this as a positive thing as it floats on social media after an incident and also makes people active in participating in their role in promoting feminism as well as playing their part in raising their voices against women's rights violations. For example, a girl narrated *"Through trends victims of any kind of violation get justice and it also helps in promoting the need for such kind of social activities"*.

Reaction Towards the Posts. The major reaction narrated by the participants towards posts related to the incident was sympathy. There was an element of sympathy that people have expressed while talking about the incident-related posts on social media that they feel sympathy when posts related to sexual harassment and rape appear, which becomes the reason for sharing them whether they are promoting feminism or not, but they intend to share posts with whom they feel sympathy. For example, a girl narrated that *"whenever I see posts related to sexual assault or gender prejudice, I feel that being a girl this is something I have faced many times"*

Positive Attitude Towards Online Feminist Movements

Mainly in the focus group discussion, two types of attitudes were observed, some show positive and supportive attitude towards these online feminist activisms and the use of social media in promoting it, and some shows the negative attitude towards it. For example, a participant narrated *"Things related to Feminism should be normalized on social media so that people get aware of it"* that there is a need for these kinds of movement in Pakistan and it should be normalized.

The platform of Awareness. One of the most repeated positive things about these online feminist movements and posts related to feminism was that they are making people aware of women's issues and rights for equality. It was noticeably true that people perceive these movements as a platform of

awareness where people learn about women's rights and issues of patriarchal societies. For example, it was narrated by a male participant that Online movements creating Awareness About women's rights “Before these online feminist movements on social media people barely know about the existence of these issues now people become more aware of it, and it has positively changed the narrative of people that take their women as a worker of the house”.

Confidence to Share Opinions. Allows people to speak up and give their opinion. For example, it was narrated by a male participant while talking about feminist movements online like me too that “people are becoming confident and bold by sharing incidents that happened to them in these movements by taking part in them.”

Safe Place to Share Opinions. These online feminist movements provide a platform for the people specifically women to share their opinion freely and it's safer to share stories and opinions on social media as compared to publicly. For example, a girl narrated in the focus group that holds very effective meaning

“Girls like me can openly share things in these kinds of movements that we do not share with our family and friends, as we cannot talk about the harassment that we face on daily basis but through these movements, we can share it.”

So, it's serving as a platform of freedom to share opinions for women to speak for themselves.

Provide Justice to the Victims. People have shown the need for these online feminist movements as they are promoting awareness about women's rights and people are getting acknowledged as it is not just a tool of awareness, but it has generated tangible results, like after any hashtag government get into action and many victims of harassment and rape get justice through it.

Modernization in Culture. It was observed that people were open towards modernization for example one participant narrated “We should not opt for westernization but modernization while living in our culture” as culture is very important for our people, they want modernization but only if it is according to the culture as they were reluctant towards the westernization of society.

Online Movement Facilitate Offline Protest or Moments. It was observed in the discussion with almost every group that after a certain incident happens people started sharing content related to that issue on social media. After any incident that is related to women's rights being violated or raped, harassment specifically posts started to appear on Twitter, Instagram Facebook and WhatsApp statuses, so according to the participants, the incident leads to a proper feminist movement on the internet and get everyone's attention. As a participant worded that “Whenever an incident happens, posts start getting pop up on social media about it and seems like a movement and people start reacting on the particular posts”. This was something interesting to note that people label every issue that has some kind of oppression, discrimination and violation as a feminist issue on social media. Move-over protest like the Aurat marches (w's march) was supported on social media.

Online Movements are Countering Sexism. According to feminist activists, these social media feminist movements shed light on sexism across industries, including the humanitarian aid sector, according to activists these movements have given women a platform to speak out about the sexual abuse they faced. For example, an activist narrated

“As women are still underrepresented in mainstream media generally as in Pakistan there are very few stories and issues of women that get reported by mainstream media. Still, we can find women on fashion pages or in advertisements while social media encourages a more level playing field for everyone including women, allowing and raising women's voices from a wider array of settings and countries, with or without traditional power and oppression, to be heard. Truly, social media has opened a new frontier for women's rights defenders and activists”.

Platform to Fight against Patriarchy. Social media offered a voice to the feminist movement, allowing everyone with a Twitter account to get involved, and it also allowed people a place to speak out against the patriarchal system. By erasing obstacles caused by distance, race, culture, socioeconomic distinctions, and geography, social media has further transformed our globe into a global village.

Social Media as Fair World for Pakistani Feminists. Activists have asserted that despite the presence of distinct power dynamics, the online realm remains regulated by accessibility, protocols, and gatekeepers who determine the consumption of specific content and the proliferation of particular topics and voices. For example, an activist narrated that *“So we can say that the internet has created one big happy world of fairness and equal opportunity for us”*.

Empowerment of Women and Minorities. Social media enables feminist movement participants to combat gender-based violence and assist young women who are victims of sex trafficking, sexual abuse, and domestic violence, which also helps to empower them for example one activist narrated that *“A feminist internet aims to empower more women and people of color to fully exercise their rights, have fun, and destroy patriarchy”*

Negative Attitude towards Online Feminist Movements

Besides the good part of about online feminist movements people have many negative perceptions about these movements and how it is displayed and portrayed on social media is seems to be the real issue faced by the feminist movements in Pakistan some negative perceptions and reason of negative attitude towards online feminist movements are given below.

Negative Portrayal of Feminism on Social Media. The contentious nature of the feminist movement in Pakistan has been a recurring theme in the ongoing discussions. it is because of its negative portrayal on social media, while talking about the Aurat march slogan participants have discussed the highlighted negative slogans on social media that it only portrays the extreme and negative part of the Aurat march. For example, narrated by a girl that *“the way media is portraying things like my body my choice and other slogans are negatively perceived as it only highlights the negative part of movements in Pakistan”*. Also, only extreme things get highlighted that eclipse the real purpose of the movement and it is affecting the real purpose of the movement and creating hate in the mind of people and making them a closed door for movements like feminism.

Promoting Vulgarity. While talking about posts related to Aurat March and other feminists' posts on social media they relate them as a threat to modesty and cultural values that are promoting vulgarity in our society and making the young generation toxic and immoral. For example, a male participant narrated *“These online movements are promoting vulgarity in our society”*

Deviated From Culture and Religion. People view these movements as Western products that are not working here in Pakistan because they are against and deviated from our religious and cultural beliefs. For example, narrated by a participant that *“We have adopted this from the West, and it is not working here it is something different from our culture”*. Critics argue that the movement is seen by some as a Western plot to undermine and erode the societal, cultural, and religious principles of Islamic communities. For example, narrated by a participant that *“I will not be going to promote things that are deviated from culture and religion as Islam and feminism are poles apart so we aren't going to support it as it is a threat to our Islam”*

Anti Men. It was noted that society as a whole, and males in particular, believe that feminism is limited to men's hatred. For example, a female participant narrated that *“feminism in online spaces is creating dangerous gender hate and it should be stopped. Aurat march and such movements are only creating hate, it's not about hating men, it's not about hating gender”*.

Exaggerated Posts. It was seen that social media is exaggerating things that do not exist that is creating a negative image of feminism in the eyes of the general public.

Feminism for Personal Gain. Another negative perception of these online feminist movements was that people misuse feminism for their benefit. In the name of feminism, they are seeking personal benefits that are hiding the real purpose of feminism in Pakistan.

Stigma With Labeled as Feminist. It was observed that people feel reluctant towards being called or appear as feminist on social media they don't support these movements because of fear of being judged by others as they take feminism in a negative connotation and relate to the stigma that being feminist will make them uncool and threat to their masculinity

Feminism as Fashion. People who are supporting feminism in online spaces appear to be fashionable specifically bloggers as it is perceived as a cool act to name one as feminist and share posts related to feminism on social media to appear more liberal and cooler.

Attention Seeking. People in discussion narrate that those who share posts related to feminism they are attention seeker and post things related to feminism to get attention from their followers usually the bloggers on Instagram posts feminist stuff to draw attention and to appear feminist just to get more followers.

Ineffectiveness of Online Feminist Movements. It was observed that only those people are getting benefitted from these online movements who have access to social media rest of the general public is unaware of it and it is meaningless for those who are not using social media and also who are deserving in actual meaning.

Representational Biases. Some individuals contend that feminism fails to encompass the experiences of all women, as its advantages are predominantly enjoyed by urban, educated, and privileged women. They argue that online feminist movements may not genuinely represent the broader issue or advocate for women from diverse social classes.

Limited to Elite Class. People claim that only elite women are promoting feminism in online spaces and not the average women. For example, narrated by a participant that "*Feminism here in Pakistan is limited to upper-class women and nothing to with actual women issues*" This activity has frequently faced criticism from both the public and private spheres, being portrayed as an external influence and a pastime favoured by affluent women who seek to emulate Western customs while disregarding their own heritage and religious practices.

Limited to Young Generation. Also, it was seen as these online movements are only for our younger generation. The older generation is unaware of this phenomenon as it is very new to a country like Pakistan where the patriarchal system is embedded into its roots. If these movements have some kind of benefit so it is only applicable to the young generation as they know how to use technology and social media with whom our elders are completely unaware.

Myths about Online Feminist Movements

It was interesting to notice that people have myths related to feminist movements that people who are promoting these online movements have some hidden motives and they have some other reasons to support them common myths were that they are Western agenda and they are funded as well.

Funded. The common answers were that these online movements are funded by Western countries to abolish our religion and culture. For example, a participant narrated, "*I heard that there is foreign funding behind these movements to destroy our culture and religion*".

Promoting Westernization. It was observed that people are viewing these online movements as Western agenda. Participants claim that those who are supporting and promoting these movements are promoting Westernization because they are not happy with their culture and want liberalism in the country

Promoting Homosexuality. Another myth was that feminism is being promoted to support LGBT in Pakistan and people who are promoting it are homosexual.

Discussion

The current study has highlighted several aspects of online feminism in Pakistan. The phenomenon has been indigenously explored through the discussion with the general population and through interviews with feminist activists, and the subject matter expert which was not previously addressed in the Pakistani context. Five main themes have evolved, knowledge about online feminism, Online practices, positive and negative attitude and myths about feminist movements through content analysis. The explored factors found links with the previous literature that online feminism picks up on the use of such communication technology, especially social media, and its uses to bring awareness to more people than ever before (Eudey 2013; Gillis, 2004; Nuñez 2011; Paasonen, 2011). It was discovered that the media in Pakistan negatively portrays feminism and show contempt for the feminist cause. People in societies like Pakistan, where the philosophy of religion is the foundation, are typically very devoted to their religious beliefs and cultural traditions (Anjum, 2020; Baig et al., 2020; Seedat, 2013; Zia., 2017). The majority of participants claim that promoting feminism is an act of Westernization and spreads vulgarity since it disregards our moral standards. Every nation, religion, and culture cannot embrace and transform its own set of values by slavishly adopting other values.

Positive attitudes towards these online movements and social media were summarized as social media has empowered feminist activism, granting a voice and enabling participation to individuals through platforms like Twitter, while also serving as a powerful tool to challenge and combat patriarchal systems. Most importantly it serves as a tool of awareness that people are getting of women's rights and they are now being aware of what feminism is and that women's rights exist that was not highlighted before (Rehman, 2019). A typical trend emerges when women speak out against harassment and share their experiences. The Internet and social media's wide audience reach has sparked and given impetus to movements like the MeToo and a huge number of activists have started using social media to raise voices against injustice and appeal to the concerned authorities to act and resolve the issues (Bell et al., 2019; Boizot, 2019; Khan, 2021; Nau et al., 2022; Powell, 2018; Rafi, 2019).

An assumption that online movements promoting vulgarity were very common among participants possible explanation will be that yet, regardless of where you're from in Pakistan, because of the controversy surrounding any kind of feminist activism being mentioned in public, tension is palpable (Irfan 2020; Khan 2021). Critics of the movement believe that it is a tactic originating from the Western world to destabilize and undermine the social, cultural, and religious values of Islamic societies. They argue that feminism does not represent the perspectives of all women and claim that its benefits are limited to affluent, educated, and urban females. These critics perceive feminism as an agenda imposed by the West. (Baig et al., 2020; Batool et al., 2021; Saigol, 2020; Serez, 2017). Myths were prevailing about these movements called to be Western agenda found to consistent with the existing knowledge about the feminist movement in Pakistan (Batool et al., 2021; Saigol, 2020; Serez, 2017). One of the most important elements being observed is that people were very much in support of gender roles that they were reluctant to change the narrative of gender roles in our society one of the main reasons why they were not in favour of feminism. Those who were supporting traditional gender roles were not in favour of change and not accepting this online feminist discourse. It was found that men were usually against these movements and feel very reluctant to call themselves feminists although they were supporting equal rights of women they were denying the need for feminist movements in Pakistan An additional barrier to feminist identification for men appears to result from perceptions of decreased masculinity in men who openly associate with feminism (Anderson, 2009; Horowitz & Fetterolf, 2020; Rehman, 2017; Saigol, 2019; Waling, 2019).

Conclusion

The current study has highlighted several aspects of online feminism in Pakistan. The phenomenon has been indigenously explored through the discussion with social media users and through interviews with feminist activists, the subject matter expert. Five main themes have evolved, knowledge about online

feminism, Online practices, positive and negative attitude and myths about feminist movements through content analysis. The domain of knowledge contains the experiences and awareness about online feminist movements that mainly consist of the use of social media in promoting feminism. Online practices involve the liking and sharing of posts related to feminism on social media. The reaction towards these posts holds the element of sympathy and gender relatedness also emerges as part of online practices. Positive attitudes towards Online feminism included means of awareness about women's rights, a platform for women to speak up for themselves, tools to tackle sexism, safe place to share opinions these online movements are playing a role in providing justice to the victim of harassment and oppression. Negative attitudes towards online feminist movements include deviation from culture and religion, promoting vulgarity and westernization, limited to the elite class, extreme and anti-men and not representing average women issues, limited to the young generation, feminism is being misused for personal benefits and people who are promoting it are attention seekers. Myths related to online movements constitute beliefs that online movements are funded by Western agencies and promote homosexuality in our society.

Support for these online feminist movements, for the betterment of society, and to achieve gender equality the ambiguities about feminism should be resolved. Although people are becoming more aware of women's rights and feminism than they were before but for a better future of feminist movements in Pakistan media should regulate and the government at a mass level for productive change in society should promote these movements. It was fascinating to discover that traditional gender roles and adherence to cultural and religious norms posed significant obstacles to the acceptance of online feminist movements. However, activists remain optimistic, as they leverage the power of digital feminist activism to transform the perspectives of common people.

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