

# Digital Piety and Satirical Resistance: How Pakistani Social Media Posts Reinterpret Islamic Discourses on Women's Modesty and Hijab

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## INTRODUCTION & AIM

### The Problem: Bodies, Honour, and Digital Violence

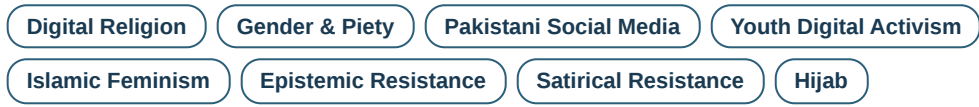
In Pakistan, patriarchal cultural values and male dominance in religious discourse have long shaped discussions on women's modesty, hijab, and piety. Women who defy social dress codes — visiting co-ed gyms, posting on social media, or venturing out without approved coverage — face institutionally assisted policing, technology-facilitated epistemic violence, and threats online and offline.



In April 2026, journalist Gharida Farooqi was publicly shamed on X with #Gharida trending nationally — not for her reporting on US–Iran talks, but for her dress, compared unfavourably to a fully veiled Iranian colleague. This technology-facilitated gender-based violence is the backdrop of this study.

### Research Gap & Aim

Prior digital Islam scholarship focuses on diaspora communities and Gulf societies. How Pakistani youth on X navigate conservative governance, digital surveillance, and vernacular humour remains underexplored. This study examines how X is used for satirical resistance and the creation of alternative gendered piety.



## METHOD

### Theoretical Framework



Social media posts are conceptualised as hybrid religious artifacts inhabiting networked, insurgent in-between zones — digital third spaces — where traditional authority and individual autonomy collide. Drawing also on Bhabha's (1994) theory of hybridity, these spaces enable vernacular ijtihād: non-institutionalised independent religious reasoning via memes, threads, and visual-textual objects.

### Data & Approach

- Corpus: Six purposively selected posts from X (formerly Twitter) by Pakistani users
- Selection criteria: Thematic relevance (modesty/hijab discourse) + discursive diversity (satirical, theological, comparative, carnivalesque)
- Search terms: English and Roman Urdu keywords — hijab, modesty, purdah, women's dressing, honour, gendered morality
- Method: Qualitative thematic analysis of visual-textual compositions (memes, weightlifting videos, theological threads)
- Analytical lens: Semiotic reading of image-text relations, rhetorical positioning, and discursive strategies



## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

### Six Posts — Six Modes of Satirical Resistance

POST 1 (NAZ) — SARCASTICALLY PRAISING "MEN OF HONOUR" Pashto-language satire praising men who "keep modest eyes" while demanding total female veiling. Pashto is a deliberate cultural choice — locating critique within KPK's strictest honour-code context. Two niqab-clad figures form a powerful visual-textual artifact exposing the asymmetrical burden of modesty. Enacts Echchaibi's "activist Islam" through internal resistance rather than external rejection.

POST 2 (ANOSH FATIMA) — HIJABI WEIGHTLIFTER AS VISUAL ARGUMENT A hijabi woman lifting heavy weights in a gym, captioned "HIJABI woman Power." Framed as a "slap in the face" for critics of Islamic veiling. Uses a "both/and" framework — religious and liberal — resisting polarised categories. Demonstrates Cheong's (2013) paradox: the Internet simultaneously empowers and challenges new and traditional religious authority.

POST 3 (MEHR TARAR, JOURNALIST) — STRATEGIC EPISTEMIC HUMILITY Critiques Imran Khan's linking of women's dress to rape without openly challenging his Islamic authority. Self-identifies as "a Muslim woman" to establish insider credentials before delivering feminist critique. Illustrates Medina's (2013) "epistemic virtues of the oppressed" — strategic qualification preserving discursive space within patriarchal constraints.

POST 4 (JALILA HAIDER, HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYER) — COMPARATIVE EPISTEMIC RESISTANCE Long-form thread contrasting Pakistan's non-enforced dress codes with Taliban gender apartheid. Uses Afghanistan as a discursive foil to resist flattened, homogenous images of Muslim-majority societies. Enacts Medina's (2013) "insurrections of subjugated knowledges" — a layperson's close Qur'anic reading that challenges the clerical monopoly on interpretation.

POST 5 (MADIHA) — ISLAMIC FEMINIST TEXTUAL DECONSTRUCTION Analyses a video of a mullah harassing a wig shopkeeper using detailed Qur'anic textual critique. Quotes verse-by-verse to expose selective application by religious authorities. Exemplifies Islamic feminist hermeneutics: "epistemic retaliation" against patriarchal Qur'anic exegesis (Sarwar & Safdar 2025), advancing women's agency through rather than outside religious authority.

POST 6 (@NNNNNNXOX / @MANNYBALL\_) — CARNIVALESQUE ACCOUNTABILITY THREAD Dialogic thread (Bakhtin 1984) exposing victim-blaming: harassers "only get brave when alone with women." Uses Bakhtinian "marketplace language" — refusing polite code words for patriarchal control. The grimacing emoji performs affective complexity (Papacharissi 2015): recording the absurdity of a system that punishes victims and shields perpetrators.

## CONCLUSION

X functions as a digital third space where Pakistani youth practise vernacular ijtihād — not a departure from Islam, but a democratisation of religious interpretation that reclaims egalitarian Islamic identity from patriarchal distortion.

- Satire and humour are primary strategies to critique patriarchal Islamic modesty readings and expose gender double standards
- Posts engage Islamic references authentically while challenging clerical authority and cultural regulation of women's bodies
- Youth employ irony, image juxtaposition, and local language to reframe hijab/religiosity as individual and context-dependent
- Extends Digital Religion theory (Campbell 2013) into explicitly insurgent Pakistani third-space contexts
- Translates Medina's epistemology of resistance into digital Islamic space — satirical posts provoke patriarchal authority into acting
- Piety and protest coexist in the same digital object — a new analytical language for digital Islam and feminist media studies

## FUTURE WORK / REFERENCES

### Future Work

Expand the corpus to include Instagram and TikTok; conduct audience reception analysis; extend to diaspora Pakistani communities; comparative study with digital Muslim feminist movements in Bangladesh and Turkey.

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