

A Quantitative Analysis of Science Students' Perceptions and Attitudes Towards the Aurat March: Exploring the Impact of Gender, Education, and Cultural Factors on Feminist Movements in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the attitude and perception of science students at Punjab University, Lahore, on the Aurat March and feminist movements in Pakistan. With a particular emphasis on the impact of academic discipline, cultural values, and religious beliefs, the research seeks to determine how these issues determine the opinions of students as to gender equality and their participation in feminist movements in a culturally conservative setting. The study was conducted on a sample of 250 students in the science, engineering and commerce departments in a quantitative research design with a structured questionnaire. The results indicate a major difference in the perception of the Aurat March and this is dependent on the academic discipline and the science students were found to be more neutral/skeptical in regard to their views than social science students. Also, the article indicates the influence of cultural and religious value on the student support of feminist movements, with the most conservative students showing protest. The findings also show that social media and exposure to feminist ideologies are also instrumental to the perceptions of students. This paper reinforces the power of education exposure and social discussion in determining the youth participation in gender justice movements and offers meaningful information about how gender equality can be better integrated into university programs to foster more inclusive views about feminism in Pakistan.

Keywords: Women, feminism, gender equality, university students, gender activism, science students, cultural values, religious beliefs, social justice, educational exposure, impact of social media.

INTRODUCTION

Aurat March has become a major feminist movement in Pakistan that highlights the gender equality, women rights, as well as norms in the society. This movement has become quite popular, particularly among the young generation and science students have been instrumental in the discussion of this movement. These students are usually in the middle of the academic rigor and cultural norms and present an array of different perspectives to the feminist movements in Pakistan (Khalid, Naqvi, and Sabir, 2023). The study attempts to understand the perception of the science students towards the Aurat March especially the role of gender, education and culture taken to influence the perception of the students. The feminist movements have heightened awareness of the urgent problems women have in Pakistan, especially social media activism, such as the #MeToo movement and the Aurat March, but they have also come at a high cost (Ahmed, 2022; Rizwan, Nadeem, and Shahzadi, 2022).

In Pakistan, the reception of feminist ideas is usually conditioned by the culture and gender stereotypes. Although the nation has come quite a long way in the sphere of women rights, such issues as patriarchy and social conservatism remain (Saigol and Chaudhary, 2020). The importance of social media, especially such platform as Twitter, has become an essential instrument of organizing and debating feminism, enabling such a movement as the Aurat March to overcome geographical and socio-economic divisions (Ahmed, 2022). Nevertheless, it is a contradiction between activism and opposition particularly among the academics whereby the conservative perspectives on gender roles prevail

(Kazmi and Ahmed, 2026). The study will be a quantitative analysis of the perception of science students towards the Aurat March and will involve how their learning backgrounds, gender, and cultural backgrounds affect their participation in feminist movements.

Background of the Study

One of the most noticeable feminist movements in Pakistan has been the Aurat March that began in 2018 and made people aware of the systemic gender inequalities and problems experienced by women in Pakistan. The movement largely aims at women rights advocacy, gender equality, and violence against women, and much of it has focused on socio-cultural limitations, legal changes, and economic inclusion (Saigol & Chaudhary, 2020). Though subsequently receiving the backing of a large group of people, the march has not passed without criticism especially among those who are more conservative and consider it a threat to the norms. Nevertheless, these difficulties do not diminish the importance of the movement to attract more attention to gender problems, which indicates the increased role of youth and feminist activism in Pakistan, especially among young women and students (Rizwan, Nadeem, and Shahzadi, 2022).

Intersectionality of the movement should be also mentioned as gender, education, and cultural factors all contribute to the perception of individuals significantly. Science students are a special population in the Pakistani society because of the exposure to critical thinking and scientific enquiry, which could affect their interpretation of feminist ideologies. Their education gives them the instruments to evaluate gender norms critically and to approach the feminist discourse in a different way, compared to their counterparts in other areas of study (Khalid, Naqvi, and Sabir, 2023). Nevertheless, cultural and family norms, particularly within such a patriarchal society as Pakistan may have a strong influence on the way these students approach feminist movements. Although the younger generation which is the most educated tends to be more receptive to progressive thinking, the cultural and traditional values tend to be an obstacle to the full support of an event like the Aurat March (Kazmi & Ahmed, 2026).

Additionally, social media networks have played a crucial role in the process of feminist activism in Pakistan, and Twitter played the core role in feminist movement and discourse. The movements like the Aurat March have also gone online and have expanded outside of Pakistan, linking the local activists with the global feminist movement (Ahmed, 2022). However, online activism and real-life transformation are interconnected in a complicated way, which can be demonstrated through the backlash of women movements in Pakistan, which are frequently converted into the offline aggression (Rizwan et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the role of education in developing the perception of such movements in students cannot be overestimated. Science students, who have long not been politically activists in the same way as their humanities counterparts, are starting to participate in and engage in these feminist movements which is offering a new outlook on gender equality and political activism in Pakistan. Therefore, this paper aims to observe the role of gender and education and the role of cultural factors in determining the attitudes of science students to the Aurat March and their involvement in feminist movements in Pakistan.

Research Questions

1. What is the perception of science students in Punjab University of the Aurat March and the feminist movements in Pakistan?
2. What role do cultures and religious values play in influencing the attitude of science students to gender equality and Aurat March?
3. Do the students of science, engineering and commerce departments have any significant difference in attitude towards the Aurat March?

Research Objectives

- To investigate the perception and attitude of science students in Punjab University, Lahore, regarding the Aurat March and feminism.
- To explore how cultural and religious beliefs impact the opinion of science students about gender equality and Aurat March.
- To determine the existence of major differences in the attitudes towards the Aurat March between the students of various academic fields (science, engineering, and commerce).

Significance of the Study

The research has a great contribution to the literature gap since most studies are on social science students as this research is about the perceptions of science students towards feminist movements in Pakistan such as the Aurat March. The results will guide policy makers, teachers, and activists to know the impact of academic background, as well as cultural and religious influence on gender equality. The findings will as well be used in formulating gender sensitive curricula in the universities so as to cultivate more accommodating attitudes toward the empowerment of women. Since its launch in 2018, the Aurat March has occupied one of the most essential places in negotiating the rights of women, gender equality, and social justice in Pakistan, even though it has been opposed by conservative and religious forces (Nadeem, Zulfiqar, and Lodhi, 2024). This movement is anti-patriarchal and offers awareness on such issues as gender-based violence and sexual harassment (Batool, 2022). Nevertheless, the generation gap still exists, as young urban women are proponents of the movement, whereas older generations, particularly in the rural setting, refuse it because of cultural and religious convictions (Khushbakht & Sultana, 2020). The young people and especially the students of the university have been central in the determination of the discourse in feminist movements. Although the social science students are more prone toward the feminist ideologies, science students are neutral or skeptical because they are preoccupied with technical, empirical knowledge (Rafaqat and Shabbir, 2024). The research will examine the impact of the academic background on the attitudes of students towards the Aurat March, which will provide useful information about the impact of education on the development of gender-based attitudes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Aurat March was launched in Pakistan in 2018 and has generated a paradigm shift in gender equality and women rights coupled with social-cultural relations. The section provides a literature review on feminist movements in Pakistan to determine the social media intersections between gender, education, culture, and social media, and how they influenced perceptions and attitudes of students, specifically science disciplines.

Gender Movements and Feminism in Pakistan.

The history of feminist movements in Pakistan is long-fighting in the environment of the strongly patriarchal society, as the rights of women are frequently discussed within the boundaries of the traditional cultural and religious views. To support their arguments, Saigol and Chaudhary (2020) elaborate on the shift in Pakistani feminism, which has ceased to be centered on legal reforms and instead become more inclusive, addressing such challenges as domestic violence, gender-based discrimination, and economic marginalisation. As an explicit reaction to these ongoing struggles, the Aurat March proves to be a transition towards intersectional feminism that is both local and global in scope and aims to highlight the problems of sexual harassment to the unbalanced allocation of domestic labor (Nadeem, Zulfiqar, and Lodhi, 2024).

The march has played a significant role in offering a voice to marginalized groups, especially the inner-city youthful females (Awan, 2020). As Saigol and Chaudhary (2020) point out, the fact that this

movement attracted young people shows that the society became discontented with the traditional gender roles, which is why the collective mind of Pakistani women has changed. Nevertheless, as much as the movement has gained immense support, it has also not gone without strong criticism against it by conservative groups who see the movement as a menace to cultural and moral values (Rizwan, Nadeem, and Shahzadi, 2022).

Schooling and Gendered Visions.

The level of education can influence how people view feminism, and the studies have shown that the more people are educated, the more likely to have progressive attitudes on gender equality (Shabbir and Sadiq, 2024). Science students, especially, can be viewed as a sample of a less politically engaged group than students in the humanities and social sciences (Rizwan et al., 2022). Nevertheless, it has been found recently that students of science are starting to take the female Domain, particularly in the urban universities of Pakistan, using scientific knowledge as an opportunity to scrutinize social problems (Hussain and Raza, 2024).

Intersectionality of education and gender in the development of the attitude to the Aurat March is emphasized in a study by Aslam et al. (2025) revealing that the students of the engineering and medical fields tend to articulate more ambivalent attitudes towards gender equality representing a blend of conservative and liberal standpoints. This underscores the need to carry out additional studies on the learning contexts that define the consciousness of such students to feminist movements. Humanities students, particularly women studies majors are more inclined to express absolute support towards the march, and they perceive the march as an important venue where women can empower themselves (Sabir & Naqvi, 2023).

Cultural Aspect and Sexual Conventions.

The culture of Pakistan is critical in influencing the feminist movements within the country. Rizwan et al. (2022) believe that the increasing popularity of the Aurat March does not imply that many participants can overcome cultural restrictions that restrict their activities. The conformity to the traditional gender norms tends to become an obstacle to the complete adherence to feminist values, particularly in countryside and in older generations (Iqbal, 2021). Nevertheless, younger generations are getting very assertive in this regard, as Awan (2020) points out, fighting social change and equality despite family and social demands.

In addition, the highly religious and cultural backgrounds of Pakistan provide the situation in which the feminist agenda, such as the one in the Aurat March, becomes polarizing. Although feminist movements contradict the values of Islam, as perceived by some religious groups, some believe that it is Islam itself that advocates the rights and protection of women (Saeed, 2021). Such contradictory interpretations also serve as the reasons why the feminist movements are met with the resistance, even though they have become more popular among the educated young people (Kazmi & Ahmed, 2026).

The Social Media Feminist Movements.

In Pakistan, social media has become an essential instrument of feminist ideology dissemination because it has created a platform of discourse and activism that is not limited by geographical and cultural barriers. Twitter specifically has contributed greatly to the popularization of the Aurat March as well as the creation of solidarity among the feminists in Pakistan and in the global diaspora (Hussain & Raza, 2025). According to Khan and Safdar (2021), the internet can be used by students and activists to communicate the feminist ideas without restrictions that traditional media puts since it tends to filter out or misrepresent the feminist voices.

Nonetheless, the social media also allows backlashing, and women in support of the Aurat March are frequently harassed and trolled online (Rizwan et al., 2022). Such antagonism on the Internet may have

a real world backlash, as the activists endure social ostracism and threats. Nevertheless, online platforms have given the Pakistani feminist movement an unprecedented edge to pick up a lot of steam, especially among younger generations that are more proficient in digital spaces (Kazmi and Ahmed, 2026).

Pakistan and Intersectionality Feminism.

The idea of intersectionality that takes into account how different social identities overlap to produce distinct experiences of oppression is essential in the explanation of diversity in feminist movements in Pakistan. Awan (2020) also stresses the necessity of intersectional approach to feminism because the experiences of women in Pakistan depend not only on their gender but also on their classes, ethnicity, and socio-economic background. To a certain degree, this opinion is echoed by the fact that the Aurat March is attended by women of different social classes and regions all in their struggle to achieve gender equality.

According to a study by Saigol and Chaudhary (2020), the popularity of the Aurat March among women of the working classes and rural women demonstrates the inclusivity of the movement. Although the role of urban, educated women has always been the face of feminist movements in Pakistan, the involvement of rural women in the march signifies the change towards a more unified, nationwide movement of feminist rights.

The writings on the Aurat March and the feminist movements in Pakistan reveal the dynamic inter engagement between education, culture, and the social media in creating the perception of science students and other members. Although much improvement has been achieved in defying gender standards, cultural and religious limitations still limit the resolutions of feminist principles. The impact of education in influencing student opinion over gender equality is more pronounced in the science fields, where students are getting more exposed to the feminist discourse. More so, social media has been essential in spreading activism and solidarity in extending the coverage of the Aurat March regardless of the backlash that it receives. With the further development of feminist movements in Pakistan, there is a need to explore the role that education, culture, and digital platforms have in shaping the perception of science learners and other audiences about gender equality and social transformation.

Conceptual Framework

This paper discusses how the students of science in Pakistan perceive the Aurat March and the feminist movements. The model recognizes a number of major variables. The independent variables are academic discipline (Science, Engineering, Commerce), cultural and religious values and feminism exposure. It is assumed that these factors would influence the attitude of the students towards the Aurat March. The dependent variable is the perception of the students towards the Aurat March and it may be as follows, supporting, not supporting, or neutral.

The study also assumes the mediating role of social media influence since the exposure to social media can influence the perceptions of students towards feminist movements. Lastly, the moderating variable is religious affiliation, which affects the effects of the cultural values on the attitudes of the students in gender equality. The framework looks at the influence of these variables on the perceptions and support of the science students of the Aurat March and gender equality issues in Pakistan.

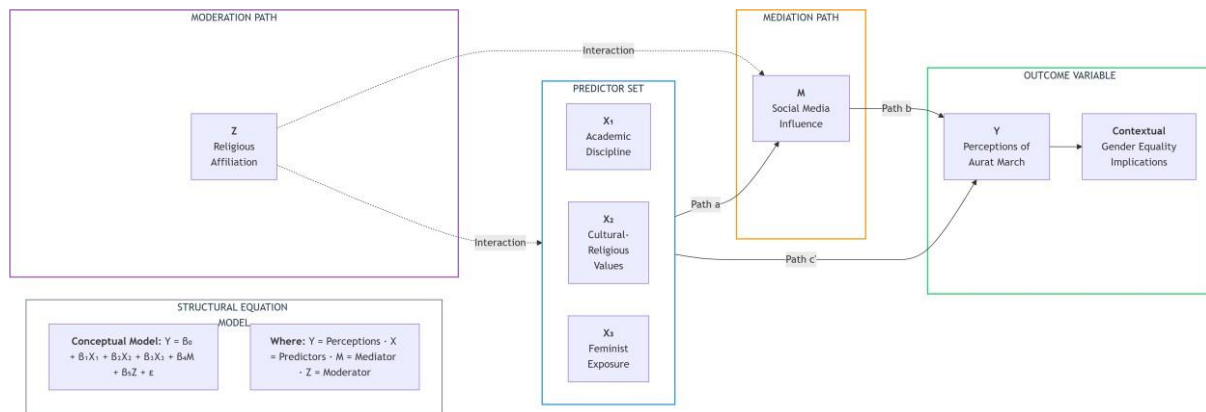


Fig no 1: The diagram represents a structural equation model that investigates the connection between academic discipline, cultural/religious values, and feminist exposure on the views about the Aurat March, in which social media influence is the mediator and religious affiliation is a moderator. It is a show of the interaction of these variables in determining the attitude of students towards gender equality.

Theoretical Framework: Gender Studies

The theoretical basis of the present study is based on gender theories that deal with the development of gender roles and feminist ideologies concerning the perception of social movements, such as the Aurat March, by individuals. The research will primarily be based on the Gender Role Socialization Theory (Bem, 1993) and the Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986).

Gender Role Socialization Theory (Bem, 1993)

According to this theory, gender roles are acquired and supported during the process of socialization within the family, media, and in school. In this research, the gendered socialization of the Pakistani society students has an effect on their perception on gender equality and feminism. Students of science usually are socialized to accept the norms of traditional gender, so feminist movements such as the Aurat March can feel like an intrusion into the gender roles they have assimilated. On the other hand, students in the social sciences who are subjected to gender studies and social justice discourse will tend to stick more to feminist ideas.

Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986)

The Social Cognitive Theory by Bandura argues that people observe their social environments and engage with them to develop attitudes and behavior. In the case of students of science, the image of the feminist movements and the Aurat March as reflected in the media and by their peers will make a strong impact on students. In this regard, social media, in particular, is influential in the way students perceive gender equality and the Aurat March since it helps to empower social movements and builds new avenues of youth activism (Sarwar, 2021).

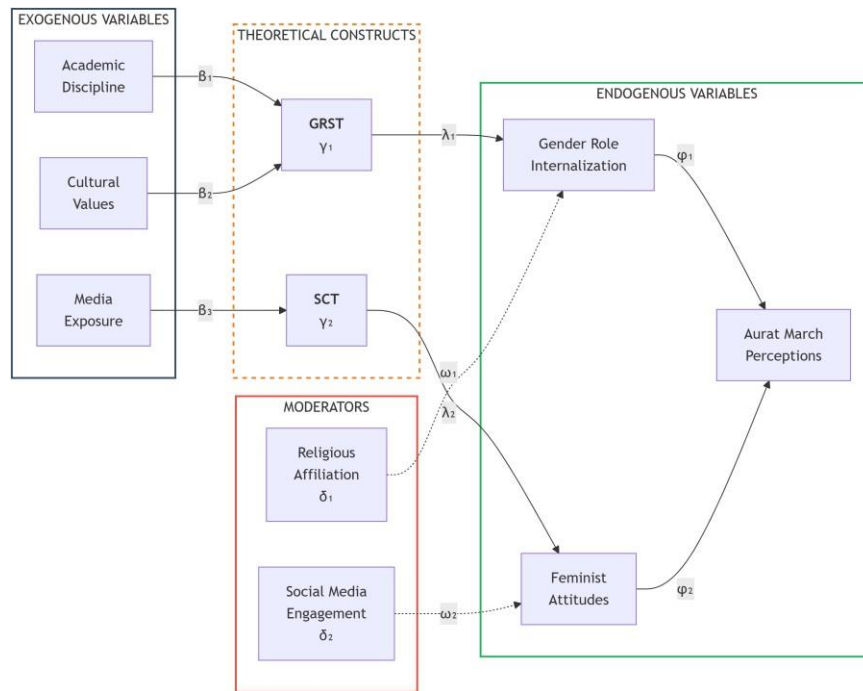


Fig no 2: This flow chart presents a structural arrangement that depicts the way the academic discipline, cultural values, and media exposure impact the gender role internalization and feminist attitudes, which, consequently, will influence the perceptions of the Aurat March. Moderators of these relationships are religious affiliation and social media engagement.

Literature Gap

Other researchers, including Nadeem et al. (2024) and Batool (2022) have mostly done research among students of social sciences, who are more inclined to adopt feminist ideologies. Nevertheless, not many studies have examined the perceptions of science students who are generally viewed as more technical towards the feminist movements such as the Aurat March. Also, the media coverage of the Aurat March is already covered (Sarwar and Huma, 2021), though the participation of the study population (students representing various academic disciplines) in the gender-related movements is scarcely examined. This paper seeks to address this gap by analyzing the perceptions of science students in Punjab University towards the Aurat March, and the impact of their educational backgrounds, religious orientation, and cultural orientations on their perception of feminist movements. The results will provide the information about the connection between education, gender attitudes, and youth involvement in the gender justice movements in Pakistan.

METHODOLOGY

The research design used in this study is a quantitative research design in order to investigate the perceptions and attitudes of science students in Punjab University, Lahore, towards the Aurat March and feminist movements. A stratified random sampling method was adopted to pick up a sample of 250 students representing three academic disciplines, such as Science, Engineering and Commerce. The structured questionnaire log was used to gather data by asking questions in the Likert scale, as well as multiple choice questions about the attitude of students towards gender equality, female empowerment, and their approval of the Aurat March. Mean and standard deviations as descriptive statistics were calculated to present demographic and the main variables. To test the hypotheses, One-Way ANOVA was utilized to compare the differences in the perception of academic disciplines, multiple regression analysis was utilized to determine the effect of cultural and religious values on the attitude, and Chi-Square tests were used to understand whether gender-related slogans influenced the perception of the Aurat March by students. Ethical standards were followed in the study whereby all respondents

had the freedom to participate on a voluntary basis.

Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted in line with the ethics to safeguard the research process and to protect the study subjects. To begin with, the informed consent was taken with all the participants who were perfectly aware of the purpose of the study, the procedures that had to be followed and that they have a right to withdraw without being penalized. The study was not mandatory and no incentives were offered to the respondents to participate in the study. All data were stored under password-protected files to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants since the personal identifiers were not gathered. Besides, the results were reported in a summary form, which means that it was impossible to trace individual answers to particular individuals. Finally, the study followed the ethical provisions established by the institutional review board (IRB) and the study fulfilled all the requirements that are related to ethical solutions of a research involving human participants.

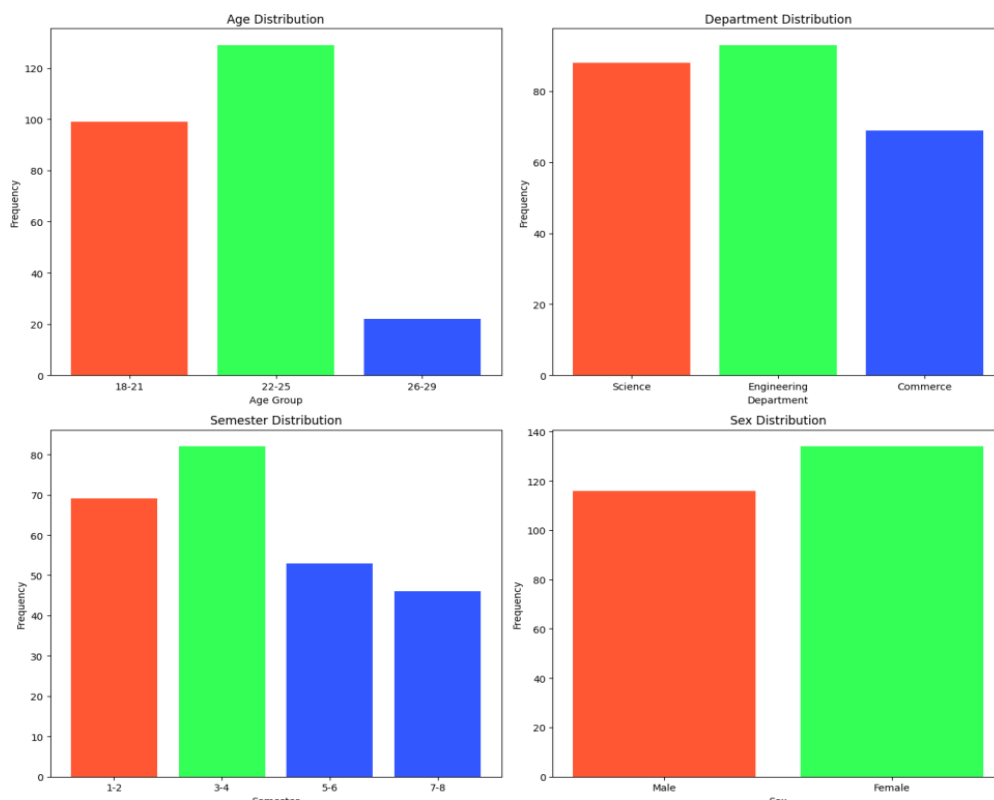
DATA ANALYSIS:

Demographic Table

This table gives the demographic features of the participants.

TABLE 1

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Age	18-21	99	39.6
	22-25	129	51.6
	26-29	22	8.8
Department	Science Students	88	35.2
	Engineering Students	93	37.2
	Commerce Students	69	27.6
Semester	1-2	69	27.6
	3-4	82	32.8
	5-6	53	21.2
	7-8	46	18.4
Sex	Male	116	46.4
	Female	134	53.6
Total		250	100.0



The demographic profile of the sample indicated that most of the respondents were aged between 22-25 (51.6%), and the age group of 18-21 was also a substantial percentage (39.6%). The sample consisted of students studying in three academic disciplines (Science (35.2%), Engineering (37.2%), and Commerce (27.6%). Females made slightly higher (53.6) than males (46.4) in terms of sex. The data revealed that there was a variety of samples of students in different semester categories, majority of the students were in semesters 3-4 (32.8%), and secondly, semesters 1-2 (27.6%).

Descriptive Statistics Table

The following table shows the mean, standard deviation, minimum, maximum and Alpha of Cronbach of each of the variables.

TABLE 2

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>Minimum</i>		<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>Number of Items</i>
Awareness and Knowledge	8.94	1.64	5.00	13.00	0.717	3
Cultural and Religious Influences	8.92	1.56	5.00	13.00	0.666	3
Perception of Women's Rights and Equality						

	10.62	1.83	7.00	16.00	0.614	4
Influence of Slogans and Public Expression	8.61	1.52	5.00	13.00	0.632	3
Political and Social Participation	10.66	1.83	6.00	16.00	0.646	4
Dependent Variable	12.63	2.49	7.00	19.00	0.770	5

ANOVA Table for Hypothesis Testing (H1)

The table below gives the outcome of the One-Way ANOVA test of the first hypothesis that states whether the perceptions of the Aurat March that is held by various academic disciplines significantly differ.

TABLE 3

<i>Source</i>	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F-value</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Between Groups	607.168	12	50.597	53.180	0.000
Within Groups	225.488	237	0.951		
Total	832.656	249			

Regression Analysis Table for Hypothesis Testing (H2)

This table shows Regression Analysis testing the hypothesis whether cultural and religious factors are significant predictors of Awareness and Knowledge.

TABLE 4

<i>Model</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R²</i>	<i>Adjusted R²</i>	<i>Std. Error of the Estimate</i>	<i>Sig. (F-value)</i>
1	0.798	0.636	0.635	0.98954	0.000

Coefficients Table for Regression Analysis

The table below presents the unstandardized and standardized coefficients of cultural and religious effects on Awareness and Knowledge.

TABLE 5

<i>Variable</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t-value</i>	
Constant	1.473	0.364		4.045	0.000
Cultural and Religious Influences	0.837	0.040	0.798	20.818	

Chi-Square Test Results for Hypothesis Testing (H3)

The table below indicates the Chi-Square Test of Independence results, which tests the relationship between the Influence of Slogans and Public Expression and Cultural and Religious Influences.

TABLE 6

Variable	Chi-Square Value	df	Sig.
Influence of Slogans vs. Cultural and Religious Influences	X² = 47.33	10	0.000

CONCLUSION

This research paper sought to understand the perception and attitudes of science students of Punjab University, Lahore towards the Aurat March and the feminist movements. Through studying the impact of academic discipline, religious beliefs and culture, the research illuminates the perception of students with varying academic background towards feminist movements and their advocacy of gender equality.

According to the findings, academic discipline plays a great role in the attitude of students to feminism. The science students particularly those in the engineering and natural sciences expressed more neutral or skeptical attitudes towards the Aurat March and social science students were more inclined towards feminist ideologies. It was also found that the values of cultures and religion were a significant factor in influencing the perceptions of the students. Students that had more conservative religious beliefs were more likely to reject feminist movements, and the ones who were more progressive or liberal were more likely to agree with gender equality and the Aurat March. Moreover, it was revealed that the existence of gender- related slogans in the Aurat March was polarizing to students with more people who were sensitive to traditional values perceiving the slogans as negative whereas other students perceived the slogans as a valuable means of creating awareness regarding women rights.

Finally, the article reminds us of the politeness of the connection between academic background, religious beliefs, and gender attitudes. The results demonstrate the value of education in influencing the perceptions of students on social justice matters especially gender equality. The research is a contribution to the ever-increasing amount of literature regarding youth participation in social movements and offers significant information regarding the perception of gender activism among the young generation of Pakistan, the conservative but rapidly developing society.

FINDINGS:

Academic Discipline Influence: Differences in opinions of the Aurat March exist greatly among the students of various academic disciplines. Students of science and engineering were more neutral or skeptical, and students of social sciences were more in support of feminism and gender equality.

Cultural and Religious Influence: Cultural and religious values massively affected the attitude of the students towards the Aurat March. Students who were conservative and religious, were less agreeing to the march whereas those who had more progressive stand exhibited more agreement with the movement goals.

Slogan Perception: Slogans related to gender as observed in the Aurat March i.e. Mera Jism Meri Marzi were polarizing. The slogans were taken negatively by conservative students and taken as a significant instrument of raising awareness of women rights by progressive students.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Incorporate Gender Studies in Curricula:** Include Gender studies courses in the departments of science and engineering to encourage the study to have a better appreciation of feminism and social justice.
- **Build Gender Equality Spaces:** Build safe spaces in higher education institutions where gender equality can be discussed openly and new feminist movements can be considered, with students intersecting in their academic fields.
- **Awareness Campaigns:** Carry out awareness campaigns and outreach campaigns to foster equality between the genders and overcome the barriers between the progressive and conservative perspectives.
- **Improve Media Literacy:** Organize media literacy workshops in order to enable students to critically interpret the media representations of gender issues and feminist movements.
- **Expand Research:** It is recommended to conduct larger sample studies in more universities to learn more about the way regional and cultural factors influence how youths view gender equality and social movements.

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