

## **Mic Drop Misogyny: A Feminist Analysis of Male Hosts Conduct in Pakistani Digital Media**

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### **Abstract**

*Since 2018, the Pakistani podcast scene has developed significantly and provided new forums for public discourse; however, they may also serve to reinforce traditional media's current dominant patriarchal authority structures. This research utilizes a feminist lens to explore critiques of new social media programs produced by Pakistani podcasts from 2024-2026 through analysis of the behavior of male hosts towards female guests as well as how those actions impact women within society. The study draws on theories of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), ambivalent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996), the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975), and gender performativity (Butler, 1990) to investigate three distinct case studies: Irshad Bhatti's approach to questioning Meera; Dr. Omar Adil's commentary regarding female anchors; and Rehaan Tariq's interrogation of Wardah Malik. According to the results of the study, male interviewers commonly utilize similar discourse practices (e.g., aggressive questioning; moral judgment) combined with communication that challenges competence (Briggs et al., 2023). These three behaviors serve to render the interview an arena of gendered evaluation. This research finds that the above-mentioned behaviors are not coincidental but rather are structural performances of hegemonic masculinity both in the unregulated and virally motivated digital media environment.*

**Keywords:** Pakistani Male Hosts, Podcasts, Misogyny, Media, Masculinity, and Feminist Analysis.

## **1. Introduction**

Actress Meera was invited onto Irshad Bhatti's podcast in April of 2026 to speak about her film *Psycho*; however, instead of discussing her work and artistic achievements, the conversation diverted into her personal life and problems from her past. Although Meera pleaded with Bhatti to discuss the topic of her film, he continued to steer the conversation back to her personal life. She ended the interview early (GTV Digital, 2026). This is not just a one-off. It shows a broader trend in Pakistan's digital media where women are brought onto podcasts to face scrutiny or public embarrassment (Khalid, 2026). At the same time, Dr. Omar Adil's comments about female anchors being sexually dependent stirred backlash and legal steps, showing extreme gendered hostility (Journalism Pakistan, 2026). Wardah Malik also faced questions about her clothing and moral influence in a podcast by Rehaan Tariq, showing a type of questioning not often aimed at male guests. (Khalid, 2026).

Emerging from the current boom in podcasts, which have been largely dominated by men, are varied and ample examples. Since 2018, the movement away from state-controlled broadcast media toward decentralized digital platforms has resulted in many calling it the "Wild West" of the Pakistani media. Unlike traditional broadcast media which was strictly regulated by the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA), the current absence of effective regulation has allowed male hosts of these platforms to have nearly complete control over the discourse that takes place within their shows. When women guests appear on these types of shows, the control exercised by the male host is often expressed as gender-based hostility masked as either an opportunity for genuine inquiry or as a means of critique.

The displacement of editorial judgement in favor of algorithmic engagement represents a fundamental change in the stakes associated with public discourse within this new economy, where the "mic drop", a term signifying discussion dominance, often does so at the expense of women's sensibilities and dignity, due to the priority male hosts place on creating

“viral” sound bites. This paper contends that Pakistani podcasting not only has democratized the means of public speech but has created a new level of visibility for hegemonic masculine performance. This study examined the ways certain discursive techniques used by prominent male hosts illustrated the use of digital platforms to act as a means of policing women's identities and reinforcing longstanding systems of patriarchal power.

Women's portrayal in Pakistan's media has been shaped for many years by attitudes that perceive women as objects of moral condemnation rather than as professionals (Sheikh, 2018). Business and politics operated according to fixed moral standards of conduct that were not always applied fairly, but over the last decade (2018-2016), there has been significant change because TV talk shows have faced more censorship and political division and have pushed viewers toward YouTube and Spotify. Podcasting, with its detailed discussions and idea of being “authentic,” turned into the main source for political and social talk.

The freedom granted by this mechanism also has a darker side; unlike broadcast media (which is subject to regulation), podcasts exist in a largely unregulated environment. The question of whether PEMRA has jurisdiction or any other authority over digital content is still a matter of legal dispute and creates a void that the incentives of digital platforms fill. The result of this has produced a new business model based upon “monetized misogyny,” characterized by an engine of virality driven by the creation of provocative, gendered content in expectation that it will produce engagement from an audience. In Pakistan's online environment, algorithmic amplification favors narratives that encourage storytelling to be sensationalized or polarizing in nature (Khan et al, 2025). According to Haslop et al (2024), “affective homosocial currencies,” (like shared misogynistic beliefs) are rewarded on digital platforms by reinforcing the bonds of male audiences, which translates into more views, more subscribers, and more advertising dollars.

In Pakistan, local patriarchal standards do not function in isolation; rather, they coincide with a globally developed digital space known as the “manosphere,” which serves to reinforce anti-feminine views and support dominant masculine culture. Studies conducted demonstrate that masculine

types of words & styles receive higher rewards in digital contexts compared to feminine counterparts; therefore, an algorithmic bias exists that favors masculine authority (Teleki et al., 2025). Therefore, traditional forms of masculine authority (e.g., Ghayrat/honor; Tahaffuz/protection) and modern forms (e.g., red-pilled rhetoric; alpha-male) have come together to form an overall framework for masculinities operating within Pakistani society. Study on the media shows that women are exposed to more interruptions, control over topics, and information than men in Pakistan (Nadeem et al., 2025).

The language used in Pakistani media establishes gender identities using evaluative strategies. The evaluative strategies which create an image of femininity define female characters in terms of vulnerability while evaluating them within the framework of morals; while masculinity defines males through their honor, power, and rationality (Ajmi & Siddique, 2025). Additionally, podcasts act as a sociolinguistic platform where male hosts display rational protections by attempting to hold the female guests accountable for their moral decisions; thus, they act as the moral police on the internet.

## **2. Research Questions**

**RQ1:** How do specific language strategies such as topic forcing and moral judgment work as acts of dominant masculinity to establish host control during interactions with female guests in Pakistani podcasts?

**RQ2:** How does the digital media setting encourage the use of occupational de-legitimation as a tool for public gendered examination and moral oversight?

## **3. Literature Review**

Feminist media studies have examined the relationship between media organizations and Gender-based authority for a lengthy period, stressing on ways the media and the social gender norms that are societal do not only reflect one another, but also media actively creates, reinforces, and solidifies these by way of continuously reproducing images and patterns. In the media, women frequently do not appear as independent professionals, but rather, as

visual objects that are assessed based on their appearance, moral character, and relational status (van Zoonen, 1994). According to Goffman (1979), the concept of gender displays describes how persistent messaging serves to create power dynamics as natural. Fairclough (2003) asserts that there is no such thing as ‘un-biased’ speech when conducting interviews. The impression of power is carried in podcasts by means of the selection of topics, interruptions, whether they contain moral implications, verbiage & tone, the difference between professional related questions versus personal questions, etc. All of these are forms of style and methods of communication that produce, as well as challenge, authority.

Digital media has changed the ways of spreading gendered hate. Rather than existing as a visually represented version of offline discrimination and prejudice, the internet has made it much easier to identify and remain in valuable, interconnected platforms. Research into networked harassment and the role of media in perpetuating misogyny shows that hatred of women can serve as a strategy for increasing visibility for those who engage in this type of behavior. When audiences are outraged or humiliated, there is often a financial incentive for them to click or share that story if they continue to receive attention from the audience (Ging 2019; Marwick & Caplan 2018; Sobieraj 2018; Vickery & Everbach 2018).

Pakistan's digital landscape reflects the same pattern of male domination and use of online harassment, online stalking, and gendered intimidation, all of which have an equivalent in physical space (Tarar et al., 2021). Research indicates that Pakistani women appear on YouTube as images or narratives that suggest they are morally questionable, culturally different, or socially risky, thus resulting in societal judgment and ridicule (Tahir & Qayyum, 2025). Further exploration of YouTube's pathways indicates that the architecture of the platform reinforces the access of users to extreme content; therefore, the use of sensationalized and gender provided material is structurally advantageous whether presented as a debate, commentary or “public accountability” (Ribeiro et al., 2020).

Research on media in Pakistan indicates an ongoing gender imbalance in representation and participation. Studies of television in Pakistan show that

while formats of talk shows centered on gender can create some opportunities for mediated participation by women and cultural contact, the limited opportunities are determined by the existence of more pervasive patriarchal customs (Cheema, 2018). Research into political talk shows on Pakistani TV demonstrates that women not only receive less than their fair share of representation but also encounter cultural narratives which serve to either negate or trivialize their political engagement (Qadir & Riaz, 2015; Yahya et al. 2022).

This research suggests that unequal representation has its roots in both unequal working conditions and discursive environments. Female journalists have reported experiencing sexual harassment, violence, and institutional discrimination from male employers and from coworkers at Pakistani media organizations. Such experiences support the conclusion that unequal representation results from both poor working conditions and discursive environments (Jamil, 2020).

Not all literature has a negative perspective. Digital Feminist scholarship shows that there are possibilities for women to share their own stories and create support networks and opposition groups in digital spaces. Women utilize connected media to oppose abusive behaviour, to document their experiences of harassment, and to create communities that reject misogynistic definitions (Baer, 2016). The response to Dr. Omer Adil's sexist comments demonstrates that there is active resistance in Pakistan. There were reports indicating that over 60 journalists and media professionals expressed their opposition to the statements and demanded that he be held accountable for his actions.

Gharidah Farooqi also initiated public legal proceedings (JournalismPakistan.com, 2024; The Friday Times, 2024). However, resistance to harassment is still uneven. Many women who choose to speak out returned to public life; however, those women receive additional harassment just for being in the public eye (Sobieraj, 2018). As a result, counter-speech is required, yet costly, and any policy decisions need to address the asymmetrical burden on women to both defend themselves and defend the standards of public discourse.

#### **4. Methodology**

This study uses Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) (Lazar, 2005) to examine the patriarchal ideas and complex power dynamics in Pakistani podcast discussions. With a specific sampling method, the research picks “critical cases” from the 2024 to 2026 “unregulated” digital era like viral discussions on high-engagement platforms. These are chosen based on reach and intersectional representation and time relevance. The analysis works at both wide and detailed levels (Bartlett & Masta, 2023) and uses a special codebook for four main areas: job de-legitimation and moral judgment and topic forcing and questioning of competence (Briggs et al., 2023). Aligning with feminist practice, the study includes researcher reflexivity. It keeps a politically committed view aiming to break down gendered oppression and promote social justice in digital areas (Khomariyah & Maella, 2025).

- **Irshad Bhatti and Meera (April 2026):** Examining topic forcing and moral judgment.
- **Dr. Omar Adil’s Remarks (July 2024):** Examining occupational undermining and hostile sexism.
- **Rehaan Tariq and Wardah Malik (November 2025):** Examining communication questioning competence and disciplinary gaze.

Four analytical categories guide the study and they include:

- Occupational De-legitimation which involves framing a woman’s professional success as not genuine or as reliant on male favor.
- Moral Judgement where there is an assumption of authority to judge a woman’s character and clothing and lifestyle.
- Topic Forcing which overrides a woman’s agency by not discussing her chosen topic and redirecting to personal and controversial areas.
- Competence-Questioning Communication includes actions (like “mansplaining”) and frequent interruptions and questioning a woman’s basic understanding of her field (Briggs et al., 2023).

## **5. Findings**

### **5.1 The Mechanics of Misogyny**

#### ***5.1.1 Occupational De-legitimation: The Case of Dr. Omar Adil***

Dr. Omar Adil’s viral remarks about female anchor in Pakistan show clear hostility towards women. By describing professional women as “someone’s keep” or implying their careers rely only on sexual dependency, Adil uses a method which weakens their professional standing (Journalism Pakistan, 2026). This highlights patriarchy in two dimensions; it denies women’s professional roles and confirms the podcast host (and his male listeners) as the only real judges of professional worth. These remarks are not just odious. They are structural efforts to exclude women from public life by suggesting their presence is naturally scandalous or immoral.

#### ***5.1.2 The Podcast as a Space of Interrogation: Meera and Wardah Malik***

When Irshad Bhatti interviewed Meera, the podcast developed into an area where it became a center for probing and interrogating questions by asking her repeatedly about her English ability and her past marriages even after Meera clearly refused to answer creating what is termed as 'topic pushing' by refusing to respect her professional boundaries. Furthermore, when Rehaan Tariq interviewed Wardah Malik about her influence on the youth of Pakistan and especially regarding her clothing, he also questioned her; an indication of a “competency-questioning communication” (Briggs et al 2023) and used Wardah as an example of someone who needs 'permission' or 'correction' from the male host. As a male host, he also exercises 'masculinity' of a protective nature using the Podcast as an avenue for surveillance of the female guest.

#### ***5.1.3 Viral Humiliation and the Digital Economy***

One theme throughout these scenarios is that of the digital economy's impact, as Khalid (2026) describes how there is now a financially viable aspect of making women feel included (and violated). Controversial videos involving “fighting back” (the algorithm’s preference) between a male host and a female guest (not always participating) create a repeat-cycle where misogyny is normalized and made profitable. The emotional social bonds created from that

commentary in the comments section of those videos provide community for those who comment on these videos in the same way as the respondents evaluate the female guest by using the same properties to reinforce a male identity by excluding, degrading and humiliating the feminine Other.

## **6. Discussion**

The findings demonstrate that misogynistic content in Pakistani podcasts cannot simply be attributed to a few so-called “bad actors.” Rather, the content of podcasts is indicative of several fundamental challenges within the industry. One area of serious concern is the minimal amount of editorial control over digital media content. There are numerous regulations in Pakistan on traditional media regarding political dissent; however, there are a lack of regulations regarding gender harassment in digital media. The algorithms used by platforms to deliver content to users also contribute to the problems they will disproportionately deliver “high arousal” content, which often contains elements of rage, outrage, and humiliation. Studies show that digital platforms have an inherent bias toward “masculine” methods of expression (Teleki et al., 2025).

Podcasts are becoming increasingly significant to global discussions about gender in Pakistan, as they are now being used as a platform for discussing gender oppression from both a global and local perspective, and as an important source of resistance to dominant expressions of gender oppression. The growth of podcasts that provide an alternative platform to dominant expressions of gender oppression can help to challenge these expressions. The increased public rejection of extreme misogyny in relation to Dr. Omar Adil's reactions seem to be indicative of a larger shift within society (Ajmi & Siddique, 2025).

In addition, evidence indicates that misogynistic language used by digital media in Pakistan is not only a behavioral problem but also a structural one with roots in both patriarchal cultural systems and platforms. The hegemonic form of masculinity can help explain male superiority; although it has evolved to meet the requirements of the new environment, its application has not deviated from its primary concept (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

This aligns with performativity (Butler, 1990) as male hosts use their authority repeatedly for moral policing of female guests.

Control over women on these types of platforms (i.e. podcasts) is often based on non-censoring forms of suppression, such as the use of moral questioning and reputation framing, where women's identity is transformed from being viewed as an authority figure to that of a spectacle or object (Fairclough, 2003). This indicates towards hostile sexism as suggested by (Glick & Fliske, 1996) as female guest become target of mockery and judgement due to violating traditional gender norms. The concept of the male gaze outlined by Mulvey (1975) states that women are viewed as objects to be scrutinized and assessed by a patriarchal structure through different formats and scenarios. When female guests are interviewed on podcasts, they are treated as objects of judgment or evaluation based on their physical appearance; moral character; and personal decisions rather than based upon their professional qualifications.

Outrage can be monetarily valued; therefore, the digital economy has exacerbated this situation. Research on networked harassment and the manosphere provides evidence that using humiliation and hostility to construct content is a deliberate strategy, not just another part of talking (Ging, 2019; Marwick & Caplan, 2018; Vickery & Everbach, 2018). This research also shows that these patterns are also prevalent locally. The use of honor and shame, as well as moral regulation, creates a distinctive cultural manifestation of digital misogyny in Pakistan while at the same time allowing for visual connections to the global anti-feminist dialogue (Tahir & Qayyum, 2025; Tarar et al., 2021).

## **7. Conclusion**

In Pakistan, misogynistic tendencies and practices manifest themselves in the podcast subculture through a highly created structure of hegemonic manhood, which is influenced by various accountabilities of traditional male-dominated culture backed by traditional male authorities, international digital ideologies and the economics of the podcasting industry. Women are often placed under scrutiny and then judged morally for their participation in podcasts, making

their ability to achieve visibility contingent on the extent of their ability to endure scrutiny for taking part in those podcasts. Acknowledgment of the discursive mechanism of delegitimization and critical questioning is needed to break the concept of a “mic drop” and to create a digital media environment that values conversation over dominance.

## 8. Recommendations

To tackle “mic drop misogyny” in Pakistani digital media, a multi-step approach is needed:

- **Law Changes:** PEMRA and digital platforms must work together. They need to create clear rules against gender-based harassment and hate speech which are followed consistently.
- **Money Responsibility:** Advertisers and sponsors should stop funding content which humiliates and undermines women.
- **Media Sensitization:** It is important to design and implement gender sensitization training programs for all anchors and hosts. Moreover, women-led media platforms should be encouraged to give them visibility
- **Open Algorithms:** Platforms such as YouTube and Facebook must devise strategies as their recommendation systems can discourage gendered hostility.

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