DIGITAL FEMINISM AND SOFTNESS AS RESILIENCE: A MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF GENDERED COPING MECHANISMS IN GREEN TV'S *WORKING WOMEN*

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Abstract
Working Woman on Green TV is a Pakistani series in which six women protagonists navigate the hostilities of the society to exercise their agency using different mediums including social media and employment. This Pakistani television series Working Women portrays six different women characters and their struggle for independence in a society that is patriarchal in nature. Although the characters come from different cultures and social backgrounds, the series portrays women's lives in a common hostel; from their struggles to the hostilities, they face and how ultimately, they triumph as they try to gain agency over their lives. This research focuses on Working Women applying Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SF-MDA) with special attention to Digital Feminism by Kaitlynn Mendes, Jessica Ringrose, and Jessalynn Keller and Soft Femme Theory by Andi Schwartz. SF-MDA is used to analyse the series' visuals, language, and sound to investigate how these elements work together to tell stories of defiance and fortitude.

Based on Digital Feminism, the study investigates collective sympathy, soft defiance, freedom, and other tenets of modern feminism present in the framework of the drama. Soft Femme Theory complements this study through focusing on feminine traits as visual aesthetics instead of images which offer subversion towards societal constraints. This analysis shows how far-reaching the critique of dominant patriarchal structures goes while celebrating women reproductive roles as well as individual identities therefore locating femininity juxtaposed as a site of conflict and empowerment. Under the purview of Digital Feminism, Working Women reaffirms the transformative potential of media in redefining gendered narratives in South Asia.

Introduction
The Pakistani TV drama *Working Women* depicts independent women juggling professional aspirations with societal responsibilities. Taking place in a close-knit hostel environment, the show depicts women from varying cultures and socioeconomic classes as they navigate life's many challenges. Narratives like that of the Punjabi unhackneyed social media icon named Sadia played by Anoushay Abbasi, the Pukhtoon mother named Hashmat played by Faiza Gillani who is a runaway who has escaped to city , Amber, a female student living in her rich stepfather's house played by Syra Asghar, a nurse Rossie played by Jinaan Hussain and later an adolescent elective mute Hindu girl illustrate the ongoing struggles within patriarchal systems that

seek to provide women some semblance of control over their lives. There are multiple layers to this narrative which counter the simplistic portrayal of women in Pakistani media where working women were rendered invisible because societal norms considered them taboo ("It is Discouraged").

In these circumstances, *Working Women* achieves even greater significance by depicting feminine resilience as relational softness through violence framing it as not feebleness but aggression towards patriarchal systems. The show portrays traits such as care, empathy and gentleness which Schwartz associates with Soft Femme Theory not only subversive but rather empowers a woman facing systemic patriarchy (Schwartz). Also, using Digital Feminism as defined by Mendes, Keller and Ringrose focuses on how the series integrates new feminist principles like modern day female activism and quiet defiance which aligns with fourth wave feminism more than any other influence (Mendes et al. 1292; Saraswati 47).

This research applies SF-MDA, systemic functional multimodal discourse analysis, to study how the aspects of visual, language and sound in Working Women interact to create a narrative. Following Kress and van Leeuwen's division of meta functions: ideational, interpersonal or textual; this work focuses on female representation also their agency within the context of multimodal feminism frameworks and advanced narratives in serial television drama. It builds on digital feminism and soft femme theory to demonstrate how the show subverts patriarchal standards while still celebrating womanhood (Mendes et al. 1292; Saraswati 47).

There has almost never been a media genre that dares to tackle conventional narratives about women with professional lives focused on working females in Pakistan. ResearchGate claims that there is fundamental disparity regarding the portrayal of female leads in Urdu television plays between 2010-2019 where their depiction followed what can be called normative model ("Normative Model"). By contrast, *Working Women* pushes these boundaries, offering a transformative take on the struggles and triumphs of women asserting themselves in hostile environments. This makes the series an exemplary case study for exploring the intersection of media, gender, and multimodal analysis.

This research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How does narratives of feminine agency are constructed in *Working Women* through multimodal elements?
2. How does the interplay of softness and resilience along with resistance has been illuminated by digital feminism and soft femme theory in the series *Working Women*?

By tackling these questions, the study adds fresh insight to the ongoing debate about how South Asian media shows women and how feminist theory can recast femininity as a cascade of strength.

Literature Review

SF-MDA: Kress & van Leeuwen's Meta function Framework; Prior MDA in Film/TV

Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SF-MDA) is a semiotic approach that provides a comprehensive framework for analysing meaning-making processes through visual, auditory, textual analysis. As Kress and Van Leeuwen put it, "this framework emphasizes the meta functions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual." These are pivotal for understanding how the media conveys sophisticated narratives. Kress and Van Leeuwen narration explains in detail works employing MDA (Multimodal Discourse Analysis) in film and television focus on how gendered discourses are constructed as a result of dynamic interactions between seeing and hearing which is gendering Television drama such as *Working Women*. Consequently, television show *Working*

Women falls within the ambit of evolving stead multi-modal feminist discourse analyses because of the semiotic elements present in the show.

Digital Feminism: Online/Modern Feminist Agency and Visibility

In deeper layers of meaning, there exists techniques essential to explain advanced phenomena where modern precepts have transcended to cyberspace is known as digital feminism. Mendes et al, talk about silenced narratives from socially marginalized groups who gain audiences through means or platforms available for them. As highlighted by Mendes et al., these suppression tier groups are empowered and share their stories via supported collective counter narrative offered supremacy on technological channels (Mendes et al. 1290). This part covers feminist studies surveillance by Nakamura who implies gadgets driven by technology can either liberate from social norms built by nineteenth century men or trap into deeper regressive patriarch mindset in a vice versa manner depending on the use either in support or against femininity (Nakamura 221-228). In a recent GenderIT article, the idea of feminist digital economics appears, linking technology, gender, and activism while pointing to the income-generating power that online platforms offer to feminist groups ("Why We Need 'Feminist Digital Economics'"). Building on this, the study looks at how *Working Women* weaves those digital feminist ideals into its stories about women pushing back against everyday patriarchal pressures.

Soft Femme Theory: Femininity as Subtle Resistance

Schwartz explains Soft Femme Theory, which reconceptualized traditionally feminine traits like caring, emotion, and softness as modes of resistance (Schwartz). It resonates with Sadie Plant's observations on the soft feminism appreciation offered by cybernetic spaces and how they transform feminist identity and agency (Plant). Schwartz studies 'femme internet aesthetics' to illustrate how digital media constructs counter-narratives of resistance grounded in care and vulnerability, a motif that also features in Working Women.

Pakistani Media & Gender: Difficulty in Depicting Working Women

Pakistani working women have long suffered from the media's portrayal of them under censorship-ridden societal norms (Chanvised 45). In contrast, *Working Women* breaks these boundaries by depicting women grappling with the pursuit of independence alongside deeply rooted patriarchal forces ("It Is Discouraged to Show Working Women"). The series captures their social and linguistic coping strategies which offer a distinctive space for feminist discourse within South Asian narrative cinema. As Bee Gul points out, storytelling in *Working Women* is culturally authentic which counters dominant narratives of simplistic stereotyping through diversity (Gul).

Research Gap:

Although Soft Femme Theory and Digital Feminism have been explored in global context, yet there is a lack of multimodal analysis of South Asian television dramas particularly from digital feminist lens. This gap has been bridged by this research in which SF-MDA has been employed to analyse Green Tv's short series *Working Women*, drawing from global feminist discourses while situating the analysis within a indigenous cultural framework.

Methodology

A qualitative approach in this research is employed which will be grounded in Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SF-MDA) to examine how narratives of feminine resilience are constructed in *Working Women* through Digital Feminism and Soft Femme Theory. The analysis will be based on selected scenes which will show key scenes like depiction of hostile interactions along with scenes comprising confrontations of each character with patriarchy, and

lighthearted moments of camaraderie that will form the basis of analysis. Data is derived from visual angles, color, and lighting; verbal cues such as dialogue and tone; auditory elements including music and sound effects; and spatial details like scene layout and camera movement, with each strand carefully transcribed. Drawing on Systemic Function-Multimodal Discourse Analysis, the research examines ideational clues about limits and choice, interpersonal signs like gaze and gesture, and textual features, sound, repeating symbols that stir feelings of connection and femininity. Findings are linked to Digital Feminism, showing quiet acts of solidarity and defiance, adding to Soft Femme Theory, which shows style and sentiment as tools of emotional pushback. Ethical considerations include revering cultural contexts and accurately representing the show's portrayal of women's struggles and agency. This comprehensive framework enables a nuanced exploration of feminist-coded narratives in the series.

Analysis and Discussion

1) Representation of Hostility

<u>Visuals</u>

In *Working Women*, the office and hostel continue to be arenas of feminine oppression, serving as structures of societal control. In Episode 1's opening scenes, the sexism and systemic bias within a social setup is illustrated further through its spatial arrangement and garments worn. Erum and Nusrat's character struggle clad in curbed skirts and blouses while navigating through layers of condescending comments and subtle power dynamics with their male acquaintances. Zulfi, their mutual friend's denigrating satirical remarks also emphasize how under the purview of digital feminism such personas are being represented either for reinforcement of patriarchal norms or challenging them using softness as a tool of resistance by women. Amber leaving the house of her stepfather and exercises autonomy by confronting her mother for her choices of leaving her father for a rich man (Green Entertainment TV, Episode 1). Hashmat's escape from the rural area to the women's hostel in Episode 2 represents what patriarchal families restrict. The stark minimalism within the hostel ironically symbolizes her transitional state as she strives for more autonomy beyond harsh judgment coupled with fierce resilience (Green Entertainment TV, Episode 2).

Figure 1 a. Nusrat (Nusi) wearing a skirt in *Working Women*, Episode 1. Her choice of attire visually manifests her struggle for autonomy and challenges rigid patriarchal norms within a male-

dominated environment. This scene underscores emerging power dynamics as she asserts her individuality (*Working Women*, ep. 1, 00:05:30–00:05:45).

An elective mute goth girl is also shown in the series who is a fugitive and had run away from her captivators (YouTube, Episode 1). Her makeup is worn out and the visuals symbolize devastation like how many girls in backward areas in Sindh and rural Punjab are forcefully converted and kept in detention for feudal lords (Hussain 5-24). So, portrayal of such ingrained suppressive and hostile treatment on a digital platform encapsulates the true essence of Digital Feminism as well.

Figure 1 b. In Episode 1, the goth elective mute girl breaks into Nusrat's house (*Working Women*, ep. 1, 00:34:40)

Dialogues

Dialogues in the series symbolize how softness is used as resistance through the satirical undertones in a hostile milieu in which women navigate their agency. For example, Dismissive remark of Zulfi in Episode 1 "Man, when smart women like you say these things, I swear" Showcase how opinions of women are trivialized within different social settings (YouTube, Episode 1). In Episode 3, confrontation of Nuse aka Nusrat with Zulfi and her friends about running a women's hostel being mistaken for an orphanage underscores the societal stigma and disgrace associated with a women's independence portrayed in a digital setting (YouTube, Episode 3).

Figure 2. Zulfi to Nusrat: "Man, when smart women like you say these things, I swear" (*Working Women*, Episode 1, 00:05:08).

Music/Sound

The soundtrack complements these themes along with bombardment of humiliation underscoring alienation throughout series episodes. For instance, during Episode 2, conflict faced by Amber intertwines with the silences that are interlaced with tense music which underscores Amber's internal conflict as she navigates societal rejection and familial betrayal (Green Entertainment TV, Episode 2). OST of the series, especially the lyric " گھر لوٹ جاؤں یا میں تجھے تک آؤں" ("Should I return home or come to you?"), gives the gist of the internal turmoil of each women character in the series seeking refuge versus facing societal hostility (YouTube, OST). Lastly, the melancholic tone of the soundtrack enhances the emotional landscape that complements the narrative of personal and systemic struggles.

2) Coping Strategies

Linguistic Strategies

Politeness, humor and assertiveness have been used by the characters in *Working Women* in order to navigate societal hostilities. Episode 1 of Working Woman shows, Nusrat's male friend questioning of her friends, "When you cannot tolerate sad movies, then why do you watch them?" reflects how he attempts to assert his opinion as well as belittle women agency through discouraging remarks passed in a humorous manner (TikTok, Green Entertainment TV). In Episode 3, Nuse aka Nusrat employs assertiveness to correct the misunderstanding about the hostel "This is a women's hostel. Working women hostel" shows how direct language is used as

a coping mechanism (YouTube, Episode 3).

Figure 3. Nuse's friend questioning all his friends (*Working Women*, Episode 1, 00:04:55).

Social Strategies

The way Amber converses with Nuse aka Nusrat and the other hostel lodgers in Episode 2 shows just how much good company can push back against loneliness. The way these women stand with each other offers a warm contrast to the pushback they keep getting outside, proving that even subtle camaraderie really does create its own safe space (Green Entertainment TV).

3) Soft Femininity as Resistance

Visuals and Gestures

Amalgamation of gentle looks red strong aura, and gestures also work as a form of quiet

protest. Amber's soft pastel outfits paired with steady eye contact during awkward talks send a simple yet bold message: being feminine doesn't mean stepping back (YouTube, Episode 2). In the same spirit, Nuse aka Nusrat sits tall in Episode 3, proving that innate strength can often be evinced or shown without any loud gestures. Moreover' character of Sadia employs soft femineity as an act of resistance with her bubbly and chirpy antics.

Figure 4. Sadia in episode 1 is making poses for posting on social media (*Working Women*, Episode 1, 00:07:55).

Lyrics and Themes:

Cited OST's line: "میرے عشق نو قتال نہ کرو" translates roughly as "Do not kill my love" acts allegorically to show preservation of self under testing conditions (YouTube, OST). The lines symbolize a request for kind compassion embodying fundamental idea articulated in the concept of core resistance through emotional resilience. It also juxtaposes with the struggles faced by each character yet staunchly defying boundaries.

4) Digital Feminism in Portrayal

Modern Feminist Ideals:

The show advances contemporary feminist principles by showing women rallying around each other in support of different empowerment strategies. Episode 3 discusses Nusrat's management role in the hostel as an example of women exercising agency through collective unity.

Empowerment Through Technology

While social media does not serve as a primary focus within the storyline, Amber's escape to the city and her later attempts at navigating the metropolitan maze reflect society's view on women's ability to tell their stories and connect with each other. This, in turn, expresses a deeper message about technology's relevance towards women's independence. A scene in Episode 1, the character Sadia's friend telling her about the incidents of girls being trapped by modelling agents on Facebook (YouTube, Episode 1) shows how the digital sites serve as both shackles and liberator

for   female   agency.

Figure 5. Sadia at her friend's home who tells her about cons of being a social media icon

5) Challenging Patriarchal Norms

<u>Critique of Societal Constraints</u>

Working Women portrays Amber attempting to achieve a balance between personal goals and societal norms as defying patriarchal frameworks which is overtly critiqued. Discussing her rural roots, connecting them with urban life paints a picture of overwhelming ideals forcing individuals into self-neglect.

<u>Redefining Femininity</u>

Episode 1 largely focuses on redefining femininity as strength aimed at empowering rather than suppressing us through shapes. Feminine defiance is depicted in women's resilience enduring the slender-framed box cast upon them while enabling movement through dialogue and actions. Erum's conversations about emotional honesty showcase vulnerable powerful authentic bonds fueled courage borne out; displaying brave joint defiance against stifling silencing conventions.

Conclusion

The TV drama *Working Women* on Green TV serves as an insightful example of how female strength can appear in quiet yet layered forms of resistance. Viewed through Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SF-MDA) and framed by Digital Feminism and Soft Femme Theory, this study shows that the series builds a sense of agency not by staging loud confrontations but by leaning on softness, shared sisterhood, and aesthetic care. Key moments-banter-filled circle talks in the hostel, exchanges where Nusrat fights for a safe space, and quick, painful jabs of patriarchal disrespect-make clear how the women push back, tapping into visual, verbal, and emotional channels.

Together, gestures, how characters are positioned in a scene, the cut and colour of their clothes, even the sway in a voice or a backing tune, weave a story of steady, if muted, defiance. SF-MDA shines here because it untangles the ideational, interpersonal, and textual layers at once, showing that a shift of light, an angle of the camera, or a hand resting on a hip each insists, in its own way, that women are claiming the space around them. When soft visuals like pastel hues,

lingering close-ups, loving touches rule the frame, they do not water down the message; instead, they shore up.

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