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Social Media and its Impact on Public Opinion: An Analysis of PTI and PML-N Electoral Campaign in General Elections 2018

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Abstract

Social media has brought revolution in the world of politics as well. It has affected the ways by which public get knowledge, build opinions and influence political system. This study aims to highlight this deep impact of social media on public opinion in the context of General Election of 2018 in Pakistan. The research analyzes the Facebook and Twitter to observe its influence over voter's opinions, political system and the results of General Elections 2018. The two biggest parties of Pakistan i.e. Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf (PTI) and Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) used social media to increase their share of vote as well as to get support of their voters on a mass level. The research attempts to shed insight on how political parties employ tactics for the digital world participation, dissemination of information, and public participation throughout their election campaigns. "Social Learning Theory" serves as the overarching framework for this research. Descriptive analytic approaches are employed to describe and summarize the findings of this qualitative study. An analytical method is applied to assess the data critically. The study reveals that during general elections 2018s, Facebook and Twitter helped political parties with their electoral campaigns and mass mobilization. PTI's dynamic strategy and efficient communication were crucial in gaining victory against PML-N.

Key Words: Social Media, Public Opinion, Facebook, Twitter, Political Parties, Pakistan

Introduction

One of the most important sources of information on politics in general is the media. Both print and electronic media have the ability to embed their news, opinion and news stories in the consciousness of the general public, making them aware of what matters in politics and for a nation as a whole. Consequently, the public's understanding of politics is greatly aided by the media. Since the media increases public awareness of political viewpoints, it plays a critical role in building, promoting, and projecting democratic norms and ideals.

The spread of social media platforms in modern days has completely changed how public debate and political communication operate. It has the power to influence and shape people's thoughts and public opinion these days. As a result, the majority of political parties worldwide have begun to use this platform to communicate with voters, party employees, and other leaders. Through social media platforms, they are also tackling various political and social issues. Additionally, they use a variety of social media channels to spread their ideology among the general public. They get support by using social media to sway public opinion (Khan, 2005).

Social networking sites (SNSs) have become increasingly popular in Pakistan, enabling political parties to take part in online political debates and activities. The majority of people who don't read newspapers or watch news channels depend more and more on these SNSs to stay informed about events in their community, country, and world. As a result, the knowledge, opinions, and actions of individuals are shaped by the news and information that is shared on these SNSs (Brian E. Weeks, 2015). Therefore, the media, political institutions, and other networks' engagement contribute to public opinion creation and mobilization. It was the first time political parties of Pakistan employed this strategy to sway public opinion in their favour. Resultantly, there was rapid use of social media and of technological devices. Political parties as well as independent candidates used social media as a tool to affect Pakistan's election process. They utilize this forum to achieve their goals and objectives. Simultaneously, people of Pakistan also used this tool to express their thoughts freely.

In Pakistan, previously radio, television, newspaper hold dominant position in creating public opinion. They provide platform for political interaction. But the emergence of cyber technology i.e social media sites has opened up a new channel for political participation. Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf (PTI) and Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) used this channel as a mean of communication and information exchange.

PTI is the pioneer political party in Pakistan who uses social media to mobilize their voters, encourage the citizens to become active in politics. It mobilizes the younger generation specifically to leverage social media for political objectives. (Hussain, 2018) The study aims to look at the strategies of Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf and Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) by which they employed social media to influence public opinion in the General Elections of Pakistan 2018. Hence this study will apply Social Learning Theory. The researcher will learn how the PML-N and PTI interact with the public, advance their agendas, energize voters on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, and shape public opinion by putting this theory to use (Dunya news, 2018).

Literature Review

Social media has transformed the way people communicate, exchange information, and form beliefs. It has become an essential part of daily lives. Social media and public opinion have been the focus of much academic research in recent years. The purpose of this literature review is to provide a summary of the main findings and developments in this area of study. There has been a great deal of research into the impact of social media on the formation of public opinion. Social media can be used to shape public discourse, amplify certain stories, and influence attitudes and behavior. Political communication through the media plays a major role in the

participation of voters in political programs. With the passage of time, scholars have noticed profound shifts in media and in contemporary society that have led to the emergence of new types of political communication that differ in quality from its previous political communication research studies (Robert O. Wyatt, 1996)

Politicians used Facebook and Twitter for different purposes and they were more connected on Twitter, political communication on Facebook was often hindered by technical problems. Social media influences political communication. They surveyed the audience of Facebook and Twitter and asked about the most important issues. Most of them talked about politicians who used social media to promote campaigns during elections (Sebastian Stier, 2018)

Musa (2020) writes that the purpose of political parties is to bring people together around a common cause, interest, and goals. In many countries, parties are an integral part of the political system. They choose candidates, run election campaigns, form political and policy platforms, and monitor the actions of elected representatives. Political parties act as a bridge between the people and government. They give the people a voice in national affairs.

The research on Paletz (2015) also analyzes the fact that the 2008 presidential elections were held on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube in the past. The use of social media was also continued and intensified during the 2012 presidential campaign when Obama and Romney spent a significant sum in this field. The social media war between two camps was discussed by prospective electors who participated widely in these social media sites through the posting, commenting and sharing of videos and the mainstream media.

The research of Paletz (2015) also analyzes the fact that the 2008 presidential elections in America were held on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube in the past. The 2012 Presidential Elections were significantly affected by the rapid use of social media. The two opponents widely used this platform to advance their political goals. These rivals affect elections through their posts, comments and by sharing of videos. Masih (2018) stated that Facebook become a strong pillar for mobilizing people and to ensure their political participation. The exchange of views and information shows that Facebook users who share their opinions and leave comments on Facebook can freely express their opinion without any hindrance through likes and comments. The sharing of opinions and information demonstrates youths' propensity for political engagement as well as their grasp of political concerns. Thus, the study investigated the impact that political opinions shared on Facebook play in motivating young people to engage in politics in Pakistani society. Additionally, they contended that in order to allow for the free expression of social and, particularly, political issues in society, an information technology body, such as IT institutions or the IT Ministry, must establish a social media platform like to Facebook. (Rao, 2020) Draws attention to the ability of social media sites like Facebook and Twitter to encourage support from a wide range of demographic groups and promote political engagement. These channels were crucial to the outcome of the 2018 election in Pakistan. Thousands of people who shared their political beliefs were attracted to the parties' social media campaigns, which were successfully led by the party leader. Nonetheless, there was animosity between the opposing parties, and hate speech was spoken during the

election campaigns. In an effort to win elections, social networks stimulate political competitiveness among themselves; they also urge voters to trust people, especially the less educated, and cast their votes without thinking about the consequences for the country as a whole. Pakistan's 2018 election was significantly impacted by Facebook and Twitter since both platforms were used by people and officials to change the political landscape of the nation. Using intimidation tactics and covert killings to further political goals during elections is not a win-win situation on social media.

(Demirhan, 2014). Examined the extent to which political parties use social media and their strategic methods, as well as the social media strategies of Turkish political leaders and parties that were successful in winning elections and gaining parliamentary seats following the 2011 election. The characteristics of politicians, as reported by mainstream media and their use of social media are highly consistent. This indicates that social media have significant effects on mobilization and formulation of public opinion. In order to investigate how political parties (PTI and PML-N) are purposefully using social media platforms to mobilize the public during the 2018 general elections, the study needs to be examined in Present scenario of Pakistan.

The Express Tribune details how people in their twenties and thirties connected with PTI's party anthems. The media story continues to explain how the party's songs and slogans influenced the 2018 general election more than they did in previous years. Renowned Pakistani singers write the party songs for the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). These singers have a well-known reputation for getting the crowd up and dancing to their music. PTI hires a variety of vocalists to create party songs, including Nasir Ali Chohan, Faizan ul Haq, Faizan Ali Bagga, and Rahat Fateh Ali Khan. Consequently, the target audience continues to like PTI's songs. Additionally, PTI's official website and video-broadcasting platforms like Vimeo and YouTube streamed the music. These songs have been seen and shared by millions of people on Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Twitter, and other social media platforms. It is because of this that PTI has been able to reach millions of Pakistanis (Political Songs Add Colour To Polls, 2018).

Research Objectives

- To investigate how the PTI and PML-N used social media during the 2018 General Elections.
- To evaluate the content strategies that PTI and PML-N use on Facebook and Twitter.
- To evaluate the level of engagement PTI & PML-N had on different social media platforms including Likes, Shares, Comments, Re-tweets, etc.
- To examine the influence of social media campaigns of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) on the formation of public opinion and voting behavior using Social Learning Theory during the General elections of 2018.

Research Questions

The study will discuss:

1. How did the PTI and PML-N use social media during the General Elections 2018?
2. What were the main content tactics on social media used by PTI vs PML-N on social media, and how did they distinguish between the two parties?
3. How did the face book and Twitter platforms of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) influence public opinion formation during the General elections in Pakistan in 2018?
4. What makes Social Learning Theory the most suitable framework for analyzing the influence of Social Media on Pakistani voters during the 2018 General Elections?

Research Methodology

The primary aim of the research is to gather qualitative data. Numerous sources are consulted for information, such as books, journals, Facebook sites, and Twitter accounts. The purpose of selecting these sources is to provide readers a thorough grasp of how social media has influenced public opinion in Pakistan, especially in the run-up to the 2018 general elections. The research aims to study and analyze the strategies of social media opted by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) to get their goals.

This focused approach helps to analyze the role of digital communication in public opinion. Descriptive analyses technique is used to gather and describe the data. Apart from this, analytical approach is also used to evaluate and interpret the collected data. Such techniques help the researcher to draw conclusions that how social media are affecting the means of political communication and mobilizing techniques. For this, the official websites of PML-N and PTI, as well as their Facebook and Twitter accounts are analyzed. Their multimedia information is mainly analyzed.

Theoretical farmework

The "Social Learning Theory" is used to analyze the ways by which Pakistan Tehreek-E-Insaf (PTI) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) manipulate public opinion on social media in the General Elections of 2018. The research helps to analyze the people's political attitudes and actions affected by social media. Observation and imitation play important roles in the learning process. These roles are analyzed by using social learning theory proposed by Albert Bandura. This theory is the most relevant theory for the analysis of how political parties used online channels to build their narratives and mobilize voters in the General Elections of 2018 in Pakistan. Bandura's theory is best to analyze the effect of online political communications over the development of public opinion during election campaigns (Bandura, 1979).

Public Opinion and Social Media

Public opinion is a complicated phenomenon, and many academics have established diverse definitions of what it entails. According to one viewpoint, leaders should give greater weight to the opinions of the majority when making decisions than those of the minority because individual opinions do important. Conversely, an opposing viewpoint asserts that elites in the media, government, and organized groups shape public opinion.

(Stimson, 1999) defined that Public opinion is the sentiment of people who share a common bond, such as a connection to a government or community that faces particular issues that shape public policy. Different people relate to issues in different ways. Some people are part of the watchful public, who keep a careful eye on politics and government in general. Some people belong to issue publics that concentrate on some public policy discussions, such as abortion or defense spending, while disregarding others (Burstein, 2003). Explained Public opinion is the sum of individual viewpoints, and all viewpoints should be treated equally, regardless of the speakers' level of expertise on the subject matter. Public opinion, then, is the culmination of people's preferences from all societal groups. It is the culmination of numerous unique viewpoints. The feelings that people have about a subject at any particular moment are represented by the sum of their individual viewpoints. Since not everyone has an opinion on every subject, another approach to characterize public opinion is as the opinions of regular people that they feel comfortable sharing in public.

Social media is used as a platform to express popular opinion. It raised awareness of rights and gave disadvantaged voters the opportunity to question and challenge the candidates they supported. Pakistani society has developed into a better educated and politically engaged society. This contradicts a core principle of the common wisdom that has shaped Pakistani electoral politics for many years: the short-term memory of voters. Social networking is empowering the average Pakistani. The general pattern suggests that regular people have accepted social media as a tool. The way that politicians and the general public engage has drastically changed since the advent of social media. Political parties and individual candidates can no longer afford to ignore the ingenuity of common individuals, growing awareness, and their capacity for public expression of their opinions.

The public is being informed about political manifestos by the majority of Pakistani political parties via social media. The tendency to use social media has grown in comparison to earlier times. Social media's rise has completely altered the nature of election campaigns and made it the go-to platform for candidates to communicate with one another. Candidates with a presence on Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp are probably more likely to succeed. In the upcoming 2018 general elections, social media campaigning has equaled door-to-door canvassing in importance. Through social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, candidates may interact with people directly, organize supporters, and shape public opinion.

Use of Social Media by PML-N and PTI in General Elections 2018

There were three major political parties in Pakistan in 2018: PTI, PPP, and PML-N. These political parties are all preparing for the 2018 general elections. They now reach voters through social media with little financial outlay, unlike in the past when

they had to spend a lot of money on print and digital media to receive adequate coverage of their political messaging during election cycles. The first political party to use social media was Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI), which did so during its 2013 election campaign. But social media didn't really take off until 2014, when 3G and 4G mobile internet became available in Pakistan. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) took advantage of social media and the internet to their advantage in the 2018 general election. Once the trend was established, other national and regional political parties jumped on board. It is significant to remember that in order to contact as many voters as possible during the general election, the mainstream political parties recruited volunteers and social media specialists (Cheema, 2019).

The political leaders of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Labbaik (PTI) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) are frequent Twitter users and have large following on the micro-blogging site. Both the parties have their official Facebook and Twitter accounts and use these social media platforms to communicate with the public and develop their political message. In addition to Twitter, live video has become a popular tool for workers and politicians alike. Social media was used by the PTI and the PML-N in the 2018 General Elections as a tool for opinion formation and mass mobilization. Each party's social media wing is primarily responsible for promoting its message and disparaging its opponents. Both the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) organized social media campaigns and convened a number of social media connoisseurship events in an effort to inspire the general public.

Before the election, PTI released an app that was connected to a database of over 50 million voters. Using this software, PTI staff members may identify and flag their supporters, get in touch with them ahead of time, and direct them to the polls on Election Day. PTI employees were able to print polling slips for every voter with only one click thanks to the app. Compared to the employees of other parties who had to handwrite the voter slips and rely on the ECP SMS Service to get voter information; this sped up the procedure for them. It's unclear if this information was obtained lawfully and if it gave the owner an unfair advantage over rivals. The PTI campaign dominated electronic and social media. Screen shots from TV news were frequently shared. "Breaking news" was picked up by PTI's social media and spread over their networks. On the eve of voting, this caused confusion, dissatisfaction, and fury among PML-N workers and voters. PTI screams the name of youth in an effort to inspire and win over the masses. Other political parties gradually realized the potential of social media campaigns after witnessing the success of PTI's online campaign, and they launched strong virtual campaigns.

The PTI and PML-N utilize the social media platform for live Q&A sessions, interactive polls and online debates to engage directly with voters. They propagate the culture of transparency and accessibility. They heavily use visual graphic in their political campaigns. Their social media teams actively made interesting blogs, movies, clips and info graphics to effectively communicate with the masses. The content's share-ability technique helps them to propagate their agenda to minute level within minutes. Both parties kept sharp eyes on social media trends to remain up to date and also to give set back to the rivals. Their social media teams use trends,

hashtags and quick reactions to breaking news to bring attention of their voters towards them.

On Twitter and Facebook, PTI has taken the effort to bring attention to itself and interact with their fans by using hashtags like #PTIRulesKP, #WazireAzamImranKhan, and #AbSirfImranKhan often. After seeing how effectively PTI utilizes hashtags to reach and win over millions of people, other political parties and their supporters probably caught on. PTI aims to set an example of conduct that evokes strong emotional responses and helps the party's narrative, as seen by the adoption of unique and eye-catching hashtags like #NawazSharifChor.

With this campaign, PTI sought to show off its strength in the face of corruption and wrongdoing, which encouraged followers to use the party's hashtags in their own social media postings. Retweets, likes, and comments demonstrated how popular and active PTI's hashtags were, offering a kind of express support to both viewer and fan alike. The positive feedback received by PTI from its hashtag initiatives could have encouraged more people to support the party's narrative and help spread its message on the internet. Society has been impacted by the public's perception of PTI's popularity and support base, which has been shaped by the party's domination in the hashtag space. This influence has the potential to persuade voters who are still indecisive and strengthen the fidelity of party members to the platform.

Findings and Discussion

Through the application of social learning theory, the researcher discovers that four processes identified by Bandura—attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation—are essential to observational learning. PTI and PML-N both sought to draw in social media users with interesting images, interactive campaigns, and content on Facebook and Twitter. By using repetition and consistency across a range of internet media, they made sure that their messages were remembered. By sharing, retweeting, or reposting content, supporters multiplied and amplified party messaging, increasing the campaigns' effect and reach. Appealing to emotions, offering promises of change, and instilling fear of negative consequences all served to motivate people to support the agendas and ideologies of the PTI and PML-N.

Both parties established social media cells as a communication tactic to engage the people during Pakistan's 2018 elections. Campaigns managed by media cells help political parties draw in followers and voters by spreading the word about their promises to win elections and improve people's lives. They also portray the other parties as corrupt and ineffective concurrently. They both understood how crucial it was to have a powerful online presence. These political organizations create an online identity that reflects their core policy ideas and ideology through official party pages, leader profiles, and specialized campaign handles. Their political messaging was strengthened by consistent branding across all channels. The PTI and PML-N party leaders' Twitter and Facebook page statistics are displayed in the above tables.

Twitter accounts of political leaders

User	Followers	No of Tweets
@imrankhanPTI	10.2 Million	384
@shehbazsharif	4.5 Million	803
@mryyamnawaz	5.3 Million	1200

Source: Rao, M. F. (2020). Hate Speech and Media /nĩŽdmŔŒŽn Literacy in the Digital Age: A Case Study. *Global Media Journal*, 1-10.

Here is an examination of the Twitter presence of three well-known Pakistani politicians based on the data above: With more than 10 million followers, Imran Khan enjoys a sizable following on Twitter. But with just 384 tweets, his total is quite small. This could point to a more targeted or selective usage of the platform, perhaps emphasizing communication quality above quantity. With 4.5 million followers, Shehbaz Sharif is a well-known opposition figure and the head of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). With 803 tweets, he has substantially more than Imran Khan. This increased volume of tweets could suggest a different kind of communication or a more involved interaction with his followers.

Facebook Accounts

Pages	Likes	Official Page	Total Posts
Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf	6.5 Million	Official page of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf	938
PML (N)	2.9 Million	Official Page of PML(N)	797
PTI Punjab	3.5Million	Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Punjab page	349

Source: Rao, M. F. (2020). Hate Speech and Media /nĩŽdmŔŒŽn Literacy in the Digital Age: A Case Study. *Global Media Journal*, 1-10.

PTI has received the most likes out of the three pages, indicating a high level of interest and support on Facebook. With 938 posts overall, PTI demonstrates a consistent level of engagement on Facebook and most likely a regular presence to engage with its audience. PML-N has a lot of likes on its official page, although having a lot less than PTI, which indicates that it has a substantial, albeit possibly smaller, fan base on Facebook. With 797 total postings, PML-N maintains a respectable level of activity on Facebook, but slightly less than PTI.

Analysis

PML-N social media cell is headed by Maryam Nawaz Sharif in order to spread news, updates, and campaign slogans during General Elections 2018. PML-N portray Nawaz Shaif as the victim of unfair dismissal. They use hashtags like "Mujhay Kyun Nikala" and "Khalai Makhlooq". Such narratives are easy to build through social media. Their victimization narrative was embraced by their supporters. PML-N skillfully used emotional appeals to win over those who believed that Sharif is persecuted unfairly. Their social media team sponsored different posts and ads to actively engage voters and reach a wider audience. This forum helps them to easily alter their public image and to refute the information propagate by the opponents. Previously, the political parties go door to door to mobilize people, but this time they did by door to door movement as well as through social media.

On the other hand, PTI propagate their stories and messages on Facebook and Twitter using hashtag campaigns including #PTIrulesKP, #WazireAzamImranKhan, and #AbSirfImranKhan to propagate their narratives and to bring positive image of their leader. PTI effectively engaged number of social media users by making these hashtags prominent. Apart from this, they mock political rivals Nawaz Sharif and the PML-N by using hashtags such as #NawazSharifChor. PTI prioritize to propagate negative information against rivals than to advance their own agenda, narratives and vision for Pakistan.

PTI off and on interacted with fans through social media to promote a sense of belonging and encourage support and mobilize voters. By making the trends, eye-catching contents like memes and videos, use of hashtags in social media campaigns made them more, able to reach to a wider audience. The findings show that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) effectively persuaded voters in the General Elections of 2018. They ultimately won the elections. They work under the arch of Social Learning Theory. Their charismatic leadership affects and changed public opinion. People responded well to PTI's dynamic style and efficient communication than to that of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N),

Conclusion

In the General Elections of 2018 social media played a key role. It provides a persistent market to political parties to engage the voters and also to affect the public opinion. PTI and PML-N use online mediums especially Facebook and Twitter to fill the communication gap between the public and their political parties. These sites are used by PML-N and PTI to encourage agenda-setting and popular mobilization. In democratizing information access, social media plays significant role but it also raises difficult moral, legal, and cultural issues. The integrity of election process is affected negatively when false information is spread by opponents to satisfy their voters. The online advertisements raise concerns about data privacy. So to get democratic results by maximizing social media potentials, governments and civil society should come forward and play their part.

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