



TWITTER: A SPINE IN PAKISTANI POLITICAL TURMOIL

Jamshed Zaman

Research Associate

Department of Mass Communication

Forman Christian College University

Lahore – Pakistan

22-11252@formanite.fccollege.edu.pk

Dr. Saleem Abbas

Associate Professor

Department of Mass Communication

Forman Christian College University

Lahore – Pakistan

saleemabbas@fccollege.edu.pk

Abstract

The growing Twitter role and its mass use in the public may shape ordinary citizens' decisions, actions, and responses to political instability. It has been observed in Pakistani politics, especially during the no-confidence vote against Ex-Prime Minister Imran Khan, that Twitter has replaced traditional media in the narrative building of the nation. During these scenarios, Twitter announced #ImportedGovernmentNaManzoor as a record trending hashtag in history. The article focuses on using Twitter in the current Pakistani political turmoil. This will also identify whether Twitter plays a significant role in youth empowerment in this conflict. This research will use the content analysis method, through which different tweets will be analyzed to answer how Twitter plays a distinctive role in the narrative shaping of political conflict in Pakistan. And does this evolution play its part in maintaining merit in political turmoil? This proves that Twitter plays a unique and crucial role in different processes in chaos.

Keywords: Twitter, political turmoil, Imran Khan, PTI, Pakistani Politics

Introduction

Social Networks remained free spaces for people around the globe, and everyone performed a role of a social actor (Raoof, 2013). Twitter is a social networking tool. It emerged in 2006. Unlike all other existing or newly originated social networks, it provides a unique social networking service due to its different usage patterns, objectives, and requirements (Jaidka, 2019). Its brief and comprehensive text requirements as a tweet, boring feeds, and trends full of text made it



difficult to use for traditional users. After its existence, a specific group of society realized its significance as an opinion tank, where expressing an opinion in brief words was an essential requirement. The particular class of society needed a sophisticated mode of social communication. The cosmopolitan nature of Twitter pulled similar discussions from numerous clusters of communities that could not be shared and organized on other social networks.

Twitter, an instantaneous visible and increased social power, promotes the articulation of diverse opinions, a new form of participation (Lavan, 2015). This diversity not only brought social discussions but welcomed people to share personal views on politics, economics, and surroundings. The global use of Twitter in politics became a trend, and even western countries switched their mediums of political communication, so a solid national narrative should lead to strengthening the country. (Burns, 2009) argued that Twitter also brought new challenges for policymakers and administrators. Twitter not only awarded the masses but also increased their expectations from their governments in terms of their political, social, and fundamental rights. Suppression was no longer a hurdle for those empowered with the new media technologies. Further media communication helps to fuel the protests, which are hard to control and predict (Samuels, 2011).

In the context of Pakistan, the public was solely dependent upon traditional media for their updates about the surroundings. It was observed that conventional media was performing a puppet role in the country's authoritarian and forced rules. After the joint distribution of new media technologies among the masses in Pakistan, media roles switched instantly. This empowered the commoner and provided an additional opportunity to respond with opinion. There is a strong relationship between being politically informed and political participation; the more one gets the information, the more he gets involved (Carpini, 1996).

Pakistan saw its changes in the recent era when people practically participated in real-time political conflicts on new media technologies and with a physical presence. Adam Clayton Powell argues that much of the internet information in the world only reaches the elites, including students, business people, politicians, and executives. Through these elites, traditional sources like radio and newspaper consumers (Yufsuf, 2015). It was also observed in Pakistan that people in rural areas are still not armed with this facility, which stops them from being part of the national interest.

Pakistan's democracy is often accused of electoral malpractice in the face of an independent democratic state. (Sayeed, 1959) related it with Hobbes's state of nature where every decisive group fight against every other group, which is the ruthless quest for power. Pakistani establishment was frequently accused of an authoritarian role in rigging elections. In 2018 Pakistan again chose a leader to be the country's, Chief Executive. Unlike every new Prime Minister, Khan's decisions seemed to be more independent without the approval of traditional power holders, which led to a joint opposition campaign to remove him with a vote of no confidence according to the



constitution of 1973 of Pakistan. Opposition successfully de-seated a sitting Prime Minister for the first time in the history of Pakistan on April 10th, 2022. Khan's massive support from his voters erupted right after the action, based on Khan's accusations of Opposition and Establishment for being part of the foreign conspiracy against him. All social media networks, including Twitter, were flooded with trends against establishment and opposition. PTI dominated Twitter with more than 300 Hashtags over one month. (Admin, 2022). This study provides an understanding of the significant role of Twitter in the political turmoil of the country. One chose a specific case concerning the current political scenario of Pakistan to analyze Twitter as a medium of information for the masses with recent updates. It also assists them in staying connected and strengthened to build a joint narrative. The contemporary relevance of the research is the current political activism in the Pakistani political turmoil.

Literature Review

Social networking websites, specifically Twitter, have been used as a discussion tool globally. Still, it has been observed in recent years that it has a vast influence on political decisions and campaigns. In one similar article, Tanja Bosch narrated a case of #RHODESMUSTFALL in South Africa, where students, with the help of social media, led an effective campaign to remove the statue of British Colonialist Rhodes. Their demand was based on the argument that Rhodes promoted institutionalized racism, which led to the discrimination culture of Black students in South Africa. This only took a month for this powerful movement when the authorities bowed down on the power demand of students. It was not only Twitter protests for the fall of the statue; several other protests were also recorded, but the qualitative findings of tweets found that Twitter was the primary source of pressure on the administration (Bosch, 2017).

These cases and their influence are a new trend in the face of activism using these social networking tools. In one of the articles, the author draws attention to the effectiveness of social media's role in achieving political aims in Pakistan. Although it was the beginning of such social media-driven agendas, the youth was armed with foreign degrees, blackberries, and laptops. In 2007, General Pervaiz Musharaf, then President of Pakistan, arbitrarily dismissed the Chief Justice of Pakistan, Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry. This new activism not only started a powerful political movement against such an act in Karachi but also led the youth and ordinary citizens to protests from different areas, which later became successful. Social media's activism is not necessarily ideologically built, it can be from external or internal pressure, or it may be a mass opinion of people which promoted a similar massive act with the help of social media. The article used multiple examples where such instances not only caused many campaigns in Pakistan but also shaped the narratives and actions of people (Zia, 2012).

In an article, Eijaz (2013) mentions that three major evolutions are done through new media technologies and their interaction with politics, "globalization of political communication,



communication of global politics, and politics of global communication.” Globalization of political communication is evolving the developed countries’ political scenarios. Pakistani politics had realized the need for new media technologies and greatly benefited their political struggle in the country. One of the similar cases was elaborated on by Saifudin in his article, where the research was conducted on Twitter’s involvement in 2013’s election, its campaigning, and its success. The study argued with examples and findings that PTI’s successful campaign named ‘My Name is Khan’ was the most tweeted campaign as compared to any other party, which gained popularity and was a vast source of people’s interaction. According to findings, PTI’s smart step to use new media technology for the first time in its election campaign was a huge source of its success in the country’s general election. Their step was influential in the times when physical campaigns, rallies, and gatherings were vulnerable to violent attacks by extremists and opponent groups. In this way, their strong campaign and huge top supporter of that time were saved from unpredictable hardships for their political motives.

The research used quantitative methodology, taking English language tweets from archives and evaluating them with software to count the overall interaction strength of all parties, where PTI was on the top of the list (Ahmad, 2014).

Twitter has always had a considerable influence due to its most popular and influential users, including elites, journalists, actors, and political, social, and religious leaders. Qaiser & Riaz argued with facts and findings in one of their research articles that the agenda setting in current Pakistani print media was dependent on Twitter. They compared three of the famous newspaper’s top stories and Twitters trend for various days concerning the specific case of *Aven Field Reference Case*, where they found similarities in the results as the top stories were similar in all newspapers and Twitter, which proved Twitter as a significant change in Agenda Setting application. The research used quantitative analysis where they collected the data from three newspapers and Twitter and evaluated it through coding sheets under Inter-Media Agenda Setting analysis for better results (Qaisar & Riaz, 2020).

New media technologies have evolved to a significant role in recent times; in a similar context (Itefaq, Alvi, & Ahmad, 2019) found out that the rural university students in Pakistan mostly use Twitter and other new media technologies to stay politically and socially updated. This study also revealed that online political activities correlate with all offline political participation and awareness. This study used interviewing method with an online survey distributed by Qualtrics software, where data was collected from Male and Female undergraduate students at the University of Narowal. Michaelsen (2011) argues that new media technologies play a significant role in democratic consolidation. The article aimed to explain the need for new media technologies for the old politics of the country. PTI and its leader Imran Khan have a special significance in the new media technologies. Some call him a populist leader due to his active interaction with these technologies, where people stay informed and connected with the leader. Imran’s and his party’s



active and effective tweets are also among the factors of his success. This was a significant reason for his massive following from urban backgrounds and less from rural locations due to less availability and limited use of new media technologies.

According to (Riaz), Pakistan is still evolving in terms of political communication using social media. Political communication in developed or developing countries plays a vital role in democratic republics. Furthermore, Riaz mentions the examples from the United States, where President Obama's supporters used extensive e-campaigns to promote his mandate and empower his narrative to make him win the elections. These new media technologies had a huge role in his success. In Africa, the Ghanaian presidential elections of 2008 were of paramount importance, as the two powerful opponents were contesting with substantial public support. There Twitter played an important role among all other new media technologies; live coverage of all the results was continuously tweeted on Twitter. Results were astonishing as John Atta Mills, who lost the last two consecutive elections, won the elections due to an effective campaign.

(Chhachhar, Malik, & Pahore, 2021) argues that the political parties, even in Pakistan's rural areas like Hyderabad and surroundings, tried to be more updated and strengthened on new media technologies than their opponent. Findings showed that the frequent users of Twitter and Facebook from these areas got a better idea about the manifesto and mandate than other people in the area. These people also had enough exposure to decide on voting for the party. The research used a purposive nonprobability sampling technique. Another study also focused on learning the youth attitudes in the 2013 elections regarding their political responsibility. (Rubab, Fatima, & Afsheen, 2018) presented astonishing facts that social media played a significant role in political activism by involving them in various political discussions and making them aware about their responsibility to keep the process smooth for democratic governance. The study used quantitative analysis, uses, and gratification theory to take relevant findings.

Theoretical Framework

The study implies the Diffusion of Innovation Theory by E.M Rogers, one of the oldest social science theories. Diffusion of Innovation Theory mainly involves adopting new ideas, behavior, and product. It's five adopter categories can effectively elaborate on the people's participation in the specific issue on Twitter. (Jeppesen, 2021) argued that social media innovators strive for a common cause rather than individual goals. Theory in the study tends to explain how a particular idea and thought about the issue gained momentum over Twitter for a specific period; five adopters are a set of steps involved in diffusing the new study. Five adapters are explained as

1. Innovators are the first to start thinking about something new and are more vulnerable to risks. In the current political scenario, PTI politicians spoke against the corroded conspiracy against the country on Twitter. They not only generated the stance but also



spoke against the actors involved in the action. Nobody in the country could speak against the ultimate power holder, but they started the movement.

2. Early adopters are the people who adopt the idea for the first time. They represent the innovators, but they know how to implement them. They enjoy the leadership roles while diffusing the concept to the people. If one compares, early adopters were the young journalists, students, and columnists who had some influence on Twitter. They were also vulnerable to the risk of diffusion. During the process, they were powerless to get abducted by opponent power holders.
3. The early Majority are not innovators but adopt the innovation before average followers. In the current scenario, the middle working class of society was the early majority, who were educated and inclined to learn the truth through their curiosity.
4. The late majority are the people who are skeptical about changing. In the current scenario, average Twitter consumers were not using it for any purpose. They did not try to know more about something or express their opinion. They mainly depended on the majority choice, which was the primary reason to adopt the innovation.
5. Laggards are those who are bound to their conservative and traditional beliefs. In the scenario, laggards were the Twitter consumers living in the villages who were less in number but more reluctant about their daily life issues. They were least bothered about what was happening in the political world around.

Methodology

The research used the qualitative content analysis method to analyze the crucial role of Twitter in political instability. This analysis was based on Twitter's conversation with hashtags, which showed the more diverse and influential form of communication between the masses. Bruns & Stieglitz (2013) argued that much scholarly work on Twitter is in the form of Hashtags which not only makes it reachable but also helps people to follow the updates in particular Hashtags. This feature makes Twitter very easy to track a specific issue at any time.

As compared to any other social networking site, Twitter's hashtags analysis in this study showed the significance of the network where such a sensitive matter of internal political instability of a county is being discussed. The study also analyzed hashtags at specific times to find the strength of communication between all groups of society; moreover, the influential and active accounts were also tracked to see the role of Twitter in shaping the narrative of the people. The study used NodeXL social network analysis and visualization software to evaluate the results. For *#ImportedGovernmentNaManzoor*, one collected 1900 Tweets from June 20th, 2022, to June



23rd, 2022, shortly after the issue peaked. To authenticate the results, the similar Hashtag *#RegimechangeinPakistan* from the same movement was evaluated right after its origin, with the same method, where a total of 2300 Tweets were collected in the period of 12 hours on June 23rd, 2022. The social network analysis shows the relationship between the masses by providing static snapshots and neglects the network dynamics (Bruns & Stieglitz, 2013).

Similarly, NodeXL software also determines the relation and structure between the clusters but cannot find out the intensity and quality of the Tweets. Research with all discussions on Twitter against the same hashtags is beyond the scope of research (Axel Bruns, 2012). Above mentioned Hashtags and their analysis on other available social networks are limitations of this research, which may also result in deviation from the research's findings.

Findings

1. #ImportedGovernmentNaManzoor

In the current crucial political turmoil of Pakistan, it was observed as new hope by political analysts that ordinary citizens of Pakistan got a fundamental sense and awareness of the political and global status of Pakistan in terms of its foreign relation, stability, and social security. In recent days since no confidence was passed against the sitting Prime Minister, a surge of political movements was seen against the oppression they were facing in the face of inherited governments, establishment, and foreign policies. These movements were first ever observed in the history of Pakistan, where even the fear of forced abductions and suppression couldn't stop them from sharing their peaceful opinions. Twitter not only provided free space to these movements but is also a significant contributor to these movements, which is a spine in every political scenario. *#ImportedGovernmentNaManzoor* trended since the no-confidence vote. Its Urdu hashtag even set the most significant trend record of 106,413,499 Tweets which Twitter officially announced on 26th April, 2022 (TweetBinder, 2022). In analyzing this hashtag, one used 1900 Tweets over four days. A vast connection and conversation were found in the clusters, which expose that people are interlinked in their common interests on Twitter, where they not only Tweet their opinion but reply to or Retweet others as well, which strengthens it. The analysis found that most of the accounts were handled by youth, political figures, and intellectuals. Most prominent Politicians included Aliya Hamza, MNA PTI, and Ex Parliamentary secretary for Commerce and Industries.

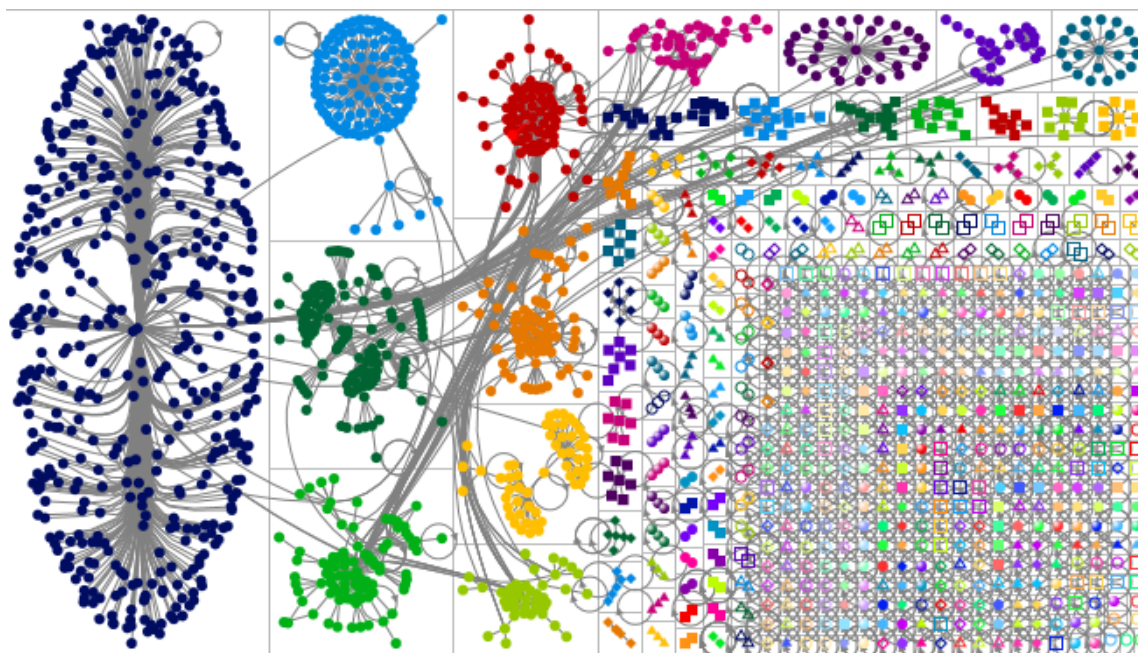


Figure 1.1 A visualization of the connection between various clusters of society on #ImportedGovernmentNaManzoor

2. #RegimeChangeInPakistan

Among all other hashtags of political instability in Pakistan, #RegimeChangeInPakistan also trended on Twitter. Due to its validation and contemporaneous, one also analyzed it to understand Twitter's role in the current political instability of Pakistan. It exposed some astonishing facts about the various clusters. Two thousand two hundred tweets were collected for analysis in only 12 hours. The study showed huge inter and intra-cluster communication, some key Twitter accounts involved in this communication were primarily handled by youth, academicians, and political figures. Social media marketing handles of PTI were least found in the whole of the conversation. A bundle of threads between the groups shows the strength of narrative among different groups of society, which one considers as the knowledge and exposure of present instability among the community, which is only possible through the medium given by Twitter.

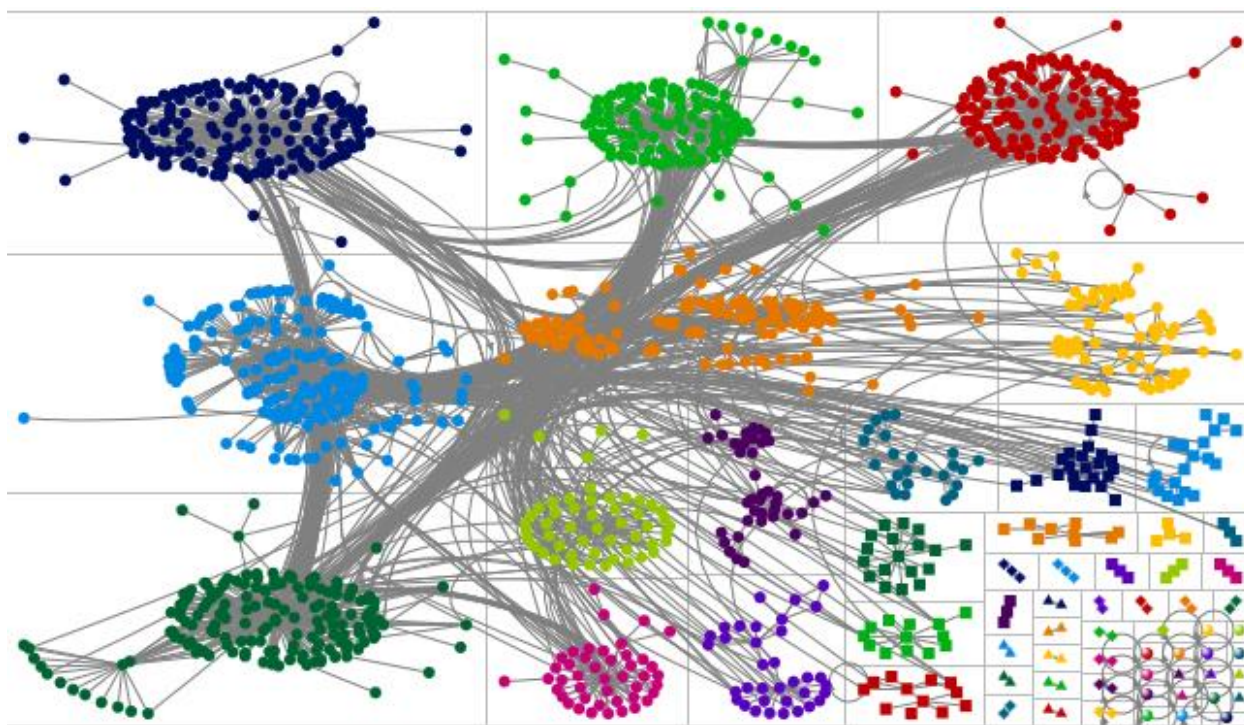


Figure2.1 A visualization of various clusters of society in #RegimeChangeInPakistan, the bundles of threads show the connections between them.

Discussion

Twitter's unique usage patterns differentiate it from all other social networking sites. Its brief and comprehensive spaces only promote the opinions to be shared because stories, vlogs, and blogs often lag the valid opinion or stance. The world soon understood its significance right after its origin. Early adopters from Pakistan were politicians, bureaucrats, businessmen, and policymakers. Although the ruling elite from Pakistan never understood the public hierarchy of the class division, their thinking patterns, and their needs, they kept Twitter space to interact about their achievements and elite opinions about different issues in Pakistan. After their empowerment with education, the youth of Pakistan kept on joining the network by realizing its unique consumption style. This is why, according to stats, Twitter is the top second most consuming social network after Facebook in Pakistan (Admin, Statcounter, 2022). Suppose one focuses on Facebook users in Pakistan. In that case, they are primarily conservatives, uneducated, and laggards according to diffusion theory, making it the most critical site to expect tolerance of opinion. Twitter provides a customized profile and feeds to every user, making sharing opinions easier without distractions. This promotes a robust discussion with the help of hashtags and mentions, which binds the people with the same interest and keeps the conversation fruitful. In the context of Pakistan and current political instability, all the credit for current hot debates on decades-old issues



goes to the initial adopters and innovators of raising the concerns independently on Twitter. Some of the people from these initial adopters were also targeted by power holders, but their actions to equip the people with reality continued. From my point of view, the division of information or innovation between the hierarchy of adopters was an essential part of an effective movement because the digestion and response of information are not the same for every adopter. In the current case, the right and timely communication division between all adopters made it an influential movement in the country's history. The success of this helpful connection between these adapters is evident in my findings from NodeXL.

This evolution of adapters not only remains to only one social network but also slowly moves to the society with much more strength and belief of rule with the majority. This slow process continues to equip the masses with the correct information, tolerance of opinion, and the same response to the issue. This is the reason that today every social network site, political sphere, and street is flooded with an almost similar stance that was generated by only a tiny idea and thought. The people from rural areas who are laggards have solid political affiliations with their conservative beliefs, promises, and agreements with their representatives. Awareness of the overall political situation will not only disconnect them from their inherited political representatives but also helps to make them stand against so-called leaders with the majority. Secondly, a trend to use such social networks would gain momentum as people want to question their representatives, executives, and institutions directly, ultimately forcing them to deliver in the deserved manner. This pressure, awareness of Democracy among the masses, and their collective response lit up the hope for transparency, justice, and merit in the country; otherwise, ultimately, it leads to revolution.

Conclusion

After the spread of Twitter as a typical social networking site among the people of Pakistan, the public understood its need for society to eliminate the social, political, cultural, and daily life issues with the power of frequent helpful discussion. In the past, it was observed that individuals are talking or discussed these issues in public used to face dire consequences, which often led to life-threatening situations for them. Understanding the diffusion theory in the aforementioned aspect would normalize these discussions about these unignored issues and produce valuable solutions with frequent decisions to improve society's standards. Political communication has significant importance in democratic republics like Pakistan. Suppressing the voices and forced implementations of narratives with the support of the uneducated public will ultimately destroy the essence of real democracy. These independent social networking forums should be used as the freedom to speak against the common political issues for prospering Pakistan.



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