



Politics in a Digital Age: The Impact of New Media Technologies on Public Participation and Political Campaign in Pakistan's 2018 Elections – A Case Study of Karachi

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Abstract

Drawing on the theory of public participation, this study evaluates the public's use of new media technologies during Pakistan's 2018 election, and whether new media technologies have increased their level of participation in the democratic process and political discourse. The study also examines the impacts of new media technologies on political parties' campaign and the government's activities during the country's 2018 election. To achieve these objectives, the study uses quantitative method of survey and qualitative methods of document review and in-depth interviews. The study uses relative frequency statistics to present the survey data and thematic analysis to analyze the qualitative data.

Keywords: New media technologies; Political campaign; Democratic process; Political discourse; Public participation; Pakistan's 2018 election

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Introduction

The digital revolution has facilitated dramatic changes with significant results worldwide such as increased public's access to information, generation of new gateways to goods and services and more opportunities of civic engagement and social networking with expanded communities. More importantly, political institutions and activities are seen as largely mediated and shaped by the technologies of information and communication. New media technologies¹ are recognized as having a powerful influence on the public's access to information and government's documents, the methods and content of political campaigns, the attitudes and preferences of voters, the efforts of activists to disseminate their messages, and the ways in which topics enter the public discourse [1].

Many Western political scientists and anthropologists assert that democracy and a healthy society require the active participation of citizens through varied media platforms. It is widely viewed that new media technologies have incredibly broken "dominant communication sphere" traditionally held by the political

elites, resulting in a cyber sphere² and a deep-rooted culture of democracy which permits citizens for wider participation and networking in political debates and democratic process through new platforms of their expression and self-representation [1-4].

Some past Western studies have shown a positive relationship between the use of new media and political mobilization, public's participation and democratization during the election campaign [5-8]. On the other hand, studies conducted in non-Western societies, also have revealed that the penetration of new media technologies aid for a more politically inclusive society, allowing excluded voices to have a social presence and challenging dominant political or social discourses that is necessary for fostering social cohesion and peace. For instance, the political uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011 suggest that new media have helped citizens to be part of participatory politics to achieve wider democratic goals [9]. Similarly, studies have shown positive implications of social media and mobile phone usage on socio-political dynamics in Indonesia [10].

In the case of Pakistan, some studies suggest that new media technologies can be seen as a catalyst to reconfigure Pakistan's politics and democratic process by introducing new platforms of public's communication and their participation in politics [11-14].

¹New media is used as a relative term and has been defined by scholars in varied ways. Peters describes new media as "emerging communication and information technologies undergoing a historical process of contestation, negotiation and institutionalization." By and large, new media is conceptualised as those forms that combine the three Cs: "computing and information technology; communications networks; and content on digitized media"

²New media technologies have created cyber sphere for public that is different from Habermas's concept of 'public sphere' and 'private sphere' Habermas [46], blurring the boundaries demarcations of global and local.

In July 2018, general elections in Pakistan have been held by the country's Election Commission. Yet, there is no study that offers qualitative insights into the public's use of new media and its impact on their participation in political process, political parties' campaign and government's activities during this election – especially in the Southern port city of Karachi. Therefore, this article aims to fill this gap in literature.

The article firstly articulates the objectives of this study. Secondly, it briefly reviews past studies into the use of new media technologies in relation to political and election campaign and public participation in democratic process and political discourse. Thirdly, the article explains the theoretical framework and methodology of the study. And finally, it discusses findings and conclusion of the study.

Objectives of the Study

This study has the following three objectives:

- To explore the public's use of new media technologies in Karachi during Pakistan's 2018 election.
- To analyse whether new media technologies have increased Karachi's public participation in democratic process and political discourse during the country's 2018 election.
- To examine the impacts of new media technologies on political parties' campaign and government's activities in Karachi during Pakistan's 2018 election.

Literature Review

The concept of new media

New media has been conceptualized differently by media and communications scholars. For some, new media have emerged from the modern information and communication technologies. On the other hand, many scholars agree that new media indicate the transforming patterns of media production, distribution and use. Therefore, it combines three elements:

- (i) Computing information technology;
- (ii) Communications networks (i.e., mobile phones, internet, cable television and interactive television);
- (iii) Content on digitized media [15,16]. **Figure 1** below illustrates the key defining elements of new media.

Likewise, Lister et al. [12-14,17] suggest that new media technologies are actually the new way of production, distribution and consumption of media content (either information or entertainment), and that has transformed the operation of traditional media outlets including newspapers, television and radio broadcasters. Despite the distinct features of new media, the author believes that the new media technologies still serve a complimentary role to the traditional media.

New media technologies, political campaign and public participation

The use of new media in election campaigns is not a recent

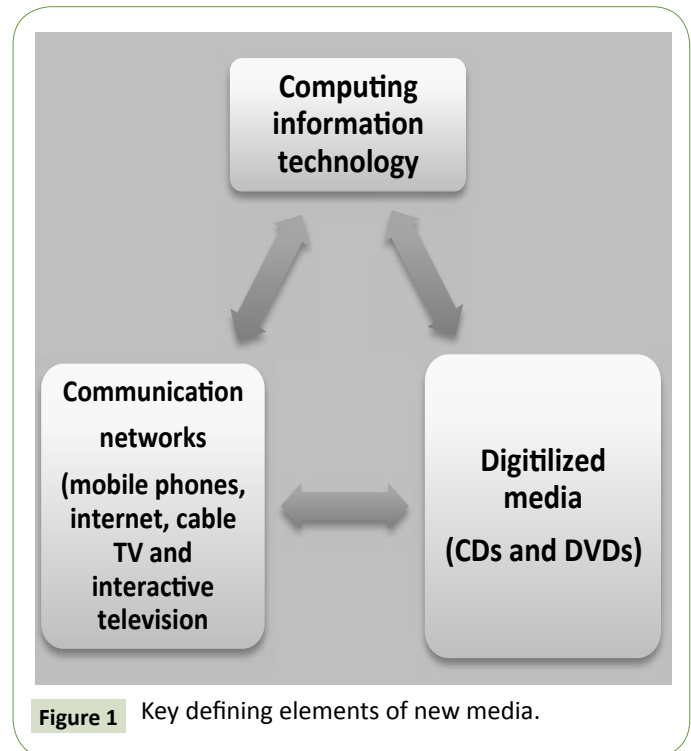


Figure 1 Key defining elements of new media.

trend; however, its significance has increased steadily over time. For instance, in the United States, Clinton's campaign-related information was placed on the internet during 1992 presidential election [18]. In the US presidential election of 2002, electoral candidates' online campaign was a very common tool, which "led some to proclaim 2002 as the first internet election. And in 2004 election, US political candidates moved beyond perceiving the web as an electronic brochure to viewing it as electronic headquarters" [10,19]. By the time of 2008 election, new media tools (such as social networking and blogging) became popular and were used for former- President Obama's political campaign [20]. These are just a few past examples of election campaigns in the United States. Today, in many Western countries and especially in the United States, no electoral candidate and political party can enter an election process without having an online presence, and scholars do agree with an expected growth in the use of new media tools in politics and election campaigns [21].

Literature review suggests that new media are widely acknowledged as a significant tool for increasing the public's political information and their participation in democratic process. For example, some previous Western studies into the use of new media in political campaigns underline that internet and online media have improved the visibility and accessibility of political information and election campaigns. And it has emerged as a source of political engagement, knowledge and interaction for public at a very low cost. Now the public has online space for gaining political knowledge, participating in opinion polls, discussing politics through blogging, tweeting and expressing their opinions across a range of social media networks [22-25].

Moreover, the positive impact of new media technologies on politics and public participation has recognized in many non-Western contexts as well. For example, Aday et al. [9] highlight that new media have promoted freedom of expression, speeded-

up the process of democratization and empowered political activists to combat against authoritarian regimes. They view that new media platforms (such as Twitter, Face Book, YouTube and Blogs) have played a crucial role in political conflicts especially in the Middle East – where traditional media is heavily restricted and internet and other social media have provided a new and comparatively freer space to public for raising their voice. And thus, social media has actually empowered the masses [9].

Likewise, Nugroho and Syarief [10], in their study about ‘new media and political process in contemporary Indonesia’ reveal the positive impact of social media usage on socio-political dynamics of the country. Their study suggests that new media is serving as a fast and a successful tool for information dissemination, public participation in political process and an online public sphere has created in Indonesia, which has helped in strengthening the democratic structure of the Indonesian society. Nevertheless, the challenge is to further broaden this sphere into civic political participation [10].

The case of Pakistan is a little different because the country’s socio-political circumstances and demographic attributes are contrary to Indonesia and many countries in the Middle East (such as Egypt, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates ect). Pakistan’s media is enjoying considerable freedom and it is considered as the most vocal one in South Asia. The country’s traditional media is already serving as an agent of political change and television news channels not only often co-opt content from cyberspace and social media but also they are operating their online news websites too, which are open for public’s feedbacks and opinion polls. Hence, the Pakistani public has more options to get political information and participate in the political process and discourse.

With the proliferation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure, social media has become popular in Pakistan. Kugelman [11] suggest that the Pakistani public use social media in five ways:

- (i) For personal recreation, communication and networking;
- (ii) To access the news stories ignored by traditional media;
- (iii) To participate in social, political and other campaigns;
- (iv) To promote and coordinate for humanitarian social causes, donations, political issues and problems; and
- (v) To participate in social and political debates. This implies that internet and other new media do have an impact in the domain of politics by introducing easy and new ways of public networking with political parties and to coordinate an event, make donations and to get information.

Previously, a number of scholars have analyzed the impact of new media in Pakistan’s politics [11-13,26] and public participation in it [14]. Nevertheless, comparatively lesser attention has been paid to examine how the public use social media and other digital tools during the country’s election [13,26]. In order to understand the role of new media in politics, especially in relation to political parties’ campaign and public’s participation in Pakistan’s 2018 election, there is a need of research that offers qualitative and quantitative insights both in this domain. Hence, this study addresses this topic.

Theoretical Framework

Theory of public participation

The theory of public participation emphasizes a process through which citizen can raise voice for their basic rights (i.e., freedom of expression; freedom of information; freedom of association and religion; rights to justice, equality, access to basic facilities necessary for an individual living and growth) and for accountability of those with powers with an opportunity to influence their policies, reforms and decision-making. The theory conceptualizes citizens as a fundamental part of political discourse and democratic and decision-making processes through their active involvement and participation [27-29].

Bryson et al. [30] suggest that there are varied purposes of public participation, namely: to advance the legal, political and democratic structure of the society; to foster inclusion and equality; to promote social justice and fundamental rights (such as freedom of expression, access to information, freedom of religion and so on); to develop an understanding of issues of common concerns and to come-up with practical solutions; and proposing policies, reforms and long or short-terms plans for the public’s benefit. Above all the core objective of public participation is to buttress democratic culture within the society.

Renn et al. [31] highlight that media-laden public participation is advantageous because people through their representation and participation can offer different perspectives to issues and solutions that can help government’s institutions to plan effective policies. Some authors view that public participation can aid in an equitable distribution of limited public resources, which is very important to be considered in contexts like Pakistan – where there are no enough natural and economic resources to full fill the needs of growing population and to solve heaps of socio-economic and environmental problems [32,33].

Other studies underline that public participation can help to create resources for future problem-solving and to address new issues by increasing trust and legitimacy, developing relationships and creating knowledge and interest about policy issues and processes [34,35].

There are many studies that unpack the potential role of traditional media (i.e., newspapers and television news channels) for public participation in politics in different contexts of the world [36-40]. Now people do participate in political debates that are particularly facilitated by television news channels. However, it is widely acknowledged that new media are more accessible to public and they are providing newer options to them for accessing information and participation, creating an online or digital sphere of political discourse that is rigorously transforming political parties’ campaign methods and democratic process [41,42].

Thus, in the light of precedent studies, this study posits that new media technologies (such as internet, social media and mobile phones) may have much deeper effect on the ways political parties carry-out their election campaign and the level of public participation in the political discourse during Pakistan’s 2018 election. **Figure 2** below illustrates the theoretical framework of this study.

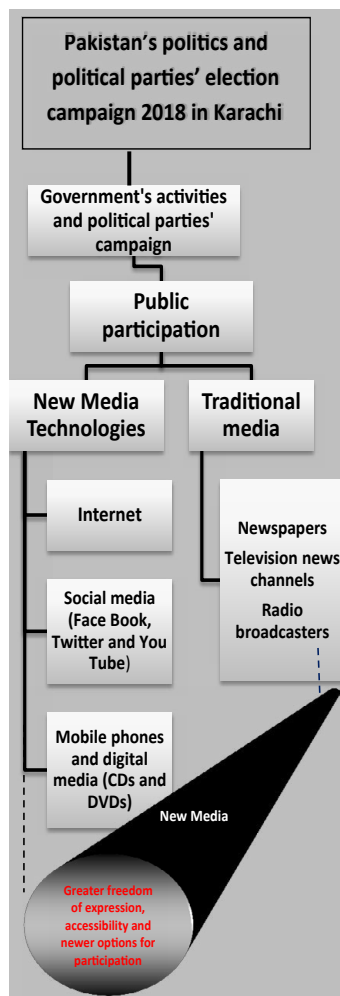


Figure 2 Theory of public participation and new media.

Methodology

This study investigates three research questions, namely:

- (i) What is the public's use of new media in Karachi during Pakistan's 2018 election?
- (ii) Does the use of new media increase the level of Karachi's public participation in the democratic process and political discourse during the country's 2018 election?
- (iii) Are there any impacts of new media technologies on political parties' campaign and the government's activities in Karachi during Pakistan's 2018 election?

To investigate the above-mentioned research questions, the study uses the quantitative method of survey and the qualitative method of in-depth interviews. Using simple random sampling³, the study incorporates a total of 100 male and female survey respondents, belonging to Muslim and non-Muslim religions (in ratio of 80 and 20 percents respectively), of age ranging between 22 and 65 years, and who hold at least a bachelor degree in any discipline. These survey respondents have been chosen from six districts of Karachi, namely: Karachi Central District, Karachi

³Simple random sampling is basically an impartial and unprejudiced representation of a group. It is recognized a neutral method to choose research participants or a sample from a larger population, since every person of the population has an equal chance of getting selected.

East District, Malir District, Karachi South District, Karachi West District and Korangi District. Fifteen survey respondents have been selected randomly from five districts of Karachi and twenty-five survey respondents have been chosen from Karachi Central, which is the largest district of the city⁴.

The bilingual (i.e., Urdu and English languages) and multiple-choice survey⁵ questionnaire seeks to explore the public's usage of new media technologies during Pakistan's 2018 election across seven key themes:

- (i) Access to information,
- (ii) ability to enhance political knowledge,
- (iii) Individual political transformation,
- (iv) Participation in political campaign and discourse,
- (v) Intercommunity interaction and networking,
- (vi) Public's accountability of government and institutions,
- (vii) Ability for collective action. The survey has been conducted during the time period of election campaign in Karachi (i.e., 15th May till 15th July).

Furthermore, using purposive sampling⁶, the study incorporates 14 interviews of male and female journalists⁷ from the mainstream Urdu and English languages' newspapers (i.e., Daily Dawn, The News International, Express Tribune, The Nation, Business Recorder, Daily Jang, Daily Express, and Nawa-e-Waqt) and television news channels (i.e., Samma TV, Geo News, ARY News, Express News, AAJ News and Dunya News) in Karachi. In addition, the study also includes eight interviews of the local members belonging to the major political parties of the country, namely:

- (i) Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI),
- (ii) Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM),
- (iii) Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N),
- (iv) Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP),
- (v) Muttahida Majlis-e- Amal (MMA),
- (vi) Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP),
- (vii) Awami National Party (ANP) and
- (viii) Awami Workers Party (AWP). In order to ensure the privacy and safety of interviewees, journalists names have been replaced by numbers (between 1 and 14) and members of political parties' names have been replaced with alphabets (between A and H).

The study uses relative frequency statistics to present the survey data and thematic analysis⁸ to analyze the qualitative data.

⁴The reasons for choosing Karachi as the main site of data collection are bi-fold. Firstly, Karachi is the economic-hub of Pakistan and political changes within the city do affect its revenue output for the country. Secondly, Karachi is the most important city of Pakistan in terms of political parties' competition in any election given electoral candidates from all major political parties contest election from this city.

⁵In this study, multiple choice survey questionnaires has been used so as survey respondents could select the key areas of issues that affect the rise of digital culture in Karachi.

⁶Purposive sampling refers to the "selection of certain groups or individuals for their relevance to the issue being studied".

⁷The study incorporates interviews of six female and eight male journalists respectively.

⁸Thematic analysis helps to classify data under relevant themes in order to interpret the various aspects of research topic. In this study, the themes have been emerged from the research questions, and therefore; findings and discussion have been presented under those themes.

Results and Discussion

Karachi: The public's use of new media technologies and their participation in democratic process and political discourse during Pakistan's 2018 election

As per the survey result, during 2018 election, Karachiite's have used internet (Google and other search engines), Face Book and Twitter most for: accessing information, increasing their political knowledge, political transformation, participation in political campaign, intercommunity networking and interaction and for carrying-out collective action for issues of common concern. Blogs have been used mostly for political campaign and government's accountability. The survey result shows a substantial use of mobile phone for election campaign and intercommunity networking purposes only. Noticeably, the survey findings do not indicate any use of digital media (CDs and DVDs) by Karachi's public during the election. **Figure 3 and Table 1**, below, explains the survey result for research question one of this study.

In this study, interview data confirms the survey findings and reveals that the levels of Karachiite's political knowledge, their

participation in election process and political discourse have been largely increased by virtue of social media much more than the traditional media. For instance, a male journalist, from local television news channel, states:

In Karachi, the penetration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure has changed media practices and public's attitudes to a large extent. Most newspapers and television news channels are running their news websites and people mostly prefer online news now. What is noticeable during this election campaign is that people are not only relying on editorials and TV talk shows for opinion building, but rather they are much engaged in social media debates about who would lead whom? Or who would solve the issues of Karachi? Or who would change the future of Pakistan? Face Book, Blogs and Twitter have become platforms of judgment and self-expression both.... I call it social media trial of not only corrupt politicians but also of political parties, which claim to bring revolutionary changes in Pakistan. (Interviewee number 6)

Another male journalist, from a local English-language's newspaper, suggests:

New media is generating the new ways for politics. It is not only serving for socializing and networking, but it is also transforming the thinking patterns of people for politics... There was a time when people used to watch eight pm television current affairs' programs and that used to be a strong tool for opinion building and political knowledge among masses. However, those programs were not enough to facilitate civic participation in the politics... New media has made its space in the Pakistani politics by providing people diverse sources of information and by involving them in political dialogue... Let me tell you that a few years ago it was very difficult for the Pakistani society to involve in politics. But now, a majority of people, especially in Karachi, use it for political purposes, and it is much convenient for them to take part in political discussions. (Interviewee number 2)

In the age of technology, the word new media is not new for the Pakistani society. However, its impacts for the level of public participation during the country's 2018 are noticeable. For example, "approximately 44 million Pakistanis, which are almost about a quarter of the total population, use social media. There are around over 50 Face Book political pages that are followed or liked by up to 30 million people." And almost all major political parties have their Face Book pages that are liked and followed by thousands of people [43,44]. These statistics indicate the considerable involvement of the Pakistani people in politics. When analyzing the case of Karachi, during 2018 election, this study thus manifests that social media (especially Face Book, Twitter and Blogs) have appeared as the most powerful new media tools for political information, governments and institutions' accountability, public's participation, their opinion formation and collective action for common problems. However, the author argues that the substantial public's use of new media in Karachi does not necessarily indicate their voting turn over or whether new media has any impact in altering their voting preferences. With regard to this, a male journalist, from an Urdu-language's newspaper, underlines some interesting facts:

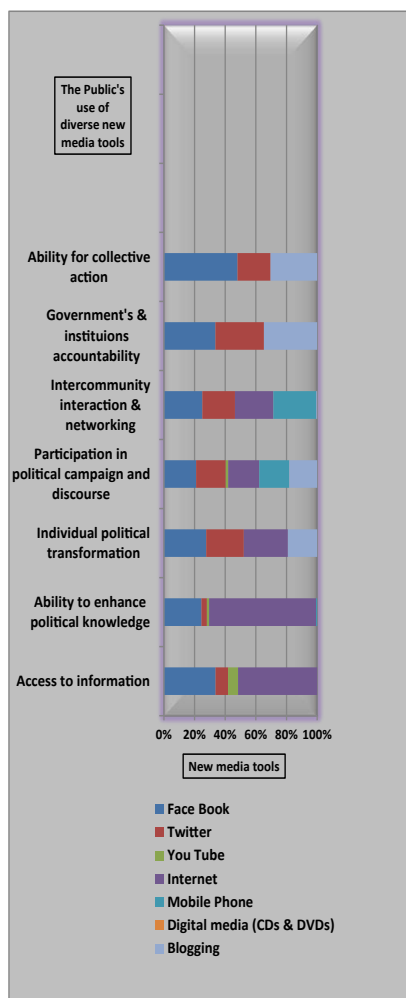


Figure 3 The public's use of new media technologies in Karachi during Pakistan's election 2018.

Table 1. The public's use of new media technologies in Karachi during Pakistan's election 2018.

The public's use of new media tools	New Media tools for public's participation in Karachi during Pakistan's election 2018						
	Face Book	Twitter	You Tube	Internet (Google and other search engines)	Mobile Phone	Digital media (CDs and DVDs)	Blogging
Access to information	62%	15%	12%	95%	0%	0%	0%
Ability to enhance political knowledge	59%	45%	2%	97%	1%	0%	0%
Individual political transformation	71%	63%	0%	79%	0%	0%	49%
Participation in political campaign and discourse	90%	92%	7%	87%	84%	0%	78%
Intercommunity interaction and networking	79%	67%	0%	79%	98%	0%	2%
Government's and institutions accountability	86%	81%	0%	0%	0%	0%	89%
Ability for collective action on issues of common concern	49%	62%	0%	0%	0%	0%	31%

Karachi is a multi-ethnic city and people here possess strong political affiliations and they vote on the basis of their ethnicities. Let me give you an example of Urdu-speaking community. Their votes mostly go to Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), but there are chances of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) to take over seats in major constituencies of Karachi. I say so because people are frustrated due to the current messy situation of the city and many are looking for some political change to overcome the deadlocks of development process in the city... Personally, I think that no political party would be able to get majority of seats because many people are not registered in the voting list and still the voting preferences of people are not clear... Indeed, people in Karachi, are actively participating in political dialogue through social media and internet, but it does not indicate the pattern of voting turn over or their preferences explicitly because people are not really pleased with the previous election process and political parties' apathetic attitude towards the devastating situation of the city. (Interviewee number 4).

Drawing on the theory of public participation, the author believes that the public's use of social media and other new media are significant indicators of their participation in political discourse. However, it cannot be seen as an indicator of their involvement in democratic process because not every person can use social media or internet due to a number of constraints such as a lack of literacy/or basic skill to operate internet and mobile phone, limited or no accessibility to internet or mobile phone, affordability and time constraints. Also, as suggested by interviewee number 4, the use of new media does not essentially indicate the public's voting turn over and their preferences. Therefore, further research into this area is required.

Pakistan's 2018 election: The impact of new media technologies on political campaign and government's activities in Karachi

It is widely recognized that the emergence of new media

technologies has altered the course of election campaign overall and has become the vital source of communication for candidates during election campaigns in many countries of the world [11,13,20,21,26].

When analyzing the case of Karachi, the political landscape has changed quite a bit during the last decade. Earlier, electoral candidates used to communicate their messages to voters through wall chalking, posters and banners, hand-out-leaflets, knock on doors, corner meetings and drive around in vans speaking through loudspeakers and playing audio songs. However, new media has reshaped the concept of political campaign in the city. In this regard, a female political worker of Pakistan Tahreek-e-Insaaf (PTI), states:

Karachi is the economic engine of Pakistan. Therefore, the dynamics of politics is also different in the city. All major political parties strive hard to win maximum seats in different districts of the city. And for this purpose, they use every means to influence voters' preference... See, during this election, PTI has focused a lot on campaign through social media, mobile phones and internet apart from organizing political gatherings, door-to-door campaign and print and electronic media advertising... Even other major political parties (like MQM, PPP, MMA, PML-N) have their Face Book pages and their political leaders have Twitter accounts for promoting parties' political agendas (Interviewee C)

According to male political members of Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP):

PML-N is comparatively more active in Punjab province, but we do liaise with our voters living in Karachi through social media. We do pay attention to their problems and social media interaction enables us to communicate with them more frequently. (Interviewee A)

While we have allocated fund for electronic media's campaign, we prefer to keep in touch with voters online. PPP's Chairman

Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and other party leaders have been very active to respond tweets on their account. And we do not do this just for the sake of competition with other political parties... I would say, social media campaign is more fast, interactive and less costly. (Interviewee H)

The author also opines that online campaign has two benefits for political parties. Firstly, they can manage their promotion at a very low cost as compared to the print and electronic media's campaign that requires massive investment. Secondly, now they can convey their messages to the public to a greater extent, within no time, through social media.

In Pakistan's 2018 election, particularly Face Book and Twitter have played a crucial role in informing and mobilizing voters and connecting electoral candidates with the public. This study confirms these facts and finds that almost all major political leaders especially Imran Khan (Chairman of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf - PTI), Bilawal Bhutto Zardari (Chairman of Pakistan Peoples' Party - PPP) and Maryam Nawaz (leader of Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz - PML-N) are the regular users of Twitter and have a substantial public's following. According to a latest newspaper report on social media usage of different political leaders and their parties:

PTI's Chairman Imran Khan is the most popular leader on micro-blogging website Twitter in Pakistan with his followers reaching 8.03 million. Hence his tweets' likes reach thousands within a few minutes. Maryam Nawaz comes second with more than 4.73 million while Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has 2.72 million followers on Twitter.

Similarly, the three political parties have official party accounts on Twitter as well on which PTI took the lead as its followers are 3.53 million while PML-N and PPP have mere 94,400 and 54,800 followers respectively.

Moreover, on Facebook too, the PTI has managed to maintain its supremacy as PTI chairman's page is the most popular with 8.2 million followers while official PTI account has 5.8 million followers. On the other hand, Maryam Nawaz Sharif's official page has 267,147 followers while PML-N's Facebook page has 2.6 million followers.

Similarly, PPP's official page on Facebook has over 195,663 followers while Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's Facebook followers are 156,655 [44].

These aforementioned facts indicate that people can interact with electoral candidates more easily in Pakistan than before. Otherwise, usually a person cannot interact with politician or leaders except during a live event, and at times it is impossible in Karachi because of protocol and safety issues. With the advent of new media technologies, it is now possible for Karachiites to attend virtual events where they can participate in live streaming events and interact with politicians and candidates.

Noticeably, political campaigns through new media (especially Twitter) are not without potential challenges in Karachi and overall in Pakistan. In 2018 election, political leaders have claimed a lot of Twitter followers. The author thinks that the existence of social bots cannot be ignored. In the case of Twitter,

bots can generate re-tweets or likes, and follow certain accounts automatically. This has happened earlier during the US election. For example, according to a newspaper report, "Twitter identified more than 500 accounts which tried to convince English and Spanish supporters of Hillary Clinton to vote online or via text" [43].

Another major challenge posed by new media is that political campaigns are now influenced by stories, whether true or not, which disseminate through Face Book and Twitter. For instance, a male journalist, from a television news channel suggests:

It is getting more and more difficult to identify actual news from fake news online. At time journalists gather facts from internet without verifying them. This is happening these days as I receive stories, links and rumours about political leaders and content about their political campaign - that are a mixture of truth, false facts, satire and gossip. This is neither good for the public's right to know and nor for the election process... public needs to know accurate information for their effective participation in the election. (Interviewee number 11)

This study reveals that new media has not only brought significant impacts on political campaigns, but also it has helped government's authorities for managing election process as well. This is Pakistan's fourth election of the twenty-first century, but perhaps the first in which social media and digital technology have been effectively used by the Election Commission of Pakistan. For example, the government's authorities have used mobile service to help citizens in locating their polling station by simply texting their National Identity Card number at government's authorized number 8300. Similarly, in 2018 election, the government has collaborated with Face Book for installing a feature to link the Pakistani voters to website of the Election Commission. This has helped Election Commission to communicate all sorts of advisory messages to the public such as: warning and reminding them about fake material received via Wats app or e-mails, and encouraging them to verify news or political content disseminated by political parties – particularly in Karachi.

By and large, the use of new media (especially Face Book and Twitter) is relatively new in political campaigns and election process in Pakistan. The author believes that new media will continue to transform the Pakistani politics in future.

Conclusion

Pakistan is a developing country where public participation in politics and democratic process can help in solving many socio-economic and political issues. In 2018 election, new media has enabled Karachiite's to express and reflect on political and the city's pressing issues and to participate in election process more actively. This study manifests that Twitter, Blogs, Face Book and internet have altogether facilitated the public's ability to gain political knowledge and to participate in political debates.

Drawing on the theory of public participation, the author argues that the assumption of people's empowerment and their equal participation and representation through new media is a myth in the case of Karachi. Many areas of Karachi lack basic amenities and infrastructure and a lot of people are not well-skilled and

literate enough to use new media technologies effectively. And those who either do not have or with limited access to internet and mobile devices actually cannot represent themselves in the online sphere of political discourse. In such circumstances, new media increases the gap between information/knowledge possessor and non-possessor and deprive many people to participate in democratic process. However, with an increased literacy rate, improved infrastructure, and equitable resources, Karachi's people can have more inclusive and equal participation in the political discourse and democratic process.

Moreover, the study suggests that Pakistan's 2018 election is a test drive for the use of social media in election campaign by political parties. And in the case of Karachi, online political

campaign has shown positive outcomes in terms of informing and mobilizing voters.

In future, Pakistan's government can change polling techniques and election process through introducing online voting and more systematic information websites - although this requires resources and skills both for effective implementation. For election campaign, more virtual political gatherings can be organized, resulting in more people to participate in democratic process. As social media becomes ever more popular, its impact on politics and election campaigns will increase over time. It will be interesting to observe how this plays out – especially in Karachi and other major cities of Pakistan.

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