



Hate Speech and Media Information Literacy in the Digital Age: A Case Study of 2018 Elections in Pakistan

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Abstract

The usage and influence of the social media in the 2018 general elections in Pakistan was pervasive compared to the one held in 2013. This study examines that how three mainstream political parties of Pakistan, utilized the Facebook and Twitter for their electioneering in 2018. To what extent the element of hate speech was existing in their Tweets and Facebook posts? The research adopted qualitative method and employed content analysis of the Facebook posts and Tweets of seventeen (17) selected central leaders and parties' media cells from period of May 25 to July 25, 2018. To examine the level of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) and hate speech in political campaign, elite interviews were also conducted. The findings suggest that political leaders promoted hate speech through Facebook and Twitter for electoral purposes. In this respect, Twitter emerged as a major tool for spewing hate. The study recommends the formation of special code of conduct for political campaign on the social media by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) for reducing hate speech and to build a peaceful democratic society.

Keywords: Twitter; Facebook; Political parties; 2018 elections; MIL; Pakistan; Social media

Introduction

Few years ago, newspapers, radio and television were the only main source for political communication and dissemination of news. Later with the invention of the internet and mobile phones, the process of communication has become rapid. However, the major boom in communication began from the last decade due to the emergence of social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WeChat. These social networks brought the billions of people closer and provided a platform to interact freely without traditional barriers of communication. As according to previous studies

[1,2], prior to the internet and social media tools, the political communication was controlled by the traditional media organizations; however, with the emergence of social media now these barriers have been removed. Another study indicates that the social media have also become an alternate medium for regulating political communication [3,4].

Moreover, the study [5] showed, social media has become more popular for political communication. There are many social media networking sites but the Facebook and Twitter are playing major role in changing the political dimensions of the world electoral campaigns. Twitter has changed the way of political communication by eliminating the mediatory role of traditional media for conveying message between the politicians and public [6]. Admitting the influence of Twitter, political actors are using it for their electoral campaigns especially in the developed democracies including United States [7], United Kingdom and Australia [8].

Facebook and Twitter have not only changed the traditional political communication patron in the developed democracies but also in the developing democracies like Pakistan, as now political leaders first prefer to speak on social media and later on traditional media. According to Yusuf [9], social media is getting more popularity and political parties are using it to convey their political ideology among people.

After the 2013, General Elections campaign in Pakistan, parties utilized Facebook and Twitter to disseminate their political messages to the general public and they are being followed by millions of netizens. In 2013, Pakistan was among those countries where first time political parties had started to engage voters and shared their political activities by Twitter and Facebook [10]. The students are using social media to share political information and having discussion with each other [11].

The youth is the 64% of the total population of Pakistan and their existence on Facebook and Twitter urged the political parties to enhance their online presence as these tools were really impacting political dynamics [12]. Another study also showed that the social networking sites have huge impact on politics and people of Pakistan [13]. According to Ahmed, et al.

[10] research, Twitter played an important role in making voter decisions in 2013 general elections and the PTI were succeeded to get more voters' attention through this online medium.

In the recent general election of Pakistan (2018), according to Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), 58 million people were using internet. The emergence of technology and social media has completely changed the trends of running political campaigns as compared to past when politicians used to reach the public through organizing processions, pamphlets and door-to-door campaign. Twitter and Facebook allowed politicians to reach public directly and convey their ideology. This has brought a major shift in voting campaigns of leading political parties. This election witnessed the major role of social media as all mainstream liberal, conservative and religious parties were very focused to run their campaign through social media besides the traditional mediums of campaign.

However, there is hard to find an academic research on use of social media tools by political parties and its consequences in terms of violence, hate speech, character assassination and incitement of political leaders, workers and supporters against each other in Pakistan. Therefore, this study examines how three mainstream political parties, namely, Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N), Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI) and the Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP) utilized the Facebook and Twitter for their electioneering in 2018. To what extent the element of hate speech exists in their Tweets and Facebook posts? What strategies of political parties' social media cells adopted to launch their campaigns? In addition, the study intends to assess the implications of hate speech and the level of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) among the people during the 2018 general elections.

Literature Review

Much academic work have been conducted about the social media's impact on political communication in those countries which were already economically, politically and technologically established democratic states such as the United Kingdom and the United States [14-16].

However, only few studies were conducted about the emerging significance of the social media in the electoral campaigns in the Asia Pacific developing democracies [17]. According to the research of Graham, et al. [18], "Twitter has quickly become an important online space for political communication because it connects ordinary people to the popular, powerful and influential". Many researchers pointed out substantial relations amid Twitter posts, for instance sentimentality of the Tweets and Election Results [14,15,19]. The role of these social networking sites is rapidly increasing, generally in political communication and particularly in elections but its inappropriate use is also creating negative impact in the society as Castells [20] in his study about the impact of internet on society observed "As in all moments of major technological change, people, companies and institutions feel the depth of the change, but they are often

overwhelmed by it, out of sheer ignorance". Similarly, Morozov [21] argued that social media plays significant role in promoting hate speech, propaganda and oppression instead of promoting democracy. In early 2011, social media has played revolutionary and critical role in uprising in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya to overthrow dictatorship through online protest which also caused in eruption of violent protest and civil war particularly in Libya [22].

It is the harsh reality that increase of hate speech is rapidly growing in across the world. According to the report of Simon Wiesenthal Center, 2012, the practice of hate-speech through social media by extremists' groups or individuals to spread discrimination and hate is concern in political communication [23].

Social media is being utilized for influencing preoccupied public ideology for political, psychological, social and to detach people from political parties by promoting hate speech [24]. According to "European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, 2011", political extremism in Europe and Spain is alarmingly increasing and putting pressure on the legislators [25].

The Internet has allowed politicians and public to spread conflicts, rumors and hate speech against politicians or minorities which is related to freedom of expression [26]. Extremists' political parties have launched social media platforms to regulate hate speech to promote their agenda [27]. Another study illustrates that there is no effective editorial check and balance as like in the traditional media, therefore the influential people may influence the minds of innocent people [28]. It is very hard to regulate and control the content on these social media tools [29]. There is no doubt that many social networking websites have rules and regulations against the defamatory content but not specifically against the hate speech of different categories.

However, Twitter has no particular policy against the hate speech in elections committed by political leaders against each other which is also followed by their followers. The policy of Twitter about elections is "Any misleading statements or information about how to vote or register vote will be against the policy of Twitter". But there is nothing in the policy of Twitter about action against the promotion or incitement of political hate speech in elections which ultimately leads towards violence in elections. The violence on elections day and during the campaign is mostly a result of the hate speech of political rivals which ultimately incite followers to fight with each other. According to Fischer [30], there are four categories of Electoral violence such as 'pre-election day, campaign violence, election and post-election day violence and termed that time duration is very crucial.

Likewise, another research by Erjavec, et al. [31], evaluated the effectiveness of the internet and observed that it's a good medium in facilitation of transmission of positive content, however, it is also a source of containing messages which encompasses words of hatred (p.900). The functions of social media applications could have more potential in its comment section to produce hate speech, particularly on Twitter. There

are four types of hate speech manufacturers which include soldiers, believers, watchdog and players. Out of them the soldiers and believers- are very much loyal to their political ideologies and they used to oppose those who differs from their likeminded political beliefs. They are aggressive in their expressions and hate messages. On the other hand, watchdogs and players are comparatively liberal and they are lenient. Such kind of followers used to believe on sharing multiple opinions and want equality.

The literature shows that the impact of Twitter and Facebook on elections and its negative utilization have been largely studied in the western countries and a little academic research available on this in South Asian countries like Pakistan. In context of Pakistan, a study on hate speech in cyberspace, conducted earlier [32], the majority of internet users in Pakistan are unaware from the country's laws related to hate speech but in general they know about the definition of hate speech.

Another report published by a non-government organization BARGAD [33] on role of social media in 2018 polls, illustrate that the pictures and videos shared by political actors on Facebook and Twitter were the main source of character assassination, religious intolerance and spreading hate speech. The hate speech trend was more on Twitter than Facebook, despite of the fact that Twitter was having only 3.5 million users while Facebook enjoys 32 million users in Pakistan.

The main factor behind this hate speech in Pakistan is the lack of knowledge of media information literacy. "Center for Media Literacy" defined media literacy as "the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and create media in all of its forms". In addition, media literacy includes the production and use of media, as well as the ability to evaluate and analyze. The concept of media literacy is at the primitive stage in Pakistan. Before, going into deep of this concept, let's have a look of overall literacy rate of the country. As per the Economic Survey of Pakistan (2017-2018), the total literacy rate of Pakistan is 58%. According to the federal education minister of Pakistan, the literacy rate of Pakistan was decreased from 60% to 58% [34]. Likewise, the report of UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Agency, shown the literacy rate in Pakistan is 57% [35]. In the light of the above literacy rate, it is not difficult to assess the level of media information literacy among the people.

Research Methodology

This study adopts qualitative research method in which 24 in-depth interviews were conducted from the central leaders of three mainstream political parties PTI, PML-N, and PPP, which include former Prime Minister, ministers, head of election campaign cell, prominent scholars, journalists and representatives of the civil society. The research also employed content analysis of the Facebook posts and Tweets

of fifteen (17) selected central leaders, from the period of May 25, 2018 to July 25, 2018. It used snowball method to reach political leaders. The written questions were sent in advance to the leaders of both political parties and later conducted in-depth interviews.

During the interviews, questions related to the effects of social media use in the election campaign, hate speech and growing trend of politics of allegations were asked to the interviewees. Moreover, follow up questions were also asked to get answers in detail. Discussion was open and leaders welcomed the follow up questions.

For social media, the Facebook data was collected manually and created data sheet containing content details of the posts shared. Data was manually collected due to Facebook limitation of data collection as they closed their graph API in July 2018 and appeared as major challenge during Facebook data collection. However, Twitter data collection was much easier due to public data policy and availability of API for data collection.

We selected eleven Twitter accounts of mainstream political figures and extracted data using Twitter API and Python library named Tweepy within PyCharm IDE. These tweets were saved in csv file along with date posts, handle name, tweet content and device name used for publishing tweets. Tweets were collected both in English and Urdu language however, some of the tweets were in local languages such as Punjabi language. Total number of extracted tweets and retweets were over 6,000 but some tweets text was missing and some of them were not readable, so we deleted all such tweets and used 5,595 tweets for this study.

Apart from primary data, we also collected secondary data from different journals, websites of media outlets and reports of national and international organizations such as UNESCO, EU (EOM), who reported on elections and the role of social media. This study measured the utilization of social media by Pakistani political parties and analyzed the critical aspect of their campaign on Twitter and Facebook. The below is the list of the selected Twitter and Facebook accounts as well as number of tweets and posts for analysis of elections campaign.

Twitter accounts of political leaders

Table 1 shows twitter accounts of political leaders, their followers and their number of tweets during the selected time period. Sheikh Rasheed has highest number of tweets and retweets with 1,549 in count. Similarly, Maryam Nawaz also made high number of tweets and retweets with 1,200 in count. Other leaders were much lower in tweets frequency and made less tweets compared to Maryam Nawaz and Sheikh Rasheed. Asad Umar remains the lowest in tweets count with only 56 tweets.

Facebook accounts which include Central Media Cell of PPP, PTI's Official, PTI Punjab, PML-N social media campaign head

Maryam Nawaz and Qamar Zaman Karia were analyzed in **Table 2**.

Table 1: Details of selected Twitter accounts of political leaders.

User	Followers	Description	Number of Tweets
@asadumar	6.1 Million	Asad Umar former Finance Minister and head of social media campaign from 2013 to 2018	56
@bakhtawarbz	2.5 Million	Bakhtwar Bhutto Zardari is sister of PPP's Chairman	225
@bbhuttozardari	3.5 Million	Bilwal Butto Charmain of PPP	206
@farukhabibisf	164.7K	Faruukh Habib Deputy Secretary General, PTI	257
@imrankhanPTI	10.2 Million	Imran Khan is PTI's Chairman	384
@mryyamnawaz	5.3 Million	Maryam Nawaz Daughter of former Prime Minister and head of social media campaign (2018)	1200
@miftah ismails	1.34 Million	Miftah Ismail Former Finance Minister of PML-N	371
@saeedghani1	417.9K	Saeed Ghani is PPP's Information Secretary for Sindh	249
@shehbazsharif	4.5 Million	Shahbaz Sharif President of PML-N	803
@sheikhrasheed	4.8 Million	Sheikh Rasheed President Awami muslim league leader	1594
@RealM-Zubair	29.5 k	Muhammad Zubair, former Governor of Sindh and Central leader of PML-N	250

Table 2: Details of selected Facebook accounts of political leaders.

Page	Likes	Description	Total Posts
Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP)	300,857	Pakistan People's Party social media page	534
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	3.5 Million	Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Punjab page	349
Maryam Nawaz	628,606	PML-N social media campaign head	1056
Qamar Zaman Karia	168,578	Leader of Pakistan People's Party	133

Findings and Analysis of Utilization of Facebook and Twitter in Elections

The research revealed that in 2018 elections of Pakistan, social media tools were used as a primary source of political campaign by the parties and their supporters. Let's start first with PML-N. PML-N established social media cells in across the country which supervised by daughter of the former Prime Minister, Mariam Nawaz. According to the prominent anchor of Dawn TV and a political analyst, before the 2018 elections the PML-N government had to face the panama scandal and due to it Nawaz Sharif had to step down. PML-N raised the slogans of "Mujhay Kion Nikala" "Khalai Makhlooq" and "Vote Ko Izzat Do" on Facebook and Twitter. He said, "In between the lines these slogans were termed as anti-military establishment and a propagation of a narrative as former prime minister was deprived of his office allegedly by the military establishment".

This propaganda and narrative were clearly reflected on Facebook and Twitter. PML-N social media team actively used it without keeping in mind that this could lead towards a bad image of military in Pakistan but also increased gap between the civilian and military establishment. On the other hand, PTI raised the slogan of "change" which attracted the youths of Pakistan. The youth are well versed with the social media and that's how PTI succeeded in gaining the major support of them. It is fact; both the PML-N and PTI tried best in making trends and broadcasting video clips by making them viral in their favor or against their political rivals.

As the Central Information Secretary of PTI said, we are the first party in Pakistan which introduced politics on Facebook and Twitter and in this election; party received more good response from voters. Moreover, deputy secretary general of the PTI said, "We have strong educated social media team which performed very strategically by adopting all new media techniques during the elections. Through social media public opinion is formed up which is ultimately translated through votes in the general election". Although, PPP also used social

media but PML-N appeared as the second most followed and liked party.

Former information minister of the PML-N government, told "social media has provided an effective way of communication and we don't need to hold more press conferences as Twitter and Facebook Pages are the best source of disseminating political views on important issues. Their statements cannot be filtered and censored according to the policy of traditional media organizations. These findings ratify research of Harfoush and Posetti [36,37], Twitter is being considered as one of the major social media tools for political campaigns and direct interaction with people by ignoring the intermediary role of traditional media. The PPP's central information secretary claimed that his party used social media as per ethical norms and promoted true democratic culture but other two parties promoted intolerance in society for the sake of votes. To some extent, his claim is valid, but in fact, as per our findings; the PPP was not able to play an active role on social media. They showed their presence but not very impressive in spite of their young leader Bilawal Bhutto Zardari.



PTI Punjab
July 13, 2018 ·

Like Page

دیکھو دیکھو کون آیا، چور آیا چور آیا



Figure 1: Facebook Posts by PTI official Page with hate speech content.

PTI started their campaign with hate speech even before the political campaign for general elections as seen above on a Facebook posts shared by official PTI account contains abusive language and supported incitement (**Figure 1**). Such posts also got high engagement by the followers of PTI by commenting and sharing on their personal wall. The Facebook posts of PPP and PML-N leaders, media cells were also contained the offensive content. For instance, the below posts of former PPP and PML-N are as an evidence of hate speech (**Figures 2 and 3**).



PPP Media Cell Central Secretariat

June 12, 2018 ·

Like Page

After claiming that Pakistan cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan sexually harassed her, now his former wife Reham Khan has made another explosive claim. Reham in her upcoming autobiography claimed that Imran is homosexual and had relationships with Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) members.



IBTIMES.CO.IN

Imran Khan is homosexual, had affair with Hamza Ali Abbasi, Murad Saeed, claims ex-wife Reham Khan

155

15 Comments 45 Shares

Figure 2: Facebook Posts by PPP Media Cell Page with hate speech content.

The posts of PML-N's social media campaign head Maryam Nawaz during the elections.



Maryam Nawaz Sharif

3 July 2018 ·

مسلم لیگ (ن) کی رہنما مریم نواز شریف کی میڈیا سے گفتگو



321

41 comments 26 shares

Like

Comment

Share

Figure 3: Facebook Posts by PMLN Leader with hate speech content.

Element of hate speeches in tweets and Facebook posts of political actors

Here are the few evidences of Twitter hashtags from analysis which shows hate speech trend during political campaign of 2018 elections (**Figures 4 and 5**). These hashtags were selected from a large number of hashtags used for political campaigns by leaders and their followers which clearly

carries the element of hate speech, incitement, abusive language, character assassination and gender discrimination.



Figure 4: Word cloud with list of words used as hate speech.

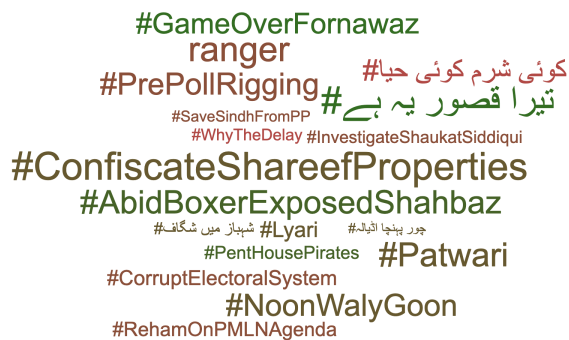


Figure 5: Word cloud of hashtags used as hate speech.

This word cloud shows most used keywords were used for creating posts lies in the category of hate speech. Most of the hate speech content was written in Urdu language and also Urdu in roman characters on Twitter.

With regard to the element of hate speech in social media campaigns, a civil society activist, noted, yes, hate speech has been widely observed in elections. Almost, the social media teams as well as tech-savvy fans benefited from their expertise in computer designing to circulate the photoshopped images of the political opponents. He said "In the fabricated social media posts or cropped images, the political opponents were accused of violating ethical and religious norms and created a wave of hatred in society". This act was more prevailed in the political campaign of multiple parties but PML-N and PTI leads. PTI's social media campaign head from 2013 general elations to 2018 claimed that PTI's campaign was based on facts and effective to convince the voters. "I don't see hate speech by PTI, however, sometime in response to other party's social media posts; one can say it might be inappropriate content". A senior Professor of Peshawar University, noted although, the hate culture was also existing in society in previous elections but in this election, it was on its peak and PTI introduced this culture of politics of hate, character assassination and created more intolerance in Pakistan's society, followed by PML-N and

other parties. This claim of a scholar also endorsed by the Ali, et al. [36] which observed "Partisan social media sites deepened public disenchantment by reproducing videos of disappointed voters and such videos mainly targeted incumbents from the PML-N and PPP" [38].

The findings of interviews, content analysis of posts and tweets explicates that political parties and their leaders went to any extent for political point scoring and turning down their political opponent, without knowing the consequences that it would promote hate speech and rifts among the people. These findings ratify the study of Bradshaw, et al. [39] that political parties or government create cyber troops though social media platforms to manipulate opinion of public for their specific agenda and objectives.

Political polarization and hate speech in society

During this election, the political polarizations were massively increased on Facebook and Twitter, as an anchor of 92 TV, said "the social media is a two-edged sword. It had immensely created political awareness among the people, but also provided a forum to spread hate speech and recent elections of 2018 is an evidence of this". The use of abusive language was a regular tendency on the Facebook posts and in Tweets by leaders, supporters and followers, which is unfortunate and counter-productive. A civil society activist, responded, the use of social media tools by parties have played a pivotal role in increasing the political polarization and intolerance. The reaction and response time are more acute in today's digital era than before. The political parties are using it by ignoring that how lethal and disastrous it can be when it comes to political gains and point scoring. Election campaigns polluted the minds of common people and their voters alike.

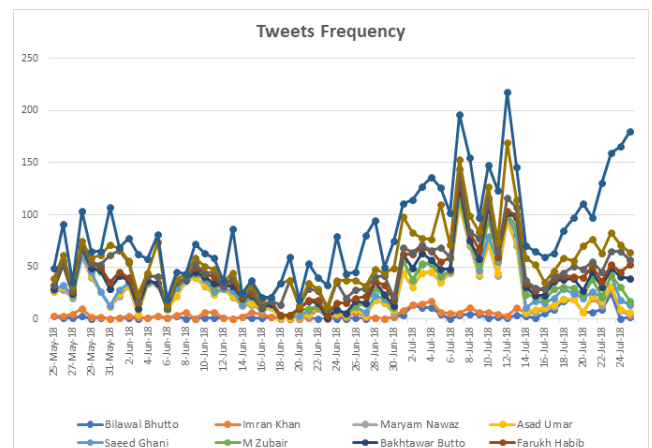


Figure 6: Tweets frequency by selected political leaders.

Above Figure 6 shows the frequency of tweets by political leadership during the 2018 general election campaign.

The Twitter trend of the three-party chiefs, Imran Khan, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and Shabaz Sahirf as well as their main leaders during the elections can be seen in the below chart.

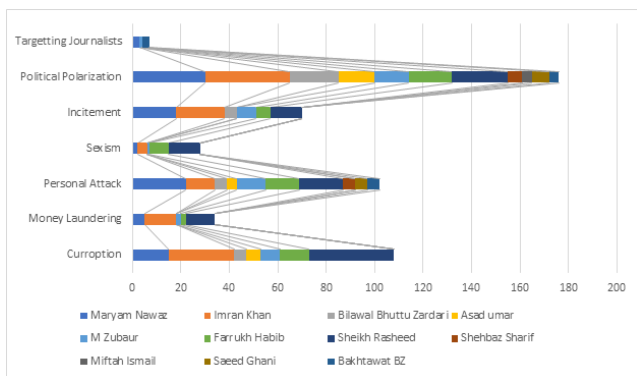


Figure 7: Tweets with hate speech by political leaders.

In above graph (Figure 7), hate speech frequency is indicated where political leaders posted tweets that contained hate speech of different categories.

Apart from our analysis from the selected Twitter accounts, Jahangir Khan Tareen, former Secretary General of PTI used words such as “Chor” as personal attack on former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif (Figure 8).



Jahangir Khan Tareen
@JahangirKTareen

NS's fabricated narrative that he got ousted only for holding an Iqama, has been torn to shreds after NAB Court's historic verdict. 'Mujhe Kyun Nikala Sharif' finally gets the answer that he has been jailed for being a Chor & a Money Launderer. Great victory for Pakistan 😊

7:42 PM · Jul 6, 2018 · Twitter for iPhone

Figure 8: Tweet by PTI political leader with hate speech content.



PTI North Punjab · @PTINorthPunjab · 8m

"I have come forward after a lot of struggle unlike Bilawal Bhutto Sahiba (Ms Bilawal Bhutto) who took over his party (PPP) over a will (left by her dying mother)."

@ImranKhanPTI
#PrimeMinisterImranKhan



Figure 9: Tweet with hate speech by PTI local page.

The element of point scoring was not only limited to malign each other only in elections but after the election the incumbent Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan, in a public

meeting called, Chairman of the PPP “Bilawal Bhutto Sahiba”, and his statement was slammed by different people on social media. The Twitter post of the PTI’s Northern Punjab cell can be seen is another example (Figure 9).

Character assassination of journalists on Facebook and Twitter

In any society, increase in polarization results in division and more acute reaction. Pakistani society is also facing this dilemma. The Pakistani media was also divided in different sections according to their tilt towards certain political parties in elections. Any of the current affairs program, ire of the political parties which respond this through a flood of abusive and defamatory social media posts. The social media teams awake all of sudden to counter any content against their parties. It is rare that they contradict the news item through formal procedure by issuing a statement, rather they bombard the media outlet or the journalist concerned with personal and abusive contents.

A member of the civil society observed that the personal attacks on journalists were also witnessed on the social media. To the extent of journalists, a study by Lewis, (2012), indicated that the challenges of using social media for global journalists are creating tensions to maintain their reputation in professional control and open participation of public to comment on the news. According to Ali, et al. [36], online harassment of liberal-leaning journalists, rights activists was also observed. For instance before general elections, on July 13, Asma Shirazi a prominent anchor of Pakistan, conducted interview of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, after a judgement against him by the accountability court of Pakistan. However, the interview was not on aired due to censorship issues. But anchor Shirazi, was badly targeted on Twitter by followers of Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf. Such kind of issues promoted hate speech on social media in the electoral process.

Implications of hate speech and level of Media Information Literacy (MIL) among people in the digital era

Findings show that the social media can prove to be the most effective platform for political as well as social debates. But the Pakistani society was immature enough to grasp the IT revolution. Instead of sharing informative contents, most of the social media users either shared the forged content, pictures and videos, without any prior verification. Unfortunately, Pakistan’s people are still unaware, how to use the internet and social media tools due to the lack of media and information literacy. Literacy is the key towards positive and productive use of any social media. A country where literacy rate is too low as compared to other countries, there is a dire need to educate people about media information literacy. Low level of literacy is lethal but when it comes to social media, the reaction can be acute and irreversible. Majority of the literate people in the digital age are well aware of the implications of hate speech but usually they don’t

follow these parameters. An educated society nurture healthy minds and healthy people.

Politics of allegations, and its benefits to political parties

The findings indicate that to some extent, accusing posts on social media benefited the political parties. Mostly, the people who blindly believe on social media posts are illiterate or semi-literate and they have no idea what is media information literacy or hate speech. Former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Raja Pervaiz Ashraf, expressed that parties were politically benefited in elections and one party made government on the basis of false allegations and hate speech against other parties but for the society it provided no benefit. He said, "government and opposition are the beauty of a democratic process but allegations which divert towards hitting below the belt reap no benefit. In addition, it could be true for a shorter term. In the long run, it would impact negatively".

The PML-N former information minister and PTI's then information secretary, opined, often a false information can spread panic among masses and their main leadership tried to avoid it but at the same time we had to create awareness among the people about performance of previous governments of each other parties.

How to curtail "Hate Speech" from Pakistani society in elections

To control the effects of hate speech among society, the government and stake holders should design a strategy to provide technical and intellectual assistance to political parties for election campaign on social media. There is dire need to educate the people as to what extent their single post or click could hurt someone else's dignity throughout the life. In a society where, millions of the people have never been to schools, it is hard to make them differentiate between the real and concocted contents, therefore, political parties should collectively devise a code of ethics for their social media teams. The regulators should enforce their writ by penalizing those spreading defamatory contents just to malign the political adversaries and divert public support in their favor.

Political figures must abide by the ethical values. Media (TV, Radio, and Newspaper) needs to be more proactive in curtailing the hate speech trend. As Vibeke Jenson, representative of UNESCO said "the empowerment of people though Media and Information Literacy is an important prerequisite for fostering equitable access to information and knowledge". Media should run public service messages to create awareness among people that how hate speech can ruin an individual and society. By promoting the media information literacy among youth, the online hate speech can be countered. As UNESCO in its report [40], suggest "given young people's increasing exposure to social media, information about how to identify and react to hate speech may become increasingly important".

Online hate speech is expressing conflicts and violence among public, politicians, and societies at the stake of human dignity. To curtail the challenges, ethical dimension of internet access and information diffusion through cyber laws can be handled during election campaigns at global level. Advocacy groups should hold brief session and activities in schools, colleges to create awareness among every segment of the society.

There is a thin line to understand between hate speech and freedom of expression. People need to be educated and differentiate between hate speech and freedom of expression. As Hylton [41] observed that hate speech is not in the ambit of free speech and termed it negative while he referred free speech as an essential component for democracy.

The power of educating people cognitive sophistication in differentiating between hate speech and freedom of expression is a strong communication activity to develop political tolerance among masses. This can play a positive role in bringing peace among political leaders, government and societies.

Role of ECP to reduce hate speech from political campaign

Despite of the existing laws related to hate speech in Pakistan, a visible hate speech trend was found in the election campaigns of the political parties during the 2018 general elections on Facebook and Twitter. Political parties massively promoted hate speech and incitement against each other on social media. Even the top political leaders shared the inappropriate content. Therefore, the ECP should announce certain limits and parameters of criticism which not tantamount to hate. Political leaders, journalists, members of civil society, expressed that the role of telecom regulators, PEMRA as well as the Election Commission is vital in curtailing hate speech but they failed to do so in the 2018 elections. Election Commission should have taken stern action against those who used hate speech to steer their political campaign but it never happened. Laws against hate speech must be implemented in letter and spirit. All the interviewees observed, the ECP has not been able to play its due role. Not only during campaigns but otherwise too. Lack of awareness and lack of interest from the ECP puts a question mark on the electoral process. Since tools and techniques are available and there is no excuse not to forcefully implement a proper strategy to stop hate speeches and political polarization.

The election commission must frame a social media political campaign policy under which there should be a clear direction against politics of hate speech, conflict, gender disparity, sexual allegations. The constitutional treatment of hate speech to secure societies from psychological violence and conflict vary in culture to culture. Western democracies and United States have big division of strategies for curtailing hate speech to protect societies from propagation of hate. In Canada, United Kingdom, and Germany it is highly prohibited and criminal sanctions are applied under international human right covenants [42].

So, the Parliament of Pakistan should also do legislation or incorporate new sections in the existing laws to deal with hate speech issues on social media with regard to politics and elections. Hate speech can be controlled by strong electoral leadership through effective strategies related with ethics of using social media, political laws and moral collaborations to restrain hate speech [43]. The implementations of laws will not only strengthen the democracy in Pakistan but also sustain the human dignity by reducing hate speech in elections.

Conclusion

The Facebook and Twitter played a significant role in Pakistan's 2018 general elections and party chiefs themselves lead political campaign on social media, which ultimately benefitted to the parties as per their online presence and strategies. Politicians preferred to run campaign through Twitter and Facebook and traditional media followed it. Thousands of people shared political content and posts of their leaders on both media tools. However, the element of hate speech was also found in the political campaign of all political parties from top to middle level leadership. Mainstream politicians launched social media cells to create social space against political rivals by doing immature politics and spreading hate content.

The hate speech factor and trend were not only limited towards only rivals but the journalists were also become the victim of this political trolling by the political parties and their followers. Overall, the political parties found to be involved in promotion of hate speech, personal character assassination and incitement of violence against each other on social media for achieving their political goals in elections.

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