

Politico-Twitterial Tug of War: Analysis of Tweets Posted by Party Leaders during General Election-2018 Pakistan

Rashid Ali Khuhro¹, Bashir Memon², Muhammad Yasir Gill³, Mohsin Hassan Khan⁴

Abstract

The advent of social media has initiated new opportunities for the promotion of democracy around the globe. Politicians use social media for the dissemination of their political agenda among the masses. Twitter is one of the most popular social media channels used by politicians for political purposes, such as, to interact with the public during election campaigns or routine political activities. In that context, this article examines the Tweets of mainstream leaders (Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Shehbaz Sharif, and Imran Khan) of three foremost political parties in Pakistan (Pakistan People's Party (PPP), Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) and Tahreek Insaf) respectively, who tweeted for election campaigns during General Elections-2018. The study also unfolds the campaign strategies, personal communication and prominent issues tweeted by the above-said leaders. The present study has selected and analyzed 570 Tweets posted by the above mentioned three leaders during the election month of July 2018. The collected tweets were analyzed by applying the Discourse Analysis method. Thus, the identified themes and sub-themes were discussed and interpreted according to the identified themes from the selected Tweets. It was found that the first most widely used strategy was the propagation of political information of campaign rallies. Second, a low-level of personalization was noticed in the tweets. Third, the three leaders highlighted the old and traditional issues of the country.

Keywords: *Twitter, Political Tweets, Politics in Pakistan, Election*

¹Lecturer, Center for Rural Development Communication, University of Sindh, Jamshoro, Pakistan and PhD Student, Department of Media and Communication Studies, Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences, University of Malaya

² Professor, Department of Media & Communication Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Sindh, Jamshoro, Sindh, Pakistan.

³Student, Department of Media & Communication Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Sindh, Jamshoro, Sindh, Pakistan

4PhD Student, Department of Media and Communication Studies, Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences,
University of Malaya

Introduction

The term “Politico-Twitterial Tug of War” represents those twitters which are made by politicians or political leaders in Pakistan of various political parties particularly PPP, PML-N and PTI. Moreover, those twitters have been pitted against each other by the leaders of said political parties. Whereas, the remaining concept “Analysis of Tweets Posted by Party Leaders” is representative of how the posted tweets criticize the leaders of their politically rival parties. Finally, the last concept “General Elections 2018, Pakistan” indicates the last general elections in Pakistan in the year 2018 which resulted in the incumbent government of Pakistan Tehrik e Insaaf whose leader Imran Khan became the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

Since independence in 1947, Pakistan has vacillated between democratic and dictatorial political systems. Several attempts of military coups on the successful democratic governments in the country allowed dictators to rule for more than half of the entire history of the country. Though, sixteen times, civilian governments were elected, but no elected government was able to successfully complete its tenure. However, for the first time in the country’s history, a democratic government (2008-2013) of Pakistan People’s Party Parliamentarian (PPP) completed its tenure successfully. Likewise, the second elected government of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) (2013 -2018) also finished its five-year period in the parliament. The completion of two terms of political governments strengthened the political process and gave democratic forces an opportunity for legislation to enhance the capacity of the democratic institution.

Though indirectly non-democratic forces several times tried to create political instability and attempted to coup both political governments, but constitutional legislation in the shape of the 18th amendment increased political stability and bound non-democratic forces to stay within their limits. According to political analysts the Memogate Scandal, continuous protests by PTI and Panama Leaks were used to pressurize both previous governments.

The second-time transition of democratic government from 2013 to 2018 also became great news for the public. After completion of the five years term in office, holding the General Election-2018 was observed as a historical happening in the country’s democratic process. The elections were held smoothly on July 25, 2018. Most of the politicians took a keen interest in the election campaigns to mobilize their voters towards their party and the mainstream political parties such as PML-N, PPP, and PTI were in high hopes to get the majority in the parliament. However, PTI won majority seats in the National Assembly with 116 out of 272. Although, the PTI could not get a one-third majority to form an independent government in the National Assembly, however, the party made the government in alliance with other political parties. At the provincial level, PTI won a majority in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

and Punjab. However, PPP won in Sindh province and with the support of PTI, BAP established an alliance government in Balochistan (ECP, 2018).

Before July 25, 2018, political parties' election campaigns had to sell their agenda on all types of media in the country. The political parties were using both electronic and print media for the dissemination of their agendas. However, the Election-2018 also observed the extreme use of social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter as a tool of the election campaign and election mobilization to inspire voters. The widespread use of social media during the campaigns helped most of the electable to entice voters, mainly usage of Twitter by three key political leaders Imran Khan, the Chairman PTI, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, the Chairman PPP, and Shahbaz Sharif, the President PMLN. They all chose to communicate through a combination of strong emotional ebullition on Twitter and carefully crafted political speeches or interviews with traditional media, such as newspapers and television stations, as their primary methods of communication in the country.

It is also worth mentioning that all three political leaders are using social media successfully for their political purposes. Currently, the trio has a combined 15.8 million Twitter followers, and they also interact with followers on Facebook, Twitter, and other social platforms. They update their followers frequently on Twitter about all sorts of happenings in the country. They always have a focus on the current issues and political scenario of Pakistan. During the month of July 2018, politicians primarily used Twitter to govern and shape public opinion. In this way, this study investigates how the said trio of leaders, i.e., Imran Khan, Shahbaz Sharif, and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari used Twitter as one of the campaign communication tools.

Problem Statement

The social media platforms such as Facebook and mostly Twitter are transforming the democratic process, letting the public and legislators communicate, link, and network in a way which was thought impossible earlier (Grant, Moon, & Busby Grant, 2010). Now politicians use Twitter to gain political purposes (Hendricks & Kaid, 2014). Individually, many studies examined Twitter usage by political representatives and parties throughout elections. Strandberg (2013) revealed that politicians and political parties use Twitter as a political awareness tool. It was also found that more than a hundred officials used Twitter handler @Barack Obama during 2008 and 2012 US presidential elections for Barack Obama (Hong & Nadler, 2012).

Considering the impact of Twitter on a political subject, many researchers have explored how Twitter influences elections and public opinion polls. The studies of these scholars (Bimber, 2014; Enli, 2017; Karlsen & Enjolras, 2016; Liu, 2017; López-Meri, Marcos-García, & Casero-Ripollés, 2017; Sousa & Ivanova, 2012) examine the studies from the United States and European countries including Spain. A case study has also been conducted on Pakistan General Elections 2013 by Ahmed and Skoric (2014) "on the Twitter campaign by Pakistani political parties to mobilize, inform and engage voters during the elections". However, it only discloses

differences in the usage patterns of the politicians, and does not analyze the contents of tweets by the political candidates.

Therefore, results and insights from observed studies of different countries, especially Pakistan, are needed to understand how premier or presidential candidates of any country around the globe share political information and opinion via Twitter during elections. This study, hence, is such a discourse study that scrutinizes the contents of the premier and leading candidates' tweets posted during general election-2018 in Pakistan.

Objectives and Research Questions

In a sense the definition of political communication is developed when political actors communicate with, inclusive of the public, having used media to achieve their objectives. Thus in this case there is no denying that Twitter has accomplished a status of a new valuable media and communication tool that helps politicians to communicate directly with the public. Then it must also be acknowledged that online media especially Twitter is one of the most important communication resources for the election campaigns (Liu, 2017). In this way, this research analyses the critical elements of a trio of mainstream Pakistani political party leaders' - Imran Khan, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, and Shahbaz Sharif - tweets to understand how they interacted and communicated with voters during the general election 2018 to achieve their objectives.

Campaign strategy on Twitter

Many politicians use different strategies and send hundreds or thousands of messages during election campaigns and spend substantial assets to show their presence on Twitter. These are political leaders that make Twitter an ideal place to make mutual communication to keep them connected with their voters. (Túñez & Sixto, 2011). Similarly, the easiness of disseminating messages and making it viral, raising queries that focus on the political discourse, and update of their participation in public gatherings are some of the actions politicians use for social media (Zamora-Medina & Zurutuza-Muñoz, 2014).

Actually, for politicians, social media is the potential medium to get attention from more users (Adam & Maier, 2010; Rahat & Sheaffer, 2007) and to humanize and build up personal ties with other social platforms (López-Meri et al., 2017). Thus, it is essential to examine what kinds of strategies were used by premier leaders in their tweets. It leads to our first research question:

What campaign strategies occurred in the tweets of the trio of leaders - Imran Khan, Shahbaz Sharif, and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari?

Personalization on Twitter

The personalization of politics emphasizes the discourse of persons instead of parties (Rahat & Sheaffer, 2007). It supports the features of the candidate and reduces the

importance of ideology, as a distinguishing aspect between parties, which brings down the standard of politics to a conflict of personalities (Sánchez Murillo, 2005).

Personalization is even more damaging when criticism of the opponents is inclined towards its representatives except for the party or its values and ideology (Elmelund-Præstekær & Svensson, 2014).

In the context of personalization, Twitter also allows politicians for the individualized and personal use of these platforms by promoting their likes and dislikes, and they use this medium to criticize their political rivals. It is essential to analyze the content of language in which they disparage their rivals on Twitter. Thus, it led us to ask the second question in our research:

What is the premier candidates' representation of himself and opponents in the Tweets during election days?

Issues That Matter

The use of Twitter by political players in election campaigns is common nowadays. In general elections-2018 of Pakistan, politicians campaigned and addressed crucial social, political, and economic issues even as leaders took on accusations and lashed out at each other over comments or controversies, many issues, and their solutions were highlighted during the election campaigns. The third question given below would try to elaborate on this matter:

What were the most prominent and addressed problems of Pakistan and their solutions discussed in tweets by the premier candidates of the general election 2018 in Pakistan?

Literature Review

Twitter was founded in 2006 by Noah Glass, Jack Dorsey, and Florian Weber. Originally, they envisioned a system in which sending a text to a single number would simultaneously send it to a large number of recipients (Carlson, 2011). Microblogging is a term used to describe the activity of users on the site who post 280-character messages, known as tweets, to their followers.

Twitter has ended up being the speediest device for revealing the news. K. Burke, Donohue, and Siemaszko (2009a) claim that US Airways Flight 1549's emergency landing in Hudson River in 2009 was the first time that Twitter was used as a continuous source of news in 2009. A rescuer on Twitter reported the incident 32 minutes after it occurred. With Twitter's ability to react and write about events earlier than traditional sources, this post quickly became a viral hit because it was the first to report on the incident by any media outlet. (Honey & Herring, 2009).

With its real-time updates and the use of hashtags, Twitter can serve as a comprehensive news source in many ways. Using Pew Research Center data,

Shearer and Gottfried (2017) found that 67 percent of US citizens receive some news via social networking sites, with 20 percent receiving it more frequently.

According to the study, at least half of Twitter users have been getting their news from the site since 2013, and this share has risen to 74% in 2017.

Statista (2016) report that Twitter raised as a communication medium with an estimated 500 million users in 2013. It has now had 350m active users from 500m handlers (Statista, 2016). It might be much less than 1.8 billion users of Facebook. Twitter debatably has an uneven impact on the world of the internet; partially, because it appeals to a vital variety of officials, reporters, and famous personalities including TV and film superstars. Twitter has been utilized to increase awareness about political issues, disseminate political content, and establish collective action. Many social movements and campaigns have got insight through Twitter such as #BlackLivesMatter (protesting violence against black people) and #me-too (sexual harassment of women in the workplace).

In contrast to Facebook, Twitter has become more popular among users, (Parmelee, 2014). Hence, it is easy for political leaders to disseminate their message to their followers through Twitter. Leaders, who frequently retweet followers' tweets show that they are quite willing to listen and value their followers' ideas.

Indeed, the politician takes Twitter as an ideal medium to reach influential followers. It is the best platform that can be useful for engaging and connecting decision-makers (M. Burke, Marlow, & Lento, 2010). Not only politicians use Twitter for political campaigns. Many central and provincial organizations also use the facility of microblogs for many of the same reasons as politicians do. The medium is considered as a faster channel to broadcast information and for communication with the interested public. (Radick, 2010).

In the context of Pakistan new media made its place in Pakistani politics and it has attracted most Pakistani; its features affect virtually every individual, particularly the new generation (Eijaz, 2013). Whereas, the diffusion of Twitter in Pakistan is also making new ways in politics as it not only serves to interact with individuals for coming together but also develops the thinking patterns of individuals for politics (Eijaz, 2013).

Further, according to Khan & Bhatti 2012, few years earlier it had been difficult for Pakistani society to involve in politics through the arrival of technology like new media; however currently the majority of individuals use it for political functions particularly the youth (Khan & Bhatti, 2012).

Thus, in this age of social networking sites, most leaders of mainstream political parties in Pakistan use Facebook and Twitter actively. The Twitter accounts of mainstream leaders such as Imran Khan, Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, and Shahbaz Sharif are very popular and these leaders spend a lot of their time for dissemination of information for their supporters and contenders. Sometimes, these leaders tweet allegations against

each other (Shah, 2017). It is an energetic ground for Pakistanis starting follower clubs and arguing with one another with the hope that their favorite

politician can favor them with a 'retweet' or a 'like' (Kagan, Stevens, & Subrahmanian, 2015).

The politicians and government representatives will have to take care of their job and their responsibility before tweeting any message for the public. For instance, in a tweet on December 23, 2016, Defense Minister Khawaja Asif, reminded Israel about the nuclear capability of the country (Dawn.com, 2016). This reaction was the output of fake news but the tweet got coverage in the global press and put Pakistan into an awkward situation. The example shows the power of Twitter and also highlights, that leaders must use this medium with responsibility (Shah, 2017).

Research Method

In this study, the researchers have applied qualitative content, a manual technique that allows having a discourse analysis and scientific understanding of the content of the messages analyzed. The sample has been selected purposively from the election campaign for the general election in Pakistan held on 25th July 2018. Contents of messages or (Tweets) for analysis were taken during the election campaign, followed by the days of the elections, the day of voting, and the day afterward. During election campaign days, essential tweets were tweeted by Imran Khan (Leader Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, or PTI), Shahbaz Sharif (Leader Pakistan Muslim League "N", or PMLN), and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari (Leader Pakistan People's Party Parliamentarian, or PPP). Thus, a total of 570 tweets of these three mainstream political leaders posted in the election month of July 2018 were analyzed.

The selection of these three political leaders from three different parties meets two standards. One, they were the three highly famous political leaders during the general election 2018 in Pakistan, and together their parties represented 83.95% of the total voters. Secondly, the three leaders had designations of Chairman or President of their respective parties. The PML-N and PPP have long histories in Pakistan's political system, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf aka PTI arose as the third-largest party in the 2013 general elections in the country. In general election 2018, Pakistan witnessed glorious PTI surpassing the two-party system and becoming the largest party in Pakistan. Thus, such a situation justifies analyzing the discourse of their strategies opted for the election campaign.

A modified version of Discourse Analysis was used in this study (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). In order to determine what event each tweet was referring to; researchers examined the context of each tweet and the broader socio-political context in which it was posted. At first, the discourse strategies used by these three political leaders in their tweets were examined. Secondly, the context of tweets to determine their representation of themselves or others were also analyzed. Lastly, the focus was to find out the prominent and addressed problems of Pakistan in the tweets of the three leaders.

The sampled data were extracted by using Twitter advanced search and Twitter archives for past tweets. The researchers found and downloaded a total of 570

tweet messages and selected 200 sample tweets for analysis. In this study, only the tweets and replies of the candidates are analyzed. The above-mentioned figures are of the tweets of the leaders and their responses. Nevertheless, this study does not measure retweets because they only serve to redistribute information published by other users, which is irrelevant to the objectives of this study.

Table 1 shows the manually selected tweets' themes used for the analysis of this study. Several themes were created, and the themes in categories with their functions are defined below.

Table 1:

Protocol of Tweets' Themes and Their Function

Themes of tweets	Description
Political agenda/campaigns/activism	Information about campaign events (place, time, etc.) weather, and environment.
Program/Promises/Future policies	Inclusive of the party manifesto, future policies, and promises.
Political achievements	Appreciation of the accomplishments of the party and leader.
Criticism of the adversary/corruption allegations/complains	Straight bouts on actions and the ideology of other parties or politicians. Delayed results complain and form problems.
Media agenda	Media mentions, for instance, interview or conversation in which the leader and media references.
Interaction/dialogue with users/replies	The party or representative replies or questions another user by using the mention (@).
Participation and mobilization	Canvassing and mobilization of voters or volunteers.
Condolence/courtesy	Terrorism threats and attacks or death condemnations, appreciation, condolences, anniversaries.
Political victimization	Political sympathies by blaming upon rivals or state of law.

Source: Generated by researchers

Analysis and Findings

The in-depth discourse analysis identified the themes of tweets posted by all three political leaders. This study reveals that the leaders i.e. Imran Khan, Shehbaz Sharif, and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari mostly used Twitter for posting updates about their election

campaigns around the country. It was found that Shehbaz Sharif was ahead of other leaders in campaign updates through Twitter, but he used it less like a critical

tool to criticize the other politicians, while Imran Khan used this platform more for criticizing his rival politicians. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari used Twitter to update his campaign rallies and make promises for a future program. The most noteworthy result was the usage of Twitter to gain sympathies by criticizing the state and establishment in the election campaign.

The findings of the discourse analysis of the tweets posted by three leaders identify the main themes of tweets in the election campaign of general election 2018. Table 2 reveals that all three leaders used this social media platform mostly to provide information about their election campaigns and election agendas.

The second most balancing theme is criticism (Table 2), as all three leaders used Twitter as a means of attacking their political rivals. This theme was used by all three leaders to criticize each other in election campaigns. Imran Khan devoted to criticism 24 (4.21%) tweets, Shehbaz Sharif 17 (2.98%) tweets; while Bilawal Bhutto Zardari contributes only 7 (1.22%) tweets in the context of criticism theme. All other themes also highlighted the priorities of the three leaders' campaign on Twitter during the general election in 2018.

Campaign Strategies in Trio Leaders' Tweets

Table 2:

Themes and number of tweets posted by the three leaders out of 570

Themes of Tweets	Imran Khan PTI	Shahbaz Sharif PML (N)	Bilawal Bhutto Zardari PPPP	Total
1: Political agenda/campaigns/activism	78	116	106	300
2: Program/promises/future policies	5	18	23	46
3: Political achievements	1	39	4	44
4: Criticism of adversaries and corruption blames on rivals	21	20	2	43
5: Media agenda	2	14	7	23
6: Interaction/dialogue with users	2	12	3	17
7: Participation and mobilization	4	12	2	18
8: Condolence / Courtesy/terrorism threats	15	17	9	41
9: Political victimization and complaints about delayed election results	1	32	5	38
Total	129	280	161	570

Source: Generated by researchers

Politicians make Twitter a marketing tool because the big part of their content is to offer their campaign activities, political announcements, and share links to their

websites (Golbeck, Grimes, & Rogers, 2010). Thus, the general strategy of Pakistan's main political leaders on Twitter is comprised of using Twitter as an alternative way

by which to circulate their messages, whose content is principally based on self-aggrandizement. Due to lack of coverage by traditional media, political actor depends on Twitter to highlight his actions and suggestions and to affect coverage of media and to keep away from journalists' filters. (López-Meri et al., 2017).

In Pakistan's general elections of 2018, if we talk about the campaign strategies in the tweets of the three leading political leaders, i.e. *Imran Khan*, *Shehbaz Sharif*, and *Bilawal Bhutto Zardari*, then all these leaders mostly use Twitter to inform voters about their election campaign programs and rallies. Comparatively, Shehbaz Sharif used this strategy more to gain voters and tried to change the mind of people. There were two kinds of campaign strategies that occurred in Shehbaz Sharif's Tweets, firstly "Mentioning of previous performance", secondly "Sympathy gaining on Nawaz Sharif verdict of Supreme Court of Pakistan or 'MUJHY Q NKALA or VOTE KO EZZAT DO' Narrative".

The second most used theme by Shehbaz Sharif in his tweets was to highlight their previous PML-N government performance and achievements. Shehbaz Sharif took to Twitter and posted almost 277 tweets in the election month of July 2018. In a total of 277 tweets, 39 (14.27%) tweets were on achievements of his role as a Chief Minister of Punjab and PML-N government in Center.



Figure 1: Shehbaz Sharif's tweets on achievements

In image 1, *Shehbaz Sharif* highlights their past government performance by mentioning facts and figures regarding the end of load-shedding, terrorism, and growth of GDP in the past five years of PML-N term. There is no denying that the PML-N government was comparatively efficient during its last term. The PML-N government took a few reasonable steps such as a decrease in electricity load shedding, better-quality of civic

discipline situation in Karachi and the strong drive to win the war on terror and National Security Plan Implementation. Acclaims for the

development of projects like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Lahore Metro Bus, and Orange Line goes to the PML-N government.

The second strategy used by Shehbaz Sharif in his tweets was to gain sympathies on Nawaz Sharif's disqualification verdict. On July 28, 2017, the Supreme Court of Pakistan disqualified Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif from holding the prime minister's office in a landmark decision on the Panama Papers case. The three-time prime minister was made ineligible after corruption charges provoked by the Panama Papers. The ruling Pakistan Muslim League-N rejected the verdict.

The image shows a screenshot of four tweets from Shehbaz Sharif (@CMShehbaz) dated July 6, 2017. Each tweet includes a profile picture, the user's name and handle, the date, the text of the tweet, and engagement metrics (replies, retweets, likes, and a share icon). A 'Show this thread' link is visible below each tweet.

Tweet 1: Shehbaz Sharif @CMShehbaz · Jul 6
Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) strongly rejects the verdict of the Accountability Court in the Avenfield case. History will remember this verdict in black words. The decision is flawed, politically motivated & has glaring loopholes.
1.1K replies, 1.1K retweets, 4.2K likes

Tweet 2: Shehbaz Sharif @CMShehbaz · Jul 6
There is no denying the fact that NAB has dual standards of justice. Proven corruption cases have been pending before NAB for many years. Some as old as ten years but no action was taken. Justice on pick & choose basis is no justice.
99 replies, 202 retweets, 566 likes

Tweet 3: Shehbaz Sharif @CMShehbaz · Jul 6
Pakistan Muslim League(Nawaz) will utilize all legal & constitutional remedies against the decision. NAB court gave its decision 2day. Another court, the court of people, will deliver its verdict on July 25. The masses will use the power of vote & their evidence will be irrefutable
89 replies, 149 retweets, 609 likes

Tweet 4: Shehbaz Sharif @CMShehbaz · Jul 6
I will go to our nook and corner of the country and make the masses aware of the miscarriage of justice & cruelty committed by NAB against the leader who served this country with his heart & soul. They know better who served them & who fed them on rhetoric.
53 replies, 109 retweets, 308 likes

Figure 2: Nawaz Sharif verdict tweets of Shehbaz Sharif

Pakistan's Accountability Court issued a guilty verdict against Nawaz Sharif and his daughter Maryam Nawaz in the Avenfield properties corruption case filed by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) just 20 days before the country's general election. Both were arrested and taken to jail on July 13. To supporters of the Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N), this demonstrates how an activist judiciary with the help of the military, administered selective justice. After criticising the army and calling for better ties with India, Nawaz Sharif blamed the military for the plot conspiracy against him. However, the military has refused to acknowledge any role in the story.

Nawaz Sharif creates narrative and cry '*Mujhy Q Nikala*' and 'vote ko izzat do' (respect the votes) and try to gain sympathies from the nation by portraying himself innocent. Nawaz's brother, Shehbaz Sharif, has led the PML-N campaign as a party president and premier candidate in general election 2018. Shehbaz Sharif tried hard to convince voters that "Nawaz was punished for eliminating terrorism and carrying out development projects". The eventual objective of this narrative is to show the PML-N in the eyes of the Pakistani public as a progressive party. The PML-N's problems are a product not of a deep state conspiracy, but instead of the party's stupidity, not to mention its deep levels of corruption.

In general elections of 2018, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman and premier candidate Imran Khan used the single strategy on Twitter and updated election campaign rallies by posting tweets on "*Naya Pakistan*" a new Pakistan promises where you can live happily without fear, with justice and equal rights, corruption-free governance system. Imran Khan used Nawaz Sharif's verdict of corruption as a weapon in the campaign for not being a 'Sadiq and Ameen', highlighted and criticized his rivals like Asif Zardari, and encouraged people to come out for a vote for new Pakistan.



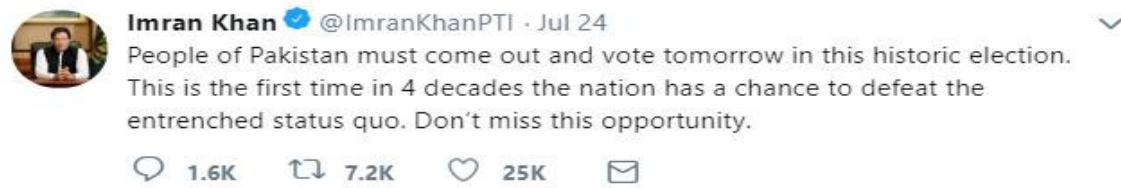


Figure 3: Imran Khan's Tweets

PTI chief Imran Khan used his clean image and the excellent party performance in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) campaign, this was PTI's first term, and the terrorism suffering province takes an apparent lead in this perspective, Imran Khan used Twitter to criticize previous rulers of both parties for corruption and bad governance. People trust Imran Khan because he has always been keen on depoliticizing the institutions to allow them to function to their role. The results are evident in the police, education, and health sectors in KPK, which gives KPK a comfortable lead over others in the "Rule of Law", "Regulatory Quality" and "Political Stability & Absence of Violence" and taking measures for curbing corruption and promoting transparency. These four sectors have a direct connection with the public.

PTI government in KPK has indeed set an example for other provinces that governments do not function in advertisements; they function on the ground. From a terrorism devastated province to a strong province in just four years, this was the result of just one feature "the will to do something".

On the other hand, Pakistan People's Party Parliamentarian (PPPP) Co-Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari alongside his father Asif Ali Zardari was the main actor of PPP in the election campaign of general election 2018. However, the interesting fact is that Asif Ali Zardari did not appear in any election campaign rallies, corner meetings of PPP. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari drove all election campaigns of 2018. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari took Twitter and mostly posted updates of his election rallies around the country.

The most important campaign strategy in tweets of Bilawal Bhutto Zardari was that he tried to revive the party's decreasing popularity by leading rallies. As a chairman of the party, one of the challenges was to overcome the image of former president Asif Ali Zardari, because many malpractices accusations against Zardari could pay a heavy price to the party in the polls. During his entire campaign, he took PPP's manifesto everywhere and presented it to the people during election rallies.





Figure 4: Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's Tweets

The son of ex-Prime Minister of Pakistan Mohtrama Benazir Bhutto Shaheed, 29-year-old Bilawal writhed taking the party headship thrust on him, and he contested elections for the first time. Bilawal attempted to revive the Pakistan People's Party vote bank, which was reduced under the control of his father Asif Ali Zardari, who served as President of Pakistan from 2008 to 2013. Bilawal has been channeling his mother's memory to build up his party beyond its stronghold in Sindh. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari tried hard to present a soft and clean image of PPP to people to vote.

Personalization on Twitter

Twitter has developed as a new platform to promote personalization in politics. In terms of representatives of the political, this approach has become one of the greatest practical resources, both to entice the attention of more users (Rahat & Sheaffer, 2007) and marketing their political agenda. For political leaders Twitter is an ideal place to establish mutual communication; it is necessary to keep them with their voters (Túñez & Sixto, 2011). The simple way of dispersing the message and making it viral, referring to which queries emphasize political discourse, and assessing their performance in the proceedings in which they contribute are a few of the features that brand Twitter one of the most convenient platforms for candidates (Robertson, Vatrappu, & Medina, 2010).

The use of Twitter as a mechanism of personalization was inadequate in the general election 2018 in Pakistan (Table 2). It was substantial only in the situation of criticism of leaders at each other by posting tweets (RQ2). However, the said trio of leaders interacted with users in a total of 17 tweets, Shehbaz Sharif made most of the interaction with 12 tweets out of 17 tweets, Imran Khan posted two tweets, and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari posted three tweets overall.

In the case of criticism, personal attacks by the three leaders were made in their election campaign tweets. In image 1 Bilawal Bhutto Zardari took to Twitter and

posted against Imran Khan on the issue of his cancellation of flight for Peshawar. Imran Khan was granted permission by the security authorities to fly to Peshawar for condolence to the Blour family, but Bilawal Bhutto Zardari was allegedly denied the flight. Bilawal Bhutto alleged the Establishment and Election Commission of Pakistan that supported Imran Khan and did not give him a level playing field for the election campaign. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari tried to present himself as a Grandson of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and son of Shaheed Mohtrma Benazir Bhutto to attract voters. In his first election campaign, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari tried to sell the Bhutto family story rather than [attempting to recapture the support](#) which his mother two-time former prime minister Benazir Bhutto had.



Figure 1: Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's tweet

Imran Khantook to Twitter and posted against his arch political rival Nawaz Sharif older brother of Shehbaz Sharif and PML-N Ex-President. Khan tried to relate the Mastung terrorism attack to Nawaz Sharif's bad times. On the 13th of July Nawaz returned from London after an accountability court verdict and on that day the deadly Mastung terrorist attack happened where more than 160 casualties were recorded. In image 2 Imran Khan alleged Nawaz for secret conspiracy and foreign support. Imran Khan also criticized Ex-President Asif Ali Zardari for his corruption during his election campaign corner meetings in Sindh. Imran Khan showed himself as a cricket legend and clear from corruption charges and presented himself as a "Sadiq and Ameen" to gain votes in campaign tweets.

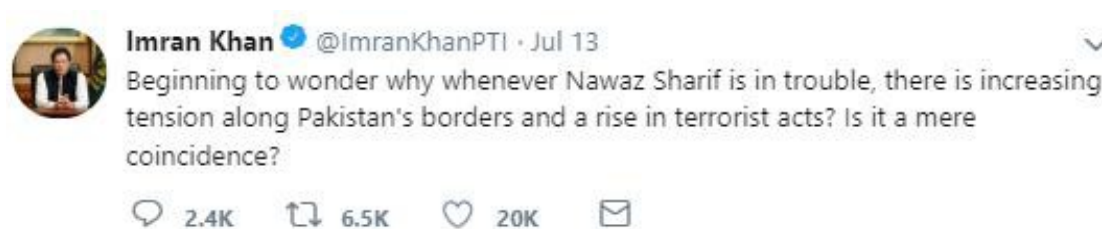


Figure 2: Imran Khan's tweet

Shehbaz Sharif tried to highlight his performance as a Chief Minister of Punjab. He, in his tweets, criticized his opponents more than any other leader. Shehbaz Sharif mostly posted tweets against PTI leader Imran Khan and frequently criticized Imran Khan on his political U-turns, for example, Shehbaz alleged that Imran was against the metro bus and called it "Jungle Bus" but then Imran started building this metro bus service in Peshawar, KPK. Shehbaz Sharif also opposed Imran Khan for not

fulfilling his promises in KPK, like, dam projects, accountability commission, cheap electricity, and lack of infrastructure.

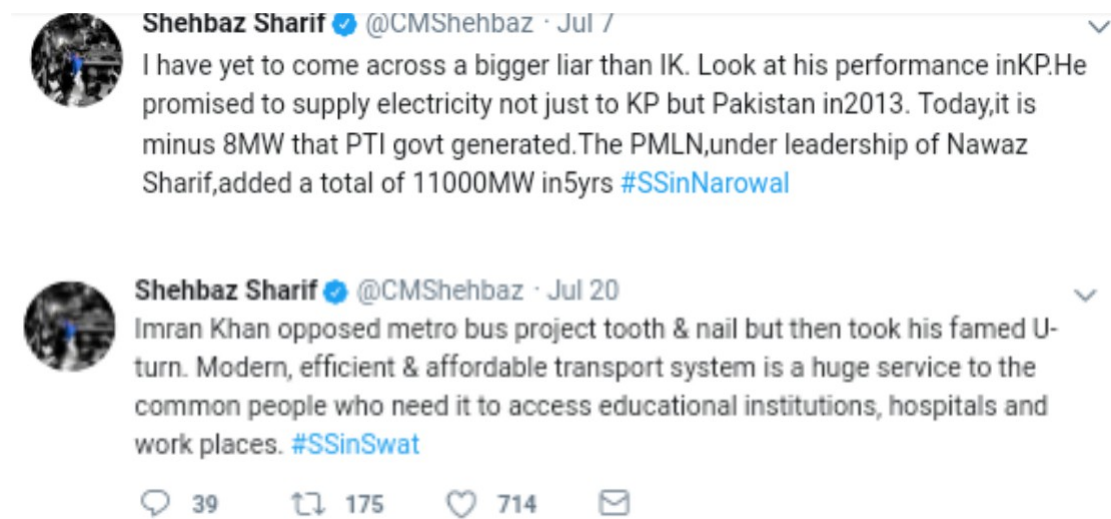


Figure 3: Shehbaz Sharif's tweets

The Prominent Addressed Problems

The 3rd research question analyzes the critical issues of Pakistan being discussed by all three political leaders during the general election 2018 campaign in Pakistan by using Twitter. The political leader uses Twitter primarily as a tool for updating information regarding the campaign. In the analysis, it was noticed that nearly every leader focused on dissimilar issues based on their party agenda.

Shehbaz Sharif raised concerns about the “*Vote ko izzat do*” respect the vote narrative, agriculture and health reforms within the country. Bilawal Bhutto focussed and concentrated on the importance of socio-economic development and empowerment of women. Imran Khan was critical of corruption and governance. Imran Khan's tweets focused on issues of money laundering and foreign debts. However, entirely different from other party leaders, Imran was also extremely active in endorsing voting behavior and focusing on youth.

Imran Khan focused on social problems mostly anti-corruption campaign. In a tweet Imran Khan gave the example of 92 years old newly elected Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Muhammad who served as three times Prime Minister of Malaysia (1981–2003; 2018–) and turned his country into corruption-free and its transition to an industrialized nation. Imran Khan criticized expelled Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on several occasions over the alleged money laundering charges and corruption.



Figure 1: Imran Khan's tweet

Imran Khan and his party's 11-point program promised to turn the country into a "Naya Pakistan" New Pakistan. Imran Khan, as per his 100-day agenda with the aim of invigorating economic development assured to recover trade and ease fast growth of the industrial sector. Imran Khan also aimed at declaring an immediate support package of reduced taxes, bringing energy prices in control for people, and clearing the enormous debt of the country. Imran Khan's agenda aimed to achieve one system of justice, reduce poverty, and raise the living standards of the poor in the future.

Shehbaz Sharif mostly highlighted their previous government infrastructure and development programs and promised to people that his party would continue development programs, safeguard the progress of democracy, political harmony, protection of minorities, respect for women, and supremacy of the constitution in Pakistan. Aside from that, Shehbaz Sharif has promised to boost the GDP, reduce the budget deficit, boost industrial production by creating socio-economic zones, utilizing CPEC projects to improve access to domestic and international markets, and creating two million new jobs every year.



Figure 2: Shehbaz Sharif's Tweets

Shehbaz Sharif is impressive in covering nearly all problems of national concern. Shehbaz Sharif's government did not follow its promises that they made before the 2013 elections. While some significant issues of Pakistan like health and education, also failed in generating the desired results.

Bilawal Bhutto Zardari PPP co-chairman in his campaign tweets mainly focused on significant issues like freeing people from hunger and illiteracy, opening new doors for youth and programs to control unemployment, the promise of a system of economic justice, strengthening democracy, mainstreaming women, empowering minorities, and ensuring rights and securing peace. In 2008 PPP placed out similar plans. It promised significant action on water security, poverty alleviation, labor policy reform, energy security, empowerment of women, and improvement of the rule of law and would build 100,000 homes for the poor. However, the PPP's 2008 tenure was termed as 'Pakistan's worst'.



Figure 3: Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's Tweets

There is no denying that the PPP government in Sindh has augmented the health budget 174 percent from Rs 36.4bn in 2013-14 to Rs 99.537bn in 2018-19. The party has made momentous development in Sindh province; notable was providing free health services in Sindh. Similarly, PPP's Sindh Government Education reforms and role in introducing development projects in the deprived areas like Tharparkar shows the excellent performance of the PPP Government in Sindh. However, corruption and lousy governance remained failures of PPP in Sindh from 2013 to 2018.

Discussion and Conclusion

In the general election of Pakistan, 2018 Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) emerged as the biggest political party in the National Assembly of Pakistan. Legendary Cricketer turned politician, and chairman PTI Imran Khan became the 22nd Prime Minister of

Pakistan. Three leading political contestants of the general election 2018 used the digital social platform Twitter to communicate with voters during the election

campaign 2018. This research work discusses the use of Twitter by Imran Khan, Shehbaz Sharif, and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari during the general election 2018 campaign in Pakistan. Also, it analyzes the campaign strategies, personalization, and addressed problems that occurred in tweets of the trio of leaders in the general election 2018 campaign.

The discourse analysis findings show that all three leading political leaders, Imran Khan, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, and Shehbaz Sharif used Twitter to update information about their election campaigns and election programs. Imran Khan's campaign strategy on Twitter shows that Imran Khan mostly criticized other politicians and updated election campaign rallies by posting tweets on "Naya Pakistan" new Pakistan slogan. Campaign strategies occurred in Shehbaz Sharif's tweets stated past performance and gaining of sympathies on Nawaz Sharif's verdict of the Supreme Court of Pakistan. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari used the campaign strategy of reviving the party's decreased popularity by leading rallies. During his entire campaign, he took PPP's manifesto everywhere and presented it to the people during election rallies.

Answering research question 2, the use of Twitter as a tool of personalization was limited in the leaders' tweets. It was significant only in the case of criticism of leaders at each other. Objective three findings showed that Shehbaz Sharif raised issues like "Vote ko izzat do" (respect the votes) narrative, development, and health reforms within the country. Bilawal Bhutto focused on the importance of socio-economic development and empowerment of women. Imran Khan was critical to the corruption and governance system. Imran Khan's tweets absorbed the issues of money laundering and foreign loans.

To summarize, it can be concluded from discourse analysis that Twitter has the potential to be an important political tool. They all improved voter relations and shaped their choices. By providing campaign updates, networking, and motivating people to vote through their online participation on Twitter, the trio of leaders' strategies demonstrated that the medium could be actively utilized to increase participation in democratic procedures.

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