

## USE OF CYBER HATE IN THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNS BY THE MAINSTREAM POLITICAL PARTIES OF PAKISTAN

Ayesha Siddiqua

Lecturer, Department of Mass Communication, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Email: ayeshasiddiqua05@gmail.com

Article History: Received on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2021, Revised on 7<sup>th</sup> April 2021, Published on 13<sup>th</sup> April 2021

### Abstract

**Purpose of the study:** The purpose of the study is to examine the use of cyber hate by the Pakistan's mainstream political parties. The issue of poll rigging in Pakistan's General Elections 2013 is examined through discourse analysis of the related tweets. The study also aims at comprehending the extent to which cyber ethics were violated during the digital electoral campaigns.

**Methodology:** Discourse Analysis of the tweets generated from the official Twitter handles of PTI and PMLN leaders was conducted to examine the use of cyber hate by the Pakistan's mainstream political parties. Violation of cyber ethics was explored through the qualitative interviews of 8 purposively selected social media managers of PMLN, PPP, and PTI.

**Main Findings:** The findings indicated that party leadership/politicians used the elements of cyber hate which included abusive language, provocation, and character assassination against their opponents during the digital electoral campaign in general and regarding the poll rigging issue of Pakistan's General Elections 2013 in specific. Resultantly the tweets using strong adjectives and metaphors on the political opponents were more frequently re-tweeted and attracted more favorites.

**Applications of this study:** The study can be helpful in various cross-disciplinary areas that focus on the examination of the usage and impact of social media and cyberspace as a medium for hate speech dissemination. The study can significantly contribute to areas related to cyber ethics, digital electoral campaigning, freedom of expression, and political opinion building.

**Novelty/Originality of this study:** The study's originality lies in its attempt to unfold the foundations of digital electoral campaigning in Pakistan and how cyberhate was used as a pivotal tool for advancing the political narratives in a fragile democratic society.

**Keywords:** *Cyber Hate, Electoral Campaigns, Cyber Ethics, Social Networking Sites (SNS), Political Parties, Pakistan.*

### INTRODUCTION

Transformation through the cyber world has not only affected communication patterns but also the way messages are designed and produced across the local and global spheres. The extension in a social system is immensely influenced by the reach which cyber world provides in terms of internet users and the accessibility of different forms of communication tools within the medium. It is with the help of this technological advancement that internet users across the globe are now able to share their thoughts, expressions, feelings, and opinions in the form of videos, photographs, comments, posts, tweets, and even smileys. The social settings of the dominant mediums in a given time relatively shape the way we perceive and understand the world around us ([Eid & Ward, 2009](#)).

A 2009 survey of international digital activists stated that Social Networking Sites (SNS) were most commonly utilized by digital users ([Brodock, Joyce, & Zaack, 2009](#)). Iranian election protests were tagged as "Twitter revolution" because of the active role which Twitter played in opinion building ([Iran's Twitter Revolution, 2009](#)). SNS was also frequently and effectively employed by the Arab Spring and the Occupy movement ([Harlow, Harp & Jurgenson, 2011](#)). Although the potential significance of SNS in terms of mobilizing activism is acknowledged yet it is also criticized that mobilization should not be Facebooked or Twittered ([Gladwell, 2010](#)). The mobilization and activism generated through SNS are mostly contained to online clicks and tagging and retweets instead of initiating real actions ([Boyd, 2008](#)).

The globalization of technology through cyberspace has also been accompanied by an amazing increase in the number of digital hate groups and cyberhate activities ([Perry & Olsson, 2009](#)). Consequently, SNS has evolved into fertile ground for extremists. Political parties, racists, ideological and extremist groups have started utilizing social networking sites for the dissemination of their propaganda ([Wiesenthal & Corner, 2008](#)). The internet is the strongest and diverse medium of communication that offers such dynamic ways which often lead people to type things they would never say to someone's face. Hate speech has become controversial since it is enclosed by the concepts of nationality, racism, and ethnicity. There seems to be a lack of consensus on the definition of hate speech ([Foxman & Wolf, 2013](#)). This lack of consensus is due to its shift towards liberal democracy consisting of protection of human rights, less intervention of the state, equality, and dignity

(Herz & Peter, 2012). Hate speech refers to communication that contains an expression of hatred towards some group, individual or specific issue. Hate speech in response can also trigger both violent attitudes and behavior (Eid & Ward, 2009).

In Pakistan, social media has emerged as a relatively young but extensive tool of political and ideological campaigning. As a natural outcome of this incredible growth, Pakistani society has also witnessed freedom of diverse expression on diverse issues. The expression is widely subjected to complexities because of prototypes in morality, security, national interest, socio-economic statuses, political and religious thinking. The political landscape of Pakistan witnessed a dramatic change in the national party politics when the country shifted from a two-party to a three-party system. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) after two elections was able to secure a victory in the 2018 General Elections (Wu & Ali, 2020). The PTI's victory in the 2018 General Elections was also rooted in the social media strategy employed by the party during the 2013 General Elections.

It is argued by some of the political analysts that confrontational politics is the core strength of the political DNA of PTI regardless it is in the ruling position or opposition (Kaura, 2020). Charges of poll rigging were raised against the government of Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PMLN) by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) for rigging the general elections of 2013 through unfair means. The allegations of rigging in the polls led to months and months of political tension in the country, when Imran Khan, the leader of the PTI, decided to get his voice heard. He demeaned the parliament and refused to be a part of it. PTI arranged widespread demonstrations against the government and laid siege to the D-chowk in the capital of Pakistan, Islamabad. Imran Khan initially refused to accept any other option other than the resignation of the Pakistani Prime Minister, Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif. The sit-ins and protests were sustained for almost 126 days. The President of Pakistan at that time, Mamnoon Hussain, then issued an ordinance that dictated the formation of a judicial commission to investigate the case of electoral rigging which might have taken place in the 2013 Elections. PTI ministers abandoned their posts and seats in the parliament during the sit-in period, but later re-joined to take their respective positions in the house (Lashari & Mirza, 2013).

### Purpose of the study

The study at hand attempted to examine the use of cyberhate by Pakistan's mainstream political parties during their digital electoral campaigns. The issue of poll rigging in Pakistan's General Elections of 2013 was examined through discourse analysis of the tweets generated through the official Twitter handles of PTI and PML N. The study also examined that to what extent cyber ethics were violated in the context of cyberhate speech during the digital electoral campaigns.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media usage for the promotion of hate speech has become a common trend nowadays. Due to this emerging trend, various cross-disciplinary studies have diverted their focus on the examination of the usage and impact of social media and cyberspace as a medium for hate speech spreading. Among various theoretical studies, the Liberal theory by Paul Kurtz (1982) favours freedom of expression in every sphere of life and assures that every individual can take part in this exchange of free ideas. The exchange of information taking place through the internet is expected to be uncensored and free but at the same time, it can be offensive and uncivilized. Long (1998) as being a liberal theorist favors Utilitarianism and he was of the view that for the greater well-being of the society such feelings of hurt are necessary as a price for the generation of greater ideas.

Rohlinger & Brown (2009) discussed in detail the impact of the internet on democracy and the involvement of people in social affairs. They were of the view that optimists always work for a positive portrayal of societies and the internet is such a medium that is free of governmental or corporate control. Because of such factors, the public can openly, and freely express their views regarding political matters beyond time, public domains, and space constraints.

McChesney (1996) on the other side argued that the internet is a public space largely dominated by global elite groups and is working as a commercial commodity in this era of the digital divide. Jurgenson (2001) by discussing the role of cyberspace in freedom of expression argued that this freedom is challenged by the cyber world. On one side it provides strength to the prevailing free speech in the form of diverse ways of expression. But on the other hand, this expression requires regulation at least on the harmful content shared and promoted through the cyber world. Dahlberg (2007) analyzed that liberal discourse promoted through cyberspace got popularity in the new academic and technological discussions. These discourses made citizens self-made and creative digital consumers.

Dijk (2001) analyzed that modern industrial societies are considered as the networking societies in which media and social networking ways combine to organize individuals at all levels whether organizational, individual, or societal. The discourses promoted through these networks fully control the regulation of such mediums. Castells (2000) stressed the similar fact that communication networks shape the public mind by influencing the behaviors at the individual and collective level through generating, shaping, and spreading their discourses. Laclau & Mouffe (2001) while quoting post- Marxist discourse theory

pointed towards the fact that discourse is in actual a set of practices, concepts, and objects which is socially dependent yet taken for granted systems for giving meaning to realities.

[Becker & Wehner \(1998\)](#) while appreciating the role of traditional media quoted the fact that this media is performing a central role in forming and mobilizing public opinion but the present social media is more active and interactive in giving that opinion more chances for expression. But this medium is different in the sense that it enables alternative ways of public opinion. Although technology is providing opportunities for the masses to express whatever they like, it is not playing an active role in bringing homogenization. Rather the most noticed trend is that a lot of differences are promoted through these cyber networks due to which citizens are spreading hate messages and spreading racism as well. But if one names and labels these individuals they are simply individuals of society like youngsters, adults, females, children, and experts who are busy discussing their particular interests through the cyber world.

[Perry & Olson \(2009\)](#) discussed that the spreading of hate speech through the cyber world has provided the platform for the increased online hate groups which are continually spreading discrimination, harassment, and bullying. Such hate groups target different emails, discussion forums, and blogs. According to [Guynn \(2016\)](#), Donald Trump's campaign consigned to the dark corners of the internet because of his hateful tweets related to the Muslim ban, Islamophobia, racism, homophobia, etc. [Walker \(2015\)](#) highlighted Trump's hateful tweets during elections in which he mentioned Mexicans as rapists and criminals. [Filimon \(2016\)](#) identified the phrase "Islam hates us" in one of Trump's tweets against the Muslim community. Few examples of some of his hateful Twitter trends covered by the media included "Hate Is on the Rise after Trump's Election," "The Year in Hate: From Donald Trump to the rise of the Alt-Right," and "A Short History of Hate" ([Duncan, 2017](#)).

[Simon Wiesenthal Annual Report \(2011\)](#) on Digital Terror and Hate in their findings reported that there are up to 11,500-14,000 social networking websites, blogs, and forums which are creating problems and are busy spreading the culture of hatred. [Rao \(2020\)](#) examined that how the political parties of Pakistan used Twitter and Facebook for spreading hate speech. [Ahmed et al. \(2016\)](#) asserted that during the 2013 elections political parties in Pakistan started the use of social media particularly Twitter to disseminate their political ideologies. Also, for the first time in Pakistan voters' participation was observed on Twitter because political parties started sharing their political activities on Twitter handles.

### Research Questions

1. To what extent cyberhate was used by the mainstream political parties of Pakistan during their digital electoral campaigns?
2. To what extent cyber ethics were violated during the electoral campaigning through social networking sites?

### METHODOLOGY

[Java et. al \(2007\)](#) highlighted that Twitter usage has gained popularity and has become a major blogging site. Study on discourses is important because discourse generation, diffusion, adoption in human communication systems is increasing because of the extended use of cyberspace ([Castells, 2009](#)). Discourse analysis is used to examine the structures and functions of texts and conversations in their social, political, cultural, and media contexts.

The time frame selected for the study is November 2014 to January 2015. The reason behind the selection of this time for the study is that it was the peak time when campaign regarding poll rigging and electoral reforms in the form of the judicial commission was taking place on social media and all the political parties were busy spreading hate messages in the name of advocacy to the general public against one another using Twitter and other social networking sites. That is why the present study has analyzed political tweets of this period. Tweets generated regarding poll rigging from the official Twitter handle of PTI and PMLN leaders were selected through the purposive method of non-probability sampling. Discourses are always analyzed in the form of several units. [Berelson \(1954\)](#) developed five units for discourse analysis which included words, themes, characters, items, space, and time. Using that pattern the units selected for analysis in the present study were words, themes, style, glosses, symbols, and metaphors.

The paper also employed the method of qualitative interviews. Interviews help comprehend the story behind a respondent's experiences. Interviews are considered to be most appropriate in cases where not much is known about the phenomenon under study and also where in-depth information is required from participants. Qualitative research interviews seek to cover both factual and meaning levels ([Kvale, 1996](#)). The paper attempted to analyze how effectively the official Twitter handles of mainstream political parties including Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PMLN), and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) were used for electoral campaigning regarding the General Elections 2013. Violation of cyber ethics concerning cyber hate was also explored through the qualitative interviews of 8 purposively selected social media managers of PML N, PPP, and PTI.

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

**RQ1:** To what extent cyber hate was used by the mainstream political parties of Pakistan during their digital electoral campaigns?

The analysis of the tweets has shown that PTI remained very active in propagating hate speech against PML-N. A similar trend was followed by PML-N as well. Tweets from November 2014 to January 2015 were analyzed to see the participation of both parties in spreading hate speech.

### Analysis of Tweets by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) on poll rigging

Tweets from PTI officials and Imran Khan's Twitter accounts were taken for analysis. To get attention from the general public and civil society, PTI raised their chanting voices against PML-N by sarcastically tagging it as the *#GoNawazGo* (metaphor) movement. In his overall addresses and tweets, PTI's leader Imran Khan remained very negative and harsh in his tone whenever he used to comment about Nawaz Sharif and poll rigging. The attack on Pakistan Television headquarter took place during the days of Dharna at D-Chowk. Relating to that attack Imran Khan condemned it by taking it as an *alleged attack on PTV* (style) and used the term *absconder* (adjective) for the leaders. The tweets about the attack were retweeted 2194 times and attracted 3502 favorites.

Imran Khan while condemning the role of political parties tweeted directly that *PPP & PMLN claims of standing up for democracy exposed again* (style). He also termed the PMLN's governance as *undemocratic* (adjective). He also remarked in another tweet that the *status quo forces petrified PTI* (style). His tweet was retweeted by 1083 viewers and got 1678 favorites. In another tweet, Imran Khan condemned the working of Sindh police and related it with words like *unnerved oppressive Sindh status quo* (metaphor). He used another tag for his movement against poll rigging *#NayaPakistan* (adjective). In some of his views, Imran Khan condemned the coordinated work of PPP and PMLN and considered it as *Muk Muka* (metaphor) between them. This tweet got attention from a lot of viewers; the number of retweets was 1488 with 2052 favorites. Imran Khan, while commenting over the position and actions of Nawaz Sharif sarcastically tweeted it as *a state of utter panic* (metaphor) and tagged his moment against PML-N as *#BarhoKManzilQareebHai* (style). He related his movement against PML-N as the *struggle for Justice* (adjective) and *bravely in the forefront of our fight for Insaf & against rigging* (attitude). The response he got for these tweets comprised 5448 retweets and 8381 favorites.

PTI continued to criticize and question the acts of the government for controlling the uncertain situation in the country and called them *Shameful* (metaphor). At another point, he referred to members of PMLN with words like *Sharif & Cohorts* (metaphor). The overall attitude in these tweets showed very *shocking* behavior. He referred to his members' efforts and sacrifices as the *killing of unarmed forces* and termed them as *massive crowds* (adjective).

Imran Khan in his tweets against poll rigging tried to cover every aspect of social life in order to gain more attention and favors from his viewers including women by mentioning women as a *cornerstone of change* (adjective). Similarly, he referred to major areas of the country as *arteries* (adjective). He also tried to address the concerns of the general public by highlighting that *People are sick of the status quo and desperate for change* (style). Poll rigging matter was sarcastically taken by him as *electoral fraud* (metaphor). The tweet regarding *electoral fraud* was retweeted 4497 times with 7551 favorites.

The situation of being hopeful against poll rigging by PTI continued to gain momentum and the tweets by them openly expressed their hopes for *Naya Pakistan* as they authoritatively took the matter and questioned that *if PMLN has not indulged in rigging then it has nothing to fear* (style). This hopeful status of PTI was favored by 4164 viewers and retweeted by 5227 Twitter handles.

### Analysis of Tweets by Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz on Poll rigging

PMLN's cyber response on poll rigging and sit-in was relatively delayed and reactionary. *#GoNawazGo* was changed into *#RoNawaz Ro* (metaphor). Tweets from PMLN's officials were few and far between in comparison to PTI's proactive approach on different forums of social media especially Twitter in terms of trends and hashtags. The most active trend from PMLN was *#RoImranRo*. In the first half of Nov, 2014 tweets from public supporters of PMLN were more prominent on most of the Twitter accounts of PMLN including PMLN Lions, PMLN Official, and accounts handled by Maryam Nawaz, Abid Sher Ali, and Talal Chaudhary. Maryam Nawaz Sharif strongly criticized PTI by comparing it to a *symbol of vandalism* (metaphor). It was retweeted 122 times and had 115 favorites. On the same day, Abid Sher Ali tweeted *IK=Pani ka Bulbula* (metaphor) which had 49 favorites and was retweeted 18 times. On Nov 29 Maryam Sharif stated *dharna party as the rented crowd* (metaphor).

Continuing the trend, Tallal Chaudry of PMLN tweeted against Imran Khan *IK as "Mulla Jutt" (metaphor) of Pakistani politics*. The tweet was retweeted 9 times and had 17 favorites. The same day Maryam Nawaz criticized PTI on their different plans from A to Z with the *#Pakrejects PTI*. It was retweeted 186 times and had 208 favorites. The same day she



condemned Imran Khan's poll rigging allegations by tweeting '*oye awaam tum NS ke aage bik Gaye ho*' (metaphor). In December, a strong reaction came from the business community of Lahore on the strike call from PTI. Maryam Nawaz Sharif reacted strongly to the strike and sit-in call. On the same day, she tweeted *this happens when unstable (adjective) leadership takes impulsive & whimsical decisions (metaphor)*. The tweet was done with the hashtag of #plansfailed. On the same day, Ali Khan Yousafzai tweeted to be comparing Imran Khan to *an animal of zoo (metaphor)* which was endorsed by Raza Rabbani. It was retweeted 2 times and had 3 favorites. Ahsan Iqbal then compared PTI workers to *hooligans (metaphor)*. The tweet was retweeted 144 times and had 145 favorites. A PMLN supporter strongly reacted to PTI dharna on poll rigging by tweeting on Imran Khan's children who are residing in London. '*Ghareeb ke bache marwa raha hai apni aulad London mai bethi civilized life enjoy kar rahi hai*' (metaphor). The tweet was retweeted 12 times and had 10 favorites. On the same day, Abid Sher Ali from PMLN tagged PTI workers as *poorly trained and reckless (adjectives)*. Marvi Memon from PMLN criticized PTI for celebrating the closure of schools by claiming them *selfish (adjective)* at the *expense of future generations (metaphor)*. The tweet was retweeted 45 times and had 97 favorites.

Tweets like *Wazireazam tu Nahin Dulah ban gya Imran Khan (Metaphor)* and *Imran ky tigers nah o gye kutay hogye (metaphor)* reflects the immoral, personal and non-political side of opinion dissemination.

**RQ2:** To what extent cyber ethics were violated during the electoral campaigning through social networking sites?

The violation of cyber ethics in terms of hate speech was witnessed by all three parties through official Twitter handles during the electoral campaign. Respondents agreed that in the official Twitter handles the use of strong metaphors and adjectives was employed by the key contestants. Some of the commonly used expressions of hate speech in the tweets of PTI, PMLN, and PPP included "absconder", "Muk Muka", #RoImranRo, #GoNawazGo, "Shameful", "symbol of vandalism", "Mulla Jutt", "Wazireazam tu Nahin Dulah ban gya Imran Khan", "Imran ky tigers nah o gye kutay hogye". Respondents also admitted that there were instances where ethical boundaries were crossed and as social media managers it became extremely difficult to make rational and logical decisions. In such cases, it was essential to "take emotionally intelligent decisions".

In a country like Pakistan where digital laws and their implementation is still in their infancy, political campaigns through SNS mostly flourish under loosely defined ethical parameters. Respondents admitted that tweets which carried the element of hate speech were more frequently re-tweeted. For example, the tweets by the PTI Twitter handle in which the PML government and its allies were stated "corrupt" and "traitors" were re-tweeted more frequently and also attracted more favorites. While sharing different examples of hateful speech respondents gave examples of the PMLN tweets which focused on declaring PTI workers as "reckless" and "hooligans" attracted more attention in terms of re-tweets and favorites.

Respondents from the social media team of the Pakistan Peoples' Party said that a personal and professional ethical compass should always be followed during digital electoral campaigns as this can prove to be more influential in attracting undecided voters. To curtail the dissemination of hate speech by political parties the campaigns should focus on criticizing the arguments and ideological positions instead of the person initiating the arguments.

Thus cyber ethics in terms of hate speech were violated during the 2013 electoral campaign. Most of the tweets during the electoral campaign were based on charging the opponent candidates with corruption and dishonesty charges. Respondents agreed that to create an ethically conducive environment candidates' especially party leadership "should be held responsible for all strategy decisions during the electoral campaign".

Respondents from all three selected parties agreed that during the General Elections 2013 Social Networking Sites especially twitter were extensively used as a tool of electoral campaigning. Earlier on foot campaigns were given more prominence which is still intact but the hiring and engagement of social media teams by the political parties emerged as a popular and effective tool in the General Elections 2018. Respondents said that one of the most effective forms of digital campaigning is the engagement of official Twitter handles. It was through official tweets that timely response of various issues was generated. Respondents agreed that while dealing through official Twitter handles one has to be extra careful as reckless comments through tweets can attract a lot of legal implications in the longer run. Twitter has specifically influenced the way politicians directly interacted with their potential voters and opponents. Respondents agreed that during the General Elections 2013 it was witnessed that politicians were also aware of the power of Twitter and the way they can develop and maintain their personal and political images through social media engagement.

Social Media Managers further added that during campaigns they had to be vigilant because tweets disseminated through different hashtags were retrievable along with the content shared by politicians. Respondents further added that while dealing with social media campaigns the economic value of the tweets were also taken into consideration which can include the number of followers along with the number of following; the ratio between following accounts and followers; average impressions per tweet and the overall economic value of Twitter impact.

Respondents from the social media team of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf also added that to fully utilize the Twitter handles it was important to stay updated with the changing dynamics of the electoral race as the political landscape is mostly subject to unprecedented change. Respondents agreed that horrendous examples of trolling were set during the General Elections of Pakistan 2013. Respondents agreed that questioning the credentials of electoral candidates in terms of relevant records, leadership qualities or transparent records are some of the more sound grounds for weakening the opponent's narrative instead of focusing on personal records. Spreading unverified information regarding a candidate's family background through Twitter handles was also frequently used as a tool to shift or at least divert voters' loyalties.

Researchers have also pointed that the political parties used Twitter and Facebook for spreading hate speech. [Rao \(2020\)](#) asserted that Pakistani "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". [Perry & Olson \(2009\)](#) also discussed that the dissemination of hate speech through the cyber world has facilitated online hate groups which aim at spreading discrimination, harassment, and bullying. Donald Trump also utilized hateful speech against Muslims and immigrants to make his electoral campaign more successful ([Guynn, 2016](#)). Under the umbrella of freedom of expression, numerous entities including political parties have frequently used hate speech to advance their agendas ([Garea & Medina, 2014](#)). Also in the absence of editorial checks and balances, the social networking sites are much more capable of manipulating the vulnerable minds and perceptions through cyber hate ([Eltis, 2011](#)).

## CONCLUSION

All three political parties created cyber troops and the party heads lead social media campaigns themselves. This leading role of party heads benefitted the political parties because of their online presence and effective strategies. During Pakistan's, General Elections of 2013 thousands of people including mainstream politicians posted their political narratives on Twitter. However, it was found that party leadership/politicians used the element of hate speech which included abusive language, provocation, and character assassination against their opponents. Resultantly the tweets using strong adjectives and metaphors on the political opponents were more frequently re-tweeted and attracted more favorites by the particular account followers. In addition, journalists also became the victim of hate speech by the mainstream politicians and by their followers. Cyber ethics violation was observed on Twitter handles by the leaders of all three mainstream political parties of Pakistan.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The digital electoral campaigns need to adopt a more futuristic and practical approach for gaining voters' loyalties.
- In a country like Pakistan where the political landscape is always subject to unprecedented change, it is difficult to predict the implementation of a unified code of ethics but political parties can at least develop and abide by their ethical compass as a representation of socially responsible behavior.
- In order to curtail hate speech, the political campaigns should focus on criticizing the argument and ideological positions instead of the person initiating the arguments.
- Moreover, there is a need for responsible electoral institutions that should work for the adoption of counter speech as one of the most promising solutions that will control hate speech along with the backing of freedom of speech.
- During elections, election regulating bodies should formulate policies and implement the laws against those who use hate speech for their political objectives as well as to secure the people from violence and conflict.
- Official Twitter handles should be carefully used for disseminating information and opinion as reckless and unverified tweets can attract legal implications.

## LIMITATIONS

Some of the major limitations of the study included the following:

- A small sample size concerning qualitative interviews was a major limitation as a larger sample size would have helped develop a more detailed and deeper insight.
- The study would be more comprehensive if a comparison of the electoral campaigns of Pakistan was made with other countries of the region.
- The study was focused only on the Twitter handles of the party officials. Future studies can also incorporate the analysis of the tweets of the party followers.
- The absence of a quantitative approach was another limitation of the study as it hindered the findings from being generalized to a larger population. Future studies can incorporate quantitative methods to advance the scope of the study.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I declare that there is no conflict/s of interest associated with this publication, and there has been no financial support for this work that could have influenced its outcome.

## REFERENCES

1. Ahmed, S., Jaidka, K., & Skoric, M. M. (2016, March). Tweets and votes: A four-country comparison of volumetric and sentiment analysis approaches. In *Tenth International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media*.
2. Becker, B. & Wehner, J. (1998). *Electronic media and civil society*. In C. Ess & F. Sudweeks (eds), *Proceedings of Cultural Attitudes Towards Technology and Communication Conference*. Australia: University of Sydney. Available at [http://www.it.murdoch.edu.au/~sudweeks/catac98/pdf/04\\_becker.pdf](http://www.it.murdoch.edu.au/~sudweeks/catac98/pdf/04_becker.pdf)
3. Berelson, B. (1954). Content analysis. *Handbook of social psychology*, 1, 488-522.
4. Boyd, D. (2008). Can social networking sites enable political action? *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics*, 4(2), 241-244. [https://doi.org/10.1386/macp.4.2.241\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1386/macp.4.2.241_3)
5. Brodock, K., Joyce, M., & Zaack, T. (2009). *Digital Activism Survey Report 2009*. Retrieved from [http://www.digiactive.org/wp-content/uploads/Research4\\_SurveyReport2009.pdf](http://www.digiactive.org/wp-content/uploads/Research4_SurveyReport2009.pdf)
6. Castells, M. (2009). *Communication Power*. New York: Oxford University Press.
7. Castells, M. (2000). The rise of the Network Society. *The information age: economy, society and culture*, 1(2). Malden: Blackwell.
8. Dahlberg, L. (2007). Rethinking the fragmentation of the cyber public: from consensus to contestation. *New media & society*, 9(5), 827-847. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444807081228>
9. Dijk, Van. (2001). The One-dimensional Network Society of Manuel Castells. *Chronicle World*. Retrieved from <http://www.chronicleworld.org/archive/castells.htm>
10. Duncan, P.K. (2017). The Uses of Hate: On Hate as a Political Category. *M/C Journal*, 20(1). <https://doi.org/10.5204/mcj.1194>
11. Iran's Twitter Revolution. (2009). *Washington Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/june/16/irans-twitter-revolution>
12. Eid, M., & Ward, S. (2009). Editorial: Ethics, New Media and Social networks. *Global Media Journal- Canadian Edition*, 2(1), 1-4.
13. Eltis, K. (2011). Hate Speech, Genocide, and Revisiting the Marketplace of Ideas in the Digital Age. *Loy. U. Chi. LJ*, 43, 267.
14. Filimon, L.M. (2016). Politics and Magical Thinking: How Falsehoods, Show man ship and Hawkishness Became Trademarks of Republican Presidential Electoral Campaign. *British and American Studies*, 22, 211–226.
15. Foxman, A. H., & Wolf, C. (2013). *Viral hate: Containing its spread on the Internet*. Macmillan.
16. Garea, F., & Medina, M. A. (2014). Spanish government asks state attorney to crack down on Twitter hate speech. *El País*, 20.
17. Gladwell, M. (2010, October 4). Small change: Why the revolution will not be tweeted. *The New Yorker*. Retrieved from <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/10/04/small-changeMalcolm-Gladwell>
18. Guynn, J. (2016). Massive rise' in hate speech on Twitter during the presidential election. *USA Today*. Available at: <http://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/news/2016/10/21/massive-rise-in-hate-speechTwitter-during-presidential-election-donald-trump/92486210/>
19. Harlow, S., & Harp, D. (2011). Collective action on the Web: A cross-cultural study of social networking sites and online and offline activism in the United States and Latin America. *Information, Communication and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2011.591411>
20. Herz, M., & Peter, M. (2012). *The Content and Context of Hate Speech. Rethinking Regulation and Responses*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139042871>
21. Java, A., Finin, T., Song, X., & Tseng, B. (2007). *Why we Twitter: understanding microblogging usage and communities*. In *Proceedings of the 9<sup>th</sup> Web KDD and 1<sup>st</sup> SNA KDD2007 Workshop on Web Mining and Social Network Analysis*, 56-65. San Jose, California. <https://doi.org/10.1145/1348549.1348556>
22. Jurgenson, N. (2011). Welcome to the augmented revolution. *Salon*. Retrieved from [http://www.salon.com/2011/11/06/the\\_21st\\_centurys\\_augmented\\_revolution/singleton](http://www.salon.com/2011/11/06/the_21st_centurys_augmented_revolution/singleton)
23. Kaura, V. (2020). Pakistani Politics at a Crossroads: The new opposition to Imran Khan and to the military establishment. *MEI*. Retrieved from <https://www.mei.edu/publications/pakistani-politics-crossroads-new-opposition-imrankhan-and-military-establishment>
24. Kurtz, Paul. (1982). Libertarianism as the Philosophy of Moral Freedom. *Modern Age*, 153-159. Retrieved from <http://www.unz.org/Pub/ModernAge-1982q2-00153?View=PDF>
25. Kvale, S. (1996). The 1,000-page question. *Qualitative inquiry*, 2(3), 275-284. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107780049600200302>

26. Laclau, E., & Mouffe, C. (2001). *Hegemony and Social Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), p.335. London: Verso.
27. Lashari, M. B. A., & Mirza, J. A. (2013). Pakistan Elections 2013. *Pakistan Horizon*, 66(3), 79–98.
28. Long, T., Roderick. (1998). Toward a Libertarian Theory of Class. *Social Philosophy and Policy*, 15(2), 303-349. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052500002028>
29. McChesney, R. (1996). The Internet and U.S. communication policy-making in historical and critical perspective: Symposium: The Net. *Journal of Communication*, 46(1), 98-124. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1996.tb01463.x>
30. Perry, B., & Olsson, P. (2009). Cyberhate: The Globalization of Hate. *Information and Communications Technology and Law*, 18(2), 185-199. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600830902814984>
31. Rao, M. F. (2020). Hate Speech and Media Information Literacy in the Digital Age: A Case Study of 2018 Elections in Pakistan. *Global Media Journal*, 18(34), 1-10.
32. Rohlinger, D., A., & Brown, J. (2009). Democracy, action and the Internet after 9/11. *American Behavioural Scientist*, 53(1), 133-150. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764209338791>
33. Simon Wiesenthal Centre annual Digital Terrorism and Hate Report. (2011). Retrieved from <http://www.wiesenthal.com/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=lsKWLbPJLnF&b=44414&ct=9141065#.VgfTcfmqgko>
34. Wiesenthal, S., & Corner, T. (2008). *Wiesenthal Library and Archives*. Los Angeles. Retrieved from <http://www.wiesenthal.com/atf/cf/%7BDFD2AAC1-2ADE-428A-926335234229D8D8%7D/IREPORT.PDF>
35. Walker, H. (2015). Donald Trump just released an epic statement raging against Mexican immigrants and 'disease'. *Reuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.businessinsider.com/donald-trumps-epic-statement-on-mexico-2015-7>
36. Wu, X., & Ali, S. (2020). The Novel Changes in Pakistan's Party Politics: Analysis of Causes and Impacts. *Chinese Political Science Review*, 5(4), 513-533. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41111-020-00156-z>