

**Dr. Azam Jan¹, Sher Muhammad Khan², Dr. Abdul Qayum Khan³**

1. Assistant Professor, Department of Communication & Media Studies, Hazara University Mansehra

2. Department of Communication & Media Studies Hazara University Mansehra

3. Department of Archeology, Hazara University Mansehra

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Corresponding Author:**Dr. Azam Jan**Email: azamjancms@gmail.com**License:**

Abstract: Social networking platforms are becoming popular in Pakistan. General public and political leaders equally make use of social media for satisfying their information and other social needs. Political leaders in particular go online to catch up as many supporters as they can for their political activities. Political activities of the politicians in turn help create political awareness among the people. The present study analyzed the use of Facebook and Twitter by Pakistani leading political parties – Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PMLN), Pakistan Tehreek E Insaaf (PTI) and Pakistan People Party (PPP) and their respective leaders for creating political awareness in the public. The study was quantitative and employed content analysis techniques. The study was focused on finding out political contents posted by the three major Pakistani political parties and their leaders on Facebook and Twitter from June 1-30, 2021 for creating political awareness in the public. For this purpose, Facebook, and Twitter accounts from the respective official websites were accessed. Data regarding political contents in terms of posts, tweets and subsequent following in the form of likes, comments, and shares was collected during the stated period. The study found that the three major political parties and their leaders made use of Facebook and Twitter for creating political awareness in the people.

Introduction

Politics is one of society's core institutions that helps divide power among the authorities for the benefit of the general public and break the monopoly of a single party or group or individual. Political awareness is equally crucial to inspire and inform the public about their needs and challenges. Several strategies are available for political awareness; however, social media is the best among them because it effectively assists the general public. The democratic atmosphere of a country is shaped through politics, and politicians represent the country and its issues. One of the traditional methods of reaching the public is public gatherings where politicians speak to their workers. For instance, Politicians in the US, generally express themselves to the public in public debates (Mohd, Hed, & Grasso, 2020). Political rallies, lengthy speeches, and manifestos determine a political leader's and party's destiny in countries such as Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh (Malakar et al., 2020).

The world is passing through a digital era where social media constantly affects every aspect of human life, including politics. Social media has been essential in empowering political parties and leaders to

reach the masses without going through traditional media's gatekeeping process. Mainstream media in Pakistan, being biased, has raised a question of the authenticity of the messages, which has given a place to the direct access of leaders to the public through social media. The mainstream media in Pakistan belong to the government or private corporations that usually target profit maximization. In either case, it is hard for political or anti governmental ideas to make their place in the main stream media.

Almost all political parties are active on social websites. In contrast, the three major political giants, Pakistan Muslim League, Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf, and Pakistan People's Party, have millions of fans following them on Facebook and Twitter. They usually take the help of social media to criticize each other, reach their followers, and announce important decisions. According to Kemp (2021), Imran Khan has secured 9.1 million fans following Twitter, making him the seventh most popular political leader in 2019; Shahbaz Sharif has 5.1 million followers, and Bilawal Bhutto has 3.9 million followers on the same social networking site. Similarly, these politicians also take the help of Facebook to get in touch with the public. According to Pakistani (2019), Imran Khan is the most famous Pakistani politician on Facebook, having 9.9 million followers, Shahbaz Sharif has 2.2 million, while Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has only 0.2 million followers.

Likewise, Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf has five million followers on Twitter, PMLN has 1.6 million, and PPP has 831.6k followers. Similarly, PTI has 6.6 million followers on Facebook, PMLN has 2.9, and PPP has 374 thousand followers, respectively. The strength mentioned above showed that political parties use social media significantly for political awareness.

Therefore, the current study focuses on how social media, like Facebook and Twitter, serve as an alternative to the mainstream media for political activists to disseminate their ideas freely and efficiently. Primarily, social media serves as a quick and ever available platform for political awareness where the public can be easily and quickly convinced about one's ideas and performances. Through posts on Facebook and tweets, the political leaders influence the mind-sets of the public and win over their sympathies. The quantification and the analysis of these posts and tweets help mark the indicators of political awareness.

Objectives

1. To explore whether the leading political parties - PTI, PPP, and PMLN use social networking sites to cater to their political needs.
2. To find out the stuff used by the leading political parties on social networking sites for creating political awareness in the users.
3. To quantify the number of Tweets and Re-Tweets by the leaders of the three political parties.
4. To ascertain the number of followers, fans, posts, comments, shares, and likes to ascertain the popularity of the political parties.

Literature Review

Democratic consciousness denotes a community of socially informed citizens with confidence in the political system. A democratic capable citizen is thus someone who engages in democratic affairs to transform individual wishes into collective wills. However, the political awareness of the leaders is judged through their knowledge and information about their political manifests, rights, and responsibilities. It also includes their criticism of specific political policies. It can be accessed through a leader's stable political attitude and cognitive engagement with public affairs rather than emotional engagements (Innerarity, 2021). To strengthen political awareness. Almost all political figures around the globe have turned their attention toward social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and

YouTube to get in touch with their followers. Similarly, Pakistani politicians have also started a competition of internet based debates, live videos, and posts to criticize their opponents and make essential decisions from their official accounts (Bronstein, Aharony, Bar-Ilan, 2018). Their followers, in return, show agreement and disagreement with their posts through likes and comments. Besides, it is widely believed in today's Pakistani society that more followers on a leader's Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube account decide his/her popularity among the nation.

Political Awareness

Political awareness is knowledge about political events, campaigns, parties, elections, and salient issues. Here "awareness" is referred to political parties and political leaders on social networking sites for creating political awareness among the users or common knowledge to understand a political issue (Berinsky, 2006). Political awareness is knowledge about what is going on in politics, how it impacts the community, and the world's ramifications.

According to Zaller, political awareness means "the extent to which an individual pays attention to politics and understands what he or she has encountered" (Zaller 1992, 21). To elaborate awareness reflects "intellectual or cognitive engagement with public affairs" (ibid.), as indicated by information about government and politics that has gotten into people's minds". Political awareness operates in the exchange of political information between the individual and various sources of political messages in the public space. It is commonly understood as an essential asset in determining people's engagement with politics and how political awareness might be a key asset in determining participation and active citizenship.

As per the recent statistics, users of social media in Pakistan are 44.61 million, in those users, 40 million are Facebook and 3 million are Twitter users. The age among those users under age bracket of 18-24 are 41% and user having age ranging from 25-34 are 36%. Above 80% are male while 20% are female users (Ahmad et al., 2019). Individual interaction has become simpler due to new communication technologies, and a new media era has emerged with interactivity as the primary focus in media functions. A person may now communicate and engage with many individuals simultaneously and receive responses because of this change (Boyd, & Ellison, 2007). Online expression and the power of media have become an essential element of political awareness activities in the recent politics of Pakistani society. Social media is bringing political parties closer to the public and masses of society.

Social Media Role in Political Awareness

Social media help users share their thoughts and point of view on matters of public interest and engage politically involved people (Ceron, Curini, Iacus, and Porro, 2014). This platform has to discuss the political problems among voters in countries across the globe. As far as political awareness is concerned, it is considered sensitive about government policies and national affairs. It gives an insight into plans which exist mainly in the relationship of power in society. Political awareness is critical from a demonstrative point of view about states as it gives the platform to examine the realities of politics about society and voting judgment. The awareness can occur through information from peers, political leaders or parties, religious sectors, or educational sectors in some countries. With this, Twitter and Facebook, the two nominated forms of media, provide political awareness worldwide.

Moreover, many political associations have used social network sites to promote political awareness and organize a protest. Thus, social media is essential for all categories of people and is necessary for economic and social points of view. Many social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook have brought out a change in political awareness and participation in politics. The world has witnessed different impacts of social sites in various fields. The effect has been observed in political activities and

awareness of other issues.

On the globe, social media is the essential platform for the success of different leaders in a political campaign. The Arab Spring is an excellent example in this regard. It is used to plot protests against the government. It is thus believed that Facebook and Twitter are significant for promoting awareness. The circulation of different political material reaches a mass of people in a limited time due to its viral nature. It has been noticed that political awareness is vastly spread among the mass of people, including political leaders, through social media (Abdulrauf, 2016; Abdu, Muhammad, & Muda, 2017; Bimber & Copeland, 2011).

Role of social media in Political Awareness in Pakistan

Being aware means realizing the importance, advantages, and disadvantages of something. Political awareness is knowledge about political events, campaigns, parties, elections, and salient issues. Here "awareness" may refer to political parties and political leaders on social networking sites for creating political awareness among the users or common knowledge to understand a political issue (Berinsky, 2006). Political awareness is knowledge about what is going on in politics, how it impacts a community, and the word's ramifications. So many people focus on "how does this impact me" instead of "how does this impact everyone." Political awareness is related to citizens' political knowledge. Political awareness includes sensitivity to public policy and government. It helps people understand politicians' objectives and agendas and encourages them to participate in political debates. Politician plays a crucial role in creating political awareness among people. It tries to bring different political issues into the limelight. It generates debates and discussions on important topics. It provides a platform for citizens to involve in arguments.

People use different social media networks to acquire knowledge and boost political awareness to express their political ideas in Pakistan. Currently, the commoners, political workers, leaders, and even political parties have begun to utilize social media to spread their views and opinions on national and international issues and gain the support of the commoners. Owen opined that digital communication technologies had increased users' social media participation with the internet's beginning. Social media allows consumers to connect with their near ones and provides a platform to exchange political views. These networks play a significant role in the betterment of users (Muzaffaret al. 2019).

According to Vitak et al. (2011), there is a positive and direct relationship between the "intensity in the use of Facebook and Twitter for political purposes" and "political participation among the users." Facebook and Twitter bring political leaders and users together, accumulate political information, and advance their political efficacy. He mentioned a few political activities that exist through typical features and functions of Facebook and Twitter. Politicians posts updates about politics, share political messages with the masses, script and distribute political notes within the party workers, get comments from the public on their posts, share political opinions, join political gathering via live streaming, following the contestants as well as downloading the political apps. These political posts subsequently appear on users' walls in news feeds, and their friends may watch them. Social media users can also witness what their followers are talking about and what their concerned people post. They can get updates from their fellow party members and relevant party events by going through the News Feed over their homepage.

Methodology

The current quantitative study employs content analysis method. To examine how social media has affected political awareness in Pakistan. Data was typically gathered from Facebook pages and Twitter accounts. Initially, the researcher used a variety of web resources to gather information about Pakistan's leading political parties. The researcher then gained access to the official Facebook and Twitter accounts

of the concerned political leaders. Only those political parties in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan that came to power after 2008 general elections are included as unit of analysis in this study. After gaining access to the Facebook and Twitter accounts, information regarding the exact number of "posts" and "followers" (likes, comments, and shares) was collected to assess the level of activity of the aforementioned three political parties and their leaders. The "likes," "comments," and "shares" on their postings on Facebook and Twitter were used to determine the popularity of each political party and individual politician.

The Concept of Political Awareness and its operational definition

Political awareness is ranked next to party identification and ideology. Zaller (1992) defines Political Awareness as the understanding level of individuals paying attention to politics and understanding the situation they encounter. Political awareness denotes intellectual or cognitive engagement with public affairs against emotional or affective engagement. According to the same researcher, political awareness is considered a critical determinant of change in mass attitude. Some commonality among individuals relating to a group represents political awareness which contributes to a political culture within a group.

As per the above political awareness description, an individual holds significant meaning and focus. Lange uses a mental mode rooted in cognitive psychology to conceptualize, select, and understand political awareness. This model may serve as an inner map for a more full-fledged orientation and understanding of the political field. It also provides a basis for young people's political action like voting or other forms of participation (Lange, 2006). It is assumed that humans have a drive for understanding and capacity for relating things to their social and political environment as part of their self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Democratic awareness concentrates on politics which may affect a democratic tradition against authoritarian tradition. It may also be significant as current politics touches upon democratic versus authoritarian aspects of procedures and decision making in the political system. Democratic awareness denotes a socially aware community of citizens who have a confident trust in the political system. This model stresses people's opinion formation and constitutes one version of what might be called awareness-interaction models related to political judgment. According to these models, higher political awareness scores indicate that the individual is apt to link to an increasing level of personal predispositions concerning specific policies, candidates, or political parties. In this study, political awareness can be operationalized as political events, campaigns, participation, elections, salient issues, media exposure, education, and self-described interest in politics (Lange, 2006).

Findings

The ensuing table describes one month data (June 1 – June 30, 2021) collected from the official Facebook and Twitter accounts of PML (N), PPP and PTI. The data reflect the number of likes, comments and the number of share/re-tweets on the posts/Tweets of the aforementioned parties. The total number of PML (N) posts on Facebook concerning political awareness during the stated period is (40). The total likes for the stated posts are counted as (85032). Likewise, the total number of positive and negative comments for the mentioned posts are (4439), (2782), and shares (5307), respectively. Similarly, for PPP, the total number of posts (30), likes (14351), positive comments (6745), negative comments (2967), and shares (6128) are noted for political awareness. Likewise, the total number of posts (32), likes (201700), positive comments (2583), negative comments (687), and shares (2689) are counted for PTI. The same table reflects one month data (June 1 – June 30, 2021) collected from Twitter accounts of PML, PPP and TTI along with the number of likes, positive comments, negative comments, and re-tweets on the Tweets of these political parties. The total number of PML (N) tweets about

political awareness during the stated period is (79). The total likes for the same tweets are counted as (45110). Likewise, the total number of positive, negative comments and re-tweets for the mentioned tweets are (1947), (2579) and (54139) respectively. Similarly, for PPP, the total number of tweets (15), likes (2683), positive comments (271), negative comments (319), and re-tweets (1421) are noted for political awareness. Likewise, the total number of PTI tweets (13), likes (7544), positive comments (7261), negative comments (1922), and re-tweets (1024) are measured for political m awareness. (See below table 1 for further details)

Table # 1: PMLN, PPP and PTI Facebook and Twitter Data (June 1 – June 30)

Data	Political awareness PMLN					Political awareness PPP					political awareness PTI				
Face book data	No. of posts	No. of like	No. of + Comments	No. of – comments	No. of Shares	No. of Post	No. of like	No. of + Commence	No. of – comment	No. of Shares	No. of post	No. of like	No. of + Commence	No. of – commence	No. of Shares
June 1 to June 30	40	85032	4439	2782	5307	30	14351	6745	2967	6128	32	201700	2583	687	2689
Twitt er Data	No. of tweets	No. of like	No. of +Comments	No. of - comments	No. of R-tweets	No. of tweets	No. of like	No. of + Comments	No. of – commence	No. of R-tweets	No. of tweets	No. of like	No. of + comments	No. of – commence	No. of R-tweets
June 1 to June 30	79	45110	1947	2579	54139	15	2683	271	319	1421	13	7544	7261	1922	1024

Facebook and Twitter Data of the Three Political Leaders (June 1 – June 30, 2021)

The following table reveals data regarding tweets and posts of Shehbaz Sharif, Bilawal Bhutto and Imran Khan during the mentioned period. The data reflects the number of likes, positive comments, negative comments, and the number of share, re-tweets on the posts/Tweets of the stated political leaders. The total number of posts of Shehbaz Sharif on Facebook about political awareness during the stated period is (03). The total likes for the same posts are counted as (12493). Likewise, the total number of positive and negative comments, and shares for the mentioned posts are counted as (624), (762), and (898) respectively. Similarly, the total number of posts of Bilawal (05), likes (14440), positive comments (470), negative comments (581) and share (226) are noted for political awareness. In the same manner, the total number of posts (26), likes (919600), positive comments (27162), negative comments (2020), and share (140188) are counted for Imran Khan regarding political awareness. The same table shows the number of likes, positive comments, negative comments, and re-tweets on the Tweets of these political leaders. The total number of tweets of Shehbaz Sharif about political awareness during the stated period is (19). The total likes for the same tweets are counted as (11020). Likewise, the total number of positive and negative comments, and re-tweets for the mentioned tweets are (7789), (4159) and (3657) respectively. Similarly, for Bilawal the total number of tweets (25), likes (137074), positive comments (22653), negative comments (5096) and re-tweets (102628) are noted for political awareness. In the same manner, for Imran Khan the total number of tweets (06), likes (95500), positive comments (3300), negative comments (750) and re-tweets (25180) are counted for political awareness (See below table 2 for further details).

Table # 2: Facebook and Twitter Data (June 1 – June 30) of Shehbaz Sharif Bilawal and Imran Khan

Data	Political awareness Shehbaz Sharif					Political awareness Bilawal's					political awareness Imran khan's				
Face book data	No. of posts	No. of like	No. of+ Comments	No. of – comments	No. of Shares	No. of Post	No. of like	No. of+ Comments	No. of– comment	No. of Shares	No. of post	No. of like	No. of+ Comments	No. of – comments	No. of Shares
June 1 to June 30	3	12493	624	762	898	05	11440	470	581	226	26	919600	27162	2020	140188
Twitt er Data	No. of tweets	No. of like	No. of + Comments	No. of – comments	No of R- tweets	No. of tweets	No. of like	No. of + Comments	No. of – comments	No. of R- tweets	No. of tweets	No. of like	No. of + comment	No. of – comments	No. of R- tweets
June 1 to June 30	19	11020	7789	4159	3657	25	137074	22653	5096	102628	6	95500	3300	750	25180

Discussion and Conclusion

Table No.1 shows data of Facebook and Twitter with respect to the three political parties for ascertaining the role of social media in political awareness in Pakistan during one month period (June 1 – June 30, 2021). Results suggest that PMLN has shared more political posts/tweets on Facebook and Twitter for creating political awareness in its followers than PPP and PTI. It shows a significant relationship between the role of Social media and political awareness of the Pakistani political parties and their leaders in Pakistan. The researchers observed during the data gathering that political party workers and the general public were gaining more knowledge about politics and political issues through social media. The popular political parties' leaders provoked the voters and general public to discuss political issues among their peers. These sites were also a source for the general public to increase their knowledge of current political affairs.

Table 2 reflects data of the posts/tweets shared on Facebook and Twitter by the leaders of the three political parties. Findings indicate that Imran Khan has shared more political posts than Shehbaz Sharif and Bilawal Bhutto on Facebook. Similarly, on Twitter, Bilawal Bhutto has shared more political tweets than Shehbaz Sharif and Imran Khan for creating political awareness in their followers.

The nature of the present study was quantitative based on content analysis. The study's main objective was to analyse the role of social media in creating political awareness in Pakistan. Thus, the study's findings showed that social media were the main form of accessing political knowledge. As indicated in the results, political parties and their leaders were also considered the ideal source for gaining knowledge and learning about politics. Social media was utilized by the three political parties and their leaders, and most individuals joined political pages to learn about their opponents' narratives and reply accordingly. This finding is corroborated by Choi's (2014) research, which describes how social media can serve as a valuable and practical platform for people to discuss political topics and events with others because of the close links among network members.

To improve the reliability and valuable use of social media, the present study will provide adequate information relating to political leaders' and their parties. The study will add to the existing literature on the importance of social media in promoting political awareness in Pakistan by highlighting the popularity of political figures and political parties using their posts, comments, likes, and shares. The

impact of social media on political awareness and participation in Pakistan is also examined in this study, with a focus on how political communication affects both political awareness and participation. It will also serve as a roadmap for future research on Pakistan's social media usage for political awareness concepts analysis. As a result, it might offer a theoretical framework for additional research in the field.

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