Twitter (X) and Political Participation: An Assessment of Pakistani Journalists' Perception

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Abstract

In the era of digital communication, social media platforms have emerged as significant forums for political socialization, enabling individuals to engage in discussion and express their viewpoints on political issues. This study aims to investigate the perception of Pakistani journalists regarding political participation. The main objective of the study is to find out whether political participation on Twitter (X) makes journalists participate in real-life political events or discussions and to inquire about the perspective of journalists on whether their political decisions changed due to Twitter (X) usage. The study employed a quantitative research design. The researcher utilized a survey method to collect the data. The sample of the study consisted of 200 working journalists, selected by using purposive sampling technique i.e., all selected journalists were users of Twitter (X) and members of the National Press Club Islamabad, Pakistan. The findings of the study revealed that a significant majority of journalists in Pakistan utilize Twitter (X) for political discussion, highlighting the platform's importance in shaping political perspectives. The results indicated that more use of Twitter (X) catalyzes journalists' political participation. The majority of journalists were of the view that their online political participation encouraged them to engage in offline political participation. Furthermore, the study emphasized the important role of Twitter (X) in empowering journalists to articulate their opinions on political issues and potentially impact the decision-making process. Moreover, findings revealed that Twitter (X) is a significant platform for open dialogue and debate regarding political issues. The research contributes to the understanding of the role of social media in political participation, particularly in the context of Pakistan's media landscape. The findings have implications for policymakers, journalists, and researchers interested in the intersection of communication, politics, and social media. Further research can build on these findings by exploring the impact of Twitter (X) on journalists' political behavior and decision-making processes in more depth.

Key Words: Twitter (X), Social Media, Pakistani Journalists, Political Participation

Introduction

Democracy is defined by Abraham Lincoln as people's government, for the people and by the people. The democracy has been considered as generally accepted type of governance. At the time of Athens, democracy was about involving the adult men in the process of decision making which

is called directed democracy but now the situation is different due to many factors such as political beliefs, literacy rate different ethnic influences. So, the process of direct democracy is no longer acceptable (Asadu, Democracy and good goverance in Nigeria: The place of the mass media, 2008). Today, a representative democracy can be observed in which some candidates are elected to represent the other citizens for a particular time period. The people in administration do not only use the mass media to share the governmental policies and plans with people but also depends on media to obtain information about electoral process and needs. For a functional democracy, the media is considered as an engine which provide supports to this process. The nature of functional democracy is always participatory because of unrestricted flow of information in which the actions of a political leader are steered by opinion and response of the public. In support to this, Jerit and Simon (2007) argued that "when politics of the United States comes under discussion than democratic experts propose that there is an unintentional relation between the actions of the political leaders and the wants of people in a particular region" (p.254). Democracy cannot prevail without a proper communication system because communication channels provide a platform for people to participate in the political process. Mcleod and Cho (2007) concluded that "there are some fundamental features of a strong functional democracy, one is people's participation and the second one is the political knowledge" (p.205). At first, the media provides political information but also suggests a way of expressing to the political leaders what they require. However, in Howard Dean's campaign in 2004, political strategy makers accepted that internet technologies can offer a supplementary system of determining the viewpoints and interests of people and involving people in the process of politics (Westling, 2007). Currently, the internet has changed the process involved in democracy by introducing social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Google Plus, and YouTube. These social media websites provide users the opportunity to share their viewpoints and to participate in discussions on various topics. This all altered the dimensions of communication and information sharing regarding politics. Social networking websites promote user-generated content in which content generated by the people is shared to impact the opinions of other users and such kinds of websites are also used to gather information (Owen & Davis, 2019). People have started to use this technology to contact political personalities, media corporations, and one another. People are more likely to believe that messages come from social media websites through their personal links (Graf, 2008). People write on their wall of social media profiles to share their life routines, interests, and sidelines. The social media website i.e., Facebook has provided a huge platform for political debates and sharing of political viewpoints both by the political leaders and public. They both can contact each other with just a single click on a computer mouse. Some called it an e-democracy as well. Whatever it is called, many concluded that the internet has revolutionized the democratic process (Livingstone, Critical debated in internet studeis: Reflection on an emerging field, 2005). Twitter has emerged as a powerful tool shaping political landscapes globally, including in Pakistan. The impact of Twitter on political participation, particularly among journalists, is a topic of significant interest. Understanding how Twitter influences political engagement and the perceptions of Pakistani journalists towards this platform is crucial in comprehending the evolving dynamics of political communication in the digital age. In recent studies, the role of Twitter in political communication has been highlighted. For instance, Qaisar & Riaz (2020) emphasized the significance of Twitter in agenda setting, showcasing its influence on political narratives. koric et al. (2012) and Shehzad et al. (2021) discussed the impact of social media, including Twitter, on political engagement and voter participation, underscoring its role in shaping public opinion. Moreover, the concept of 'Twiplomacy' has gained attention, as highlighted by the study on the perception of Twiplomacy by talk show anchors in Pakistan. The study shed light on the effectiveness of Twitter in diplomatic and political realms.

Problem Statement

Realizing the process of democracy and the significant role of the internet urged people to participate in political processes in general. In the current age, there are many interactive sites such as Twitter are used to run political campaigns. Now, the political moves and discussions have become a joint feature on Twitter. Twitter offers a platform to political leaders to meet and interact with the public. Not only political leaders but Twitter is also being used by the journalists to share their political views. By using social media websites, journalists can get more information regarding politics and can participate easily in political discussions. These asocial media websites are also being used to influence others more effectively. Twitter provides more freedom for political participation. Political personalities can use Twitter to reach their voice to the community and to interact with their followers and journalists can use the same website to raise discussion on various political topic and to criticize the policies set by politicians. Realizing the process of democracy and significant role of internet urged people to participate in political processes in general. In current age, there are many interactive websites, such as Twitter are used to run political campaigns. Now, the political moves and discussions have become a joint feature on Twitter. Twitter offers a platform to political leaders to meet and interact with public. Not only political leaders but Twitter is also being used by the journalists to share their political views. By using social media websites, journalists can get more information regarding politics and can participate easily in political discussions. Despite of growing body of research on impact of Twitter on political participation users, there is a significant gap in understanding the extent to which Pakistani journalists participate in political discussion on Twitter and how this online participation results in real-life political participation and political decision making of journalists. This study aimed to address this gap by investigating impact of participation in political discussion using Twitter on political decisions and offline political participation of journalists. So, the current study is an attempt to investigate if Twitter, is an effective and interactive platform for journalists in Pakistan to increase their political participation.

Research Objectives

The study is designed to achieve following research objectives:
1. To investigate the extent to which Pakistani journalists participate in political discussion on Twitter (X).
2. To explore the relationship between journalists' participation in political discussion on Twitter and their real-life political participation in Pakistan.
3. To investigate the relationship between Pakistani Journalists' Political Participation on Twitter(X) and their Political Decisions.

Review of Literature
Political Participation and Social Media

Political leaders and general people always look for a sphere to interact with each other. The political personalities desire to communicate with people to gain support specifically in the period of elections whereas the people want to guide government officials regarding their demands and needs. This all looks impossible without proper utilization of mass media. The Media specifically the press gather collect and report information coming from administration to the general people and highlight people's objectives and desires back to the government and people who make policies. So, mass media create a sphere of two-way flow of communication between politicians and people. By this way, media perform a task as participatory agent (Asadu, 2020). Without the media like television, radio, magazine and newspaper, no actual democracy can be observed. Media provide a platform of two-way communication where politicians use the media to share his or her political agendas and policies and at the same time media is being used by the masses to

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give feedback against those policies and to discuss the political issues. As per Rodner (2010), the media assist as an opportunity which contribute initiate debates though which people can categorize the issues, recommend resolutions against the problems but it takes time to grasp the consent because of delayed response characteristic of mass media (Rodney, 2010). In a situation, the invention of internet technology has transformed the people's way of communication and interaction with each other. Internet is a gigantic worldwide system of society, education and entertainment whose key purpose is to provide benefits to online users and make them legitimized by sinking the constraints to communication and available content globally (Akdeniz, 2002). Livingstone (2005 argues, the internet technology has required appropriate association and utilization in an extensive area for free stream of content or information among different people and parties. An internet which is also called a virtual community which provides instant feedback facility (Livingstone, 2005). The studies propose that internet can be the most significant medium for political participation and sharing viewpoints. There few fundamental features of internet towards political communication as it provides political information and a channel to participate in political as well (Sawant, 2020). As per several scholarly debates on internet and interactive technology (Twitter) and its use in process of democracy, that it has completely changed the nature and dynamics of politics, more specifically the democracy by fetching the people who participate in political process (M. Margolis & D. Resnick & Myers, 2000; 1986; 1993). The internet is a significant medium to provide political information and large amount of unfiltered, unedited content and the information which is not examined by mainstream media. We believe on the information obtained from websites and we believe on the content coming from the internet without considering the role editors and political persons. Huge amount of data i.e., information is available in internet and users. they can get information, opinions on issues, entertainment and interact with people we don't know personally. Everyone who is using internet technology enjoy equivalent freedom and have access to participate in issues related to politics, and economy of community. So, this all minimized the gap between public and politician. Twitter is considered as a public point of interacting for political leaders to share their viewpoints which cumulate into view of people. As per Rossen (2000) in his book named The Anatomy of Buzz, diffusion of information on Twitter as same as face to face communication. Stimulating discussion regarding an issue on an internet platform assists in dissemination of a message in that communication network (David & Fishbein, 2006). There are many researchers who argued that people who use Twitter are more interested in politics (Jhonson & Kaye, Cruising is Believing? Comparing Internet and Tradional Sources on Media Credibility Measures, 2017). Such people take more interest in voting process (Hill & Hughes, 2019; Katz, 1997). Such people are keen to participate in political process then light users. internet provided huge amount of political information and this information is easy to access for every user. For this nature, Twitter is considered to produce well informed citizens who participate in politics more actively and they have fine ability to influence the political process as well (Jhonson & Kaye, 2017; Bimber, 2018; Levin, 2020). The information on internet can be retrieved at any time from homes and such information can be shared by the people easily which reduced the cost on political campaigns. The online platforms have increased the access to information on various political issues which makes the people more participatory towards political process (Bimber, 2018; Jhonson & Kaye, 2020). The free flow of information on Twitter turns people more conscious towards communication. Twitter has changed the politics more specifically, the democracy around the world. The Arab Spring i.e., people's movement for democratic political system was triggered by means of communication, especially the social media websites such as Facebook and Twitter. So, it can be argued that debate on social media enhances the political awareness of public (Ogunseye, 2011). On social media, there are various activities related to politics which have direct link with election process. The initial use of social media was limited to communication, making new friends but now it has become a strong

force to promote democracy with more informed citizens. The founder of Wikileaks named Julian Assange concluded that, social media has now become a part of social life of people where we can observe people regarding their activities, names, relationship status, location and residential addresses etc. So, this information can be used for political persuasion (New Tech, 2011). The consistent use of social media makes it more influential for political socialization. The biggest benefit of social media is that it gives users an opportunity to own information on different topics and they share information with others spontaneously. Information sharing has become easier due to social media websites. This nature of social media has super passed the national and terrestrial borders and these websites are equally accessed by everyone (Davis, 2009). On social media, the people with no interest in politics can become involved in political discussion and their interest can be aroused by observing the activities of their friends regarding politics. Even the people who don't have personal contacts with politicians but they discuss about politics of country on social media and at the same time they get influenced by other viewpoints (Bentley, 2006).

Research Question
RQ1. To what extent do Pakistani Journalists use Twitter (X) to Participate in Political Discussions?
RQ2. What kinds of Political information is being shared by Pakistani Journalists on Twitter (X)?
RQ4. Does the Political Discussion on Twitter (X) influence the real-line Political Participation of Pakistani Journalists?

Hypotheses
H1. There is a positive relationship between journalists' participation in Political Discussion on Twitter (X) and their Real-life Political Participation in Pakistan.
H2. More the Pakistani Journalists Participate in Political Discussion on Twitter (X), more their Political Decisions are influenced.

Theoretical Framework
The current study is attached on Jurgon Habermas's public sphere theory. In the book titled "The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, the author claimed that public sphere is form of a national space which provides an open platform of discussion to the masses. Furthermore, this sphere is like an in-between structure of communication among systematized and casual discussions in a political system (Habermas, 2006). According to Habermas, such kinds of debate and discussion are important features of democracy which participatory in nature and public sphere is deep-rooted in rapid flow of information, messages, pictures, TV shows, films and documentaries. Each kind of content emerged from a source as happens in traditional media. People use numerous information sources and attempt to impact the opinions of other people particularly the people who are in power. As per Denis McQuail (2005), the people who are involved in this sphere of discussion are political personalities, political institutions different social groups and people from civil society. Such kind of discussions influence the process of decision making in national administrations and other political establishments. When media is in organized, open and free in nature, then it becomes the most influential institution of society. This drives to defend the Habermas's concern that media do not assist people to build their opinion on rational grounds but manipulate the people in a society. The reason of this concern is the process of gatekeeping which turns media selective about different topics and public (McQuail, 2005). The emergence of new media from internet which is highly interactive such as Twitter, have accumulated everyone in a fashion same as in-person communication. A user on such interactive media can write response on any affair and everyone in his or her friends list can approach to it

easily and record their feedback. Such kind of community on Twitter and other social media websites is called virtual community. Public is being observed to be re-forming in online sphere, constructing connection with people with same viewpoints and building innovative skills and purposeful space. No doubt, Twitter is not a selective media to people as conventional media is. But it is expected a situation when debate on Twitter influence the off-line activities of people when they interact with likeminded people through an online media.

Research Methodology
The current study examines the participation of journalists in political discussion on Twitter in Pakistan. The research method used to conduct this study was the survey. As per Babbie and Rubin (2005), a survey method encompasses original data collection from a huge population that cannot be studied directly. For current study, the survey method was adopted as the most suitable method as the study was to determine the large number of journalists who contributed in political discussion on Twitter. The size of sample was confined to journalists who use Twitter Islamabad, the capital city of Pakistan. A sample of 200 respondents was taken by employing purposive sampling technique from the journalists' population of Islamabad who use Twitter, have more than 50 followers and regularly post political information and share their political viewpoints on Twitter. From 200 respondents. A well-designed questionnaire was used as a tool for data collection. Even though the size of sample is small use of purposive sample method may comprise unintentional selection preference and produce study's results that may not true representation of a huge population but still a vigilant use of purposive sampling method can generate a sample that represents a particular subgroup of population (Wimmer & Dominick, 1991).

Findings
The findings of the current study are presented, examined and discoursed here by using tabled of frequency distribution. 200 questionnaires were distributed among respondents but only 195 questionnaires were found valuable and completed.

RQ1. To what extent do Pakistani Journalists use Twitter (X) to Participate in Political Discussions?

Table 1: Frequency of usage of Twitter(X) by Pakistani Journalists for Political Discussions.

No. of times of Sign in	Frequency	Percentage
Daily	70	35.9
Less than thrice a week	53	27.2
More thrice a week	65	33.3
Weekly	7	3.6
Total	195	100

Table 1 shows that 35.9 percent respondent of sample sign in to their Twitter on daily basis. 51 respondents to total representing 27.2 percent were signing into their twitter accounts less than thrice a week while 65 respondents representing 33.3 percent were signing into Twitter more than thrice a week. The negligible number of respondents i.e., 7 representing 3.6 percent login to Twitter on weekly basis.

RQ2. What kinds of Political information is being shared by Pakistani Journalists on Twitter (X)?

Table 2: Kinds of political information shared by the journalists on Twitter (X).

Kinds of political information	Frequency	Percentage
Upcoming political event/procession/political gathering	20	10.3
Discussion about a political candidate	41	21
Information on politicians' position and stance on specific political issue	20	10.3
Information about voting process	25	12.8
All of above	89	45.6
Total	195	100

Table 2 shows that 20 respondents of total 195 use Twitter to share information regarding an upcoming political event/rally or political gathering. 21 percent respondents discuss political candidates on Twitter while there are 10.3 percent respondents of total sample who share information about a politician's stance or position on particular political issue. In addition, 25 respondents representing 12.8 share information about voting and voting process and great number of respondents i.e., 89 which represent 45.6 percent of total said that they share all these kinds of political information on their Twitter accounts.

RQ3. Does the Political Discussion on Twitter (X) influence the real-line Political Participation of Pakistani Journalists?

Table 3: How do you relate Twitter with politics?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Twitter (X) is a powerful platform to promote political discussions	86	44
Twitter (X) plays positive role to promote participation in real-life's political events in country	64	33
Twitter (X) has no effect on politics	45	23
Total	195	100

As per table 3, the 44 percent of total sample view that Twitter is a powerful platform which promotes political discussion and 33 percent of total respondents believe that Twitter plays a positive role to encourage people to participate in important national political events in the country. However, 23 percent respondents were found undecided.

Table 4: Do political information obtain from Twitter (X) is helpful in real life political decisions?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	111	57
No	66	34
Undecided	18	9
Total	195	100

The table 4 indicates that most of the respondents i.e., 57 percent said that political information which is obtained from Twitter is helpful for their real-life political decisions and 34 percent respondents said that there is no effect of political information obtained from twitter on their real life political decisions. While 18 respondents representing 9 percent were undecided.

H1. There is a positive relationship between journalists' participation in Political Discussion on Twitter (X) and their Real-life Political Participation in Pakistan.

Table 5. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Test of Journalists' Participation in Political Discussion on Twitter (X) and their Real-life Political Participation

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient of Journalists' Twitter usage for political discussion and their Real-life Political Participation.

Variable	Real-life Political Participation
Twitter Usage Frequency for political discussion	.456**

Correlation: **$p<0.01$

Findings of the table shows the results of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation test, which was used to analyze the relationship between Twitter usage by journalists to participate in political discussion and their real-life participation in political events. The results highlighted a significant positive relationship between both variables ($p=.456$). Results highlighted, more the journalists participate in political discussion on Twitter, their participation in real-life political events was also increased.

H2. More the Pakistani Journalists Participate in Political Discussion on Twitter (X), more their Political Decisions are influenced.

Table 6. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Test of Journalists' Participation in Political Discussion on Twitter (X) and their Political Decisions.

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient of Journalists' Twitter usage for political discussion and their Political Decisions.

Variable	Political Decisions
Twitter Usage Frequency for political discussion	.343**

Correlation: **$p<0.01$

The findings of the table depicts the results of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation test, which was used to analyze the relationship between Twitter usage by journalists to participate in political discussion and their political decision. The findings showed a significant relationship between both variables ($p=.343$). Findings highlighted that more the journalists use Twitter to participate in political discussion, more their political decisions are shaped.

Discussion
It has been observed that in Pakistan, the use of social media for politics is increasing. Not only politicians but the journalists are using social media and taking part in discussions on various political issues in country. Most of the journalists in Pakistan use Twitter to raise their voices and opinions about different political events and they regularly tweet their viewpoints. In general, social media, more particularly the Twitter is getting popular among politicians and journalists in Pakistan. As Twitter is an open platform which provides equal opportunity to everyone to participate in discussion and write comments on different subjects and politics is one of them. This

study is more focused on use of Twitter by journalist and how they utilize this platform to participate in political discussion. It can be seen in research findings that Twitter is a popular medium among journalists as responses show that 35.9 percent journalists in Pakistan use Twitter on daily basis, 33.3 % sign-in to Twitter more than thrice a week and there are 27.2 % journalists who visit Twitter less than thrice a week. It means that journalists in Pakistan are exposed to every issue which is highlight on Twitter by users. As concluded by Livingstone (2005 that "the audience is being reconstructed, finding mutual interests with large network of like-minded people and developing their skills. This all result in construction of an alternative space where people are well aware of issues. The research finds of current study also revealed that Pakistani journalists share lot of political information on social media website i.e., Twitter. Journalist share information on various political subjects like Upcoming political event/procession/political gathering, Information on politicians' position and stance on specific hot political issue, voting process and they are also involved in discussion about political candidates. Pakistani journalists are more participatory in political discussion and think that participation in political discussions on Twitter help them in their political decision-making process. Another important point revealed in current study that, in Pakistan, Twitter has increased the political consciousness of journalist. The findings show that most of the journalists take part in political discussions on Twitter. Pakistani journalists raise their voices and write comments on particular political happenings in the country. Furthermore, findings also show that journalists also Twitter to promote specific political events of country. As most of the journalists are taking part in political discussion on Twitter and they view Twitter is a powerful platform to promote political discussions which plays a positive role to promote off-line their participation in important political events. As Bushey (2010 argued that majority of people try to utilize what they cultured on Twitter in real life.

Conclusion

Lack of political participation is one important challenge for political development in a country like Pakistan. Democracy can better be flourish with a more open communication structure and free flow of information especially within important institutions and stakeholders. Social media is an emerging mass media offering enormous potential to help the democratic traditions. In Pakistan, the use of Twitter is increasingly getting popular among audience and particularly among the journalist community. This trend of using twitter among journalists is supporting the free flow of information and freedom of expression. A wider majority of journalist in Pakistan are highly active on Twitter and they raise their voices more effectively on important national and international political issues. This trend of twitter usage among journalists tends to nurture and promote a more vibrant democratic culture and will help to reconcile the political ties among media, political leaders and the general people.

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