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Digital Polls and Public Influence Analyzing the Impact of X (Twitter) Polls in Pakistan

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In this digitally connected globe, the use of digital applications, especially Twitter (X), has increased manifold. Social media has become an apparatus not only for the political elite but also for the masses to express their political opinions. The introduction of digital polls on Twitter (X) gauges the public engagement and their interest in political matters. These digital surveys are conducted to monitor and measure the pulse of masses and create policies accordingly. The survey provides an overview of the masses willingness to participate in these polls. Besides this, hashtags are integral part of social media that are essential to make or break a story. Political polarization and difference of opinion is also visible in such polls.

Keywords: Political Polarization, Public Influence, Digital Polls, Twitter (X), Narrative Building, Manipulation

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Contents

- [Introduction](#)
- [Literature Review:](#)
- [Theoretical Framework:](#)
- [Research Methods and Framework:](#)
- [Data Collection:](#)
- [Limitations of the Research:](#)
- [An Overview of the Digital polls on Twitter \(X\):](#)
- [Key Findings of the Thematic Analysis](#)
- [Implications / Drawbacks of Digital Polls:](#)
- [Conclusion:](#)
- [References](#)

Abstract

In this digitally connected globe, the use of digital applications, especially Twitter (X), has increased manifold. Social media has become an apparatus not only for the political elite but also for the masses to express their political opinions. The introduction of digital polls on Twitter (X) gauges the public engagement and their interest in political matters. These digital surveys are conducted to monitor and measure the pulse of masses and create policies accordingly. The survey provides an overview of the masses willingness to participate in these polls. Besides this, hashtags are integral part of social media that are essential to make or break a story. Political polarization and difference of opinion are also visible in such polls.

Keywords: Political Polarization, Public Influence, Digital Polls, Twitter (X), Narrative Building, Manipulation

Introduction

The trend of modernization has brought radical changes in the contemporary world. The globe seems more digitally connected and social media has remodeled the modus operandi of communication. In today's digital age, political actors and those operating

within the power corridors increasingly rely on social media as a central tool for communication and influence. (Asma & Rafiq, [2024](#)). One of the most significant and popular form of social media is Twitter (Khalid & Ali, [2021](#)). This platform is the most refined and interactive version of social media notably used



for political communication. (Fareed et al., 2019). It is used widely by political actors, celebrities, political parties, opinion leaders, journalist and common citizen (Shahzad & Omar 2021). Due to its interactive nature, the platform offers space for political discussion. It has played a significant role in shaping the opinion and policy priorities of the population (Berg & Hofmann, 2021).

In the last ten years, the rise in use of social media and especially twitter (X) is associated with the advent of mobile internet and latest smart phones (Khan, et al., 2019). With its 280 character limit, this platform provides its user to share and focus on the crux of any story or opinion rather than divulging into details. Twitter (X) is the direct method of communication used by political parties and politicians with citizens of the society (Butt et al., 2021). Almost all political workers and even party leaders use this platform to communicate directly with their followers or to share important messages (Ghani et al., 2020). The trending hashtags on twitter marks the trending news and a tweet from one part of the globe reaches to another sphere simply because of the digitally connected world through these modern applications (Small, 2011). These hashtags in twitter (X) not only serve the political interest of the parties to raise slogans such as #Vote_ko_izzat_do #imported_hakoomat_na_manzoor, #Absolutely_Not they are also used during crisis situation #Flood_Relief in order to raise public awareness on specific issue. These algorithmically driven hashtags, combine with the active social media and digital media teams at political front spread news through various means, using it to alter the public opinion in their favor. (Su et al., 2019).

It would not be wrong to say that Twitter (X) is now used for agenda setting and framing method in Pakistan politics, theories that are often related to changing perception of the masses. Not only the members of the political elite make use of such platform, but also the Journalist and reporters who continuously seek various news sites to check the trending hashtags in order to align their stories with recent happenings (Imran & Maqsood 2020). While print and electronic media may take time to publish

the news, Social Media and especially Twitter (X) becomes the fastest means to publish or seek any news due to the considerable amount of masses using it and also because of the hashtags (Kemp, 2024). But every rose has its thorns. The platform may also be used and had been used to spread fake news or disinformation, targeting societies to indulge into chaos and to manipulate social behavior (Muzaffar et al., 2019).

Literature Review

The mass use of Twitter polls by common masses is relatively new, however it has seized the attention of various scholars and who define algorithms of Twitter (X) and digital polls according to their understanding, In this regards, various journals, books and scholarly articles have been written to explain the rising phenomenon of such digital polls. While few believe it to be a revolutionary step forward, other discusses its demerits. As stated, digital platforms like X (formerly twitter) have emerged as prominent arenas for public interaction, political debate, and opinion expression globally (Bano et al., 2021). In Pakistan, these platforms contribute to how citizens engage with public issues, political narratives, and collective sentiment, including through features like polls that invite users to express views instantly. Since the users of this platform are politically aware and literate citizens of the society and those who are eligible for electoral voting, these digital polls are often viewed as public test to understand their opinion regarding certain issue (Khan, et al., 2019). Results of these digital polls help the people in power circle to understand the opinion of the masses and their political affiliation and alter their policies to engage public through various means. While formal academic research specifically on X polls in Pakistan remains limited, polls on X serve as quick mechanism for users to voice opinions on current events (Ahmad et al, 2019).

Existing literature suggest that people participation in these digital polls occur and they believe their views matter. In the past few years, mainly Internet including different social media platforms like Facebook, Twittrter and Youtube have drastically transformed the understanding of political

communication (Gibson & Römmele, 2001). Before twitter (X), the political discussion was only one flow, from Political elite towards audience, such factor has been diminished due to the presence of Twitter (McNair, 2011; Chadwick, 2013). Now general audience can freely interact with the political elite in order to raise their opinion.

Theoretical Framework

To understand the digital platforms of social media and its impact on the masses, the paper adopts the theory of agenda setting and political communication. The Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) explains that all types of media communication method enable one to focus on certain issue. The power of media is to engage public and masses by setting an agenda and focus on certain news. It does not tell us what to think, but it tells us what to think about. Media houses focus on certain events, personalities and specific concerns to deviate masses from real issues. Few hashtags, popular news and the story becomes headline in the main stream media. In short, the agenda setting theory act as gatekeeping and it can shape and influence the perception of the masses. Political maneuvering is structured through hashtags and to gain prominence. The top 10 trending hashtags explains the top stories of specific the region. Everyone tries to be either in the top 10 hashtags on discusses these trending hashtags in their show.

Research Methods and Framework

The paper tends to explore the phenomenon through qualitative research design to understand the opinion of people regarding use of Twitter and Twitter polls. The question is grounded in agenda setting theory where media and political elite use a certain hashtags not to raise a certain political issue but affect how people will perceive it (Parmelee, 2014). To analyze the Pakistan twitter space, one marked with atmosphere of intense digital mobilization, the study

aims to disclose the effects of significant hashtags and top trending news on these digital polls.

Data Collection

In the quest to generate the finest possible discourse, data is collected through publically available data stream and mostly through twitter polls created on certain issues. While doing so, it was taken into consideration that the data used would be politically relevant and revolves around events that engages public spheres. This could be a political event or unfortunate incident of terrorism. To further narrow it down, the hashtags selected are those that remained in the top stories of Pakistan politics and are national issues. Moreover, it was also made sure that public engagement appeared on these polls. For example a poll with a voting less than 2000 was not selected for review.

Limitations of the Research

Though publicly available data can be easily accessed, yet there are certain limitations attached to it. People who conducted these data sets might have used various algorithms to alter the results. Since, it is possible in the digital domain; its shortcomings cannot be neglect. Also the sample used may not represent the result of entire Pakistani population as only a trivial fragment of the society involve in digital voting.

An Overview of the Digital polls on Twitter (X)

Many digital polls have been conducted in the past on this platform in order to access the public perception on a certain matter. These polls often yield results that can be utilized to alter public opinion by making certain improvements. Government institutions use these digital polls to know opinion of the society about their policies, Journalist use them to cover their stories and political parties organize such digital polls to check their public strength (Zeib, 2022). Below are few examples of the digital polls with explanation:

Digital poll on Twitter (X) by Adil Raja @soldierspeaks

Question: Why is Terrorism occurring in Pakistan?

Option 1	Indian RAW	45%
Option 2	Policies of Pakistan Army	28%
Option 3	Afghan Taliban	27%

The table depicts a digital poll raised by Adil Raja to understand the reason behind terrorism in Pakistan. 22, 520 people voted on this poll which is a very significant number. People voted and the result of their voting pattern is visible. Almost half of the masses consider Indian Intelligence Agency (RAW)

behind terror attacks in Pakistan. Few consider policies of the Pakistan Army while few think Afghan Taliban are the reason behind terrorism in Pakistan. Also, this digital post was shared or re-tweeted for 303 times and 46,000 people viewed the post.

Digital poll on Twitter (X) by Moeed Pirzada @MoeedNj

Question: Suicide attack in Islamabad (District Courts, 11 Nov) appears to be an act of?

Option 1	TTP / Afghan Taliban	13%
Option 2	Indian RAW	12%
Option 3	Unknown / Others	72%

This digital poll was conducted by US based Pakistani journalist Moeed Pirzada. It was viewed about 94,000 people on Twitter, more than 13,000 people voted in this poll while 564 people reposted this tweet. However, the result of this poll differs with the one that was shown above. In the previous poll, masses were of the view that Indian Intelligence is the reason behind terrorism in Pakistan. But after a terrorist attack in the capital of Pakistan, their analysis changed. They no longer consider India as an eminent

threat rather they believe there are other powers behind it. More so, it was earlier discussed in the limitations of research that fake or bot accounts and altering the algorithms may affect the results. One more considerable element could be the use of hashtags. These hashtags can change the public perception. During this specific certain period of time, the possibility of hashtags influence changing the opinion of the masses cannot be ignored.

Digital poll on Twitter (X) by Moeed Pirzada @MoeedNj

Question: Who won between Nawaz Sharif and field Marshal Asim Munir on the issue of notification? Who becomes powerful and who remains less powerful?

Option 1	General Asim Munir became more powerful	23%
Option 2	Nawaz Sharif became more powerful	4%
Option 3	Not sure	73%

This is another example of digital poll that was conducted to analyze the recent notification issue of Chief of Defense Forces. The poll had the highest number of votes (almost 24,000) in this survey. Due to delay in notification of Chief of Defense Forces,

various speculations started to take place. In this scenario, this poll was conducted and most of the common people did not have the clue of who became powerful in this situation. The other two options were also voted for but their contribution was meager.

Key Findings of the Thematic Analysis

Themes	Explanation of the themes	Observations derived from Data	Representative Hashtags/Examples
Political Mobilization and Campaigning	Political parties and their leaders use Twitter (X) actively	Strategic launch of hashtags before any high profile speech or political rally	#VoteForChange, #PMLN, #ImranKhan, #PPP
Narrative Framing and Counter-Narratives	Agenda setting through Twitter and framing favorable narrative while opposing the counter narrative	Emotional charged language to gain people's confidence	#ImportedHakoomatNaManzoor, #VoteKoIzzatDo
Hashtag Wars and Trend Manipulation	Public perception altered by controlled campaigns and by pushing certain hashtags on trending	Political crisis leads to artificial increase in hashtags usage.	#JusticeForPTI, #MaryamNawaz, #ShahbazSharif
Public Opinion Shaping and Polarization	Public opinion largely shaped by Twitter	Heated debate on social media platforms, divergence of opinion visible	#CorruptionMafia, #PakistanZindabad
Crisis Communication and Damage Control	During crisis situation, political parties use social media especially twitter for rapid response	Rebuttals, clarifications and coordinated efforts from official accounts of political parties as a counter measure	#TruthPrevails, #FakeNews, #JusticeForAll

The above data sets show the trend setting agenda used by political parties for political maneuvering and to oppose the narratives against them. By using certain hashtags and time based response, a public opinion is developed for a certain matter. Through this the political parties try to justify their ends while dismantling the narrative of the opposition. However, the limitations in the result still exist. As discussed above, bot accounts and artificially algorithms can alter results and change public perception. All the discussed themes come with certain hashtags and the medium to showcase them was Twitter (X).

Implications / Drawbacks of Digital Polls

With this, we now have to analyze the most important

section of the paper that deals with the implications of these digital polls. Similarly, the credibility of these polls can be questioned as they are digitally occurring, they might be maneuvered for a specific purpose or to promote specific agenda. Social media is being used in most of the cities across the world, including Moscow, Kyiv, Istanbul, Ankara, Cairo, Tripoli, Athens, Madrid, New York, Los Angeles, Hong Kong, and Ferguson, Missouri, to plan rallies and spark political protests (Zaheer, 2020). Moreover, there is a rising trend of people sharing disinformation on social, political, and violent issues as well as crises (Adil et al., 2021). In Pakistan, the policy oriented digital presence is becoming less visible as politicians are focused on personality driven politics. The domination of

hashtags digitally is the source of domination in political arena. Similarly, if we discussed the electoral proceeding and its linkages to Social media, it can be observed that the coverage of the electoral proceeding and its results were only discussed and debated at the main stream media. However, in the recent past that social media has become another battle ground for political discussion (Khan & Shah, [2022](#)).

With polarized society where difference of opinion is not much tolerated, discussion on sensitive political issues on digital platforms may be destructive and it can damage the social fabric of society. Unfortunately, this has happened in Pakistan. On one hand they can be misleading and comes with very limited sampling, on the other hand it can also be politically perilous. For instance, if the poll specifically deals with a certain situation in Pakistan politics, any user can take part in the poll regardless of its nationality. Also, the twitter (X) (Volyntseva, [2025](#)) polls limit the choices, which may not exceed than 4 numbers, making it hard for the audience to give answer exactly of their choice.

Conclusion

Digital polls have become one of the tools to access public opinion. Its increasing use for political purposes, especially in Global South marks the digital revolution. The participation of masses in these digital polls also describes their interest in political spheres. In doing so, it indicates the desire of the public to engage in democratic process so their political presence can bring change. These polls not only define public interests in them but also caution the political elite to revise their policies based on the results of the digital polls. However, it has been widely observed in the recent past that such platforms are more prone to political aggression rather than political discussion. The element of debate is like likely to happen and masses are mobilized easily for violence. While difference of opinion exists in political domain, a more nuanced approach would be to value the difference and reach to an agreement point through subtle political discussion rather than forcefully impose ones' view on another.

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