Attribute Inter-Media Agenda Setting of Political Actors During Election Time in Pakistan

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Abstract

The present study investigates the attribute agenda-setting of political actors in Pakistan during elections by social media and traditional media. X (formerly known as Twitter) was selected for social media, while Geo News and Dawn were selected for traditional media. For political actors, two mainstream politicians of Pakistan, Mr. Muhammad Nawaz Sharif and Mr. Imran Khan, were selected. Using agenda-setting as a theoretical model, the study investigated the second-level agenda-setting. The findings of the study indicated that social media influences the attribute agenda-setting of political actors more than traditional media. The findings of the study support the existing research which suggests that the attribute agenda of the political actors is being influenced by social media.

Key words: *Attribute agenda-setting, elections, political actors, Pakistan.*

Introduction

The democratic terrain of Pakistan had not experienced a steady growth/path in the first six decades since its independence in 1947. Pakistan's path to constitutional supremacy has been marked by repeated attacks on the constitution by the military junta. In the last seven decades, Pakistan has witnessed four military reigns, starting with General Ayub Khan (1958-1969), General Yahya Khan (1969-1971), General Zia-Ul-Haq (1979-1988) and General Pervez Musharraf (1999). -1988). 1999). 2008). Repeated military coups have prevented democracy from taking root among the population (Shah, 2014, Development and Cooperation, 2018). The restoration of civilian rule in 2008, after almost a decade of military rule, allowed parliamentary democracy to take root in the country. Thereafter, democracy in Pakistan became stronger and stronger. On July 25, 2018, around 104 million Pakistanis exercised their right to vote in the country's 11th general election. This is an unprecedented situation in the history of the country, since until then two democratically elected governments had been able to complete their mandate; The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) remained in power from 2008 to 2013 and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) from 2013 to 2018, although two prime ministers of both governments were sent home because the courts declared them disqualified. The 2018 elections paved the way for another civilian government to come to power, which boded well for the strengthening of democracy in a country that had repeatedly faced the threat of unconstitutional forces in the past (Behra, 2018). The present study delves in the attribution of

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political actors in 2028 elections particularly Imran Khan and Mr. Nawaz Sharif in social media and traditional media.

Literature Review

During the 1972 presidential elections, a follow up study was conducted, where Shaw and McCombs (1977) advanced their preliminary study of the agenda setting research to its second level. They theorized that in the first level agenda setting, news media could influence what we think about, whereas in second level agenda setting the media could also affect how we think about objects. Moreover, their findings also suggest that attribute agenda presented in the media can influence the public's attribute agenda. According to Shaw & McCombs, the transfer of salience from news media to the public is the core process of the first-level and second-level agenda setting. Though, second-level agenda setting is different from first-level agenda setting because it focuses on attribute salience of object, candidate etc., and the public's attribute agenda was considered as one of the important variables (Shaw & McCombs, 1977; McCombs, 1981). Lang and Lang's (1996) examined that the mass media give prominence to certain issues and likewise build the images of politicians. The second level agenda setting branches out to two more domains; the substantive attributes and the affective attributes (Jang, 2010). The substantive attribute agenda setting refers to the news features that determine the cognitive process of recognizing and structuring of news for the audience. This for instance consists of the profile, characteristics of the candidates, or the ideologies they represent. As for the affective aspect of this level, it refers to the emotional response intended on behalf of the audience. It consists of the side presented of the candidates to be positive, neutral, or negative, as an image for the public to react (Jang, 2010).

Attributes are defined as a set of characteristics and qualities that help create a probable image of each object (McCombs et al. 2000, p. 79). Ghanem (1997) states that attributes are the set of images and points of view used by journalists and people to think about each object. Attribute agenda setting occurs when a particular topic is covered and the media emphasizes some of its attributes while downplaying or ignoring others, thereby influencing public perception of those topics. According to Takeshita (2005), agenda-setting attributes and framing effects provide the behavioral dimension of media effects. More specifically, the attribute agenda definition explains that when an object is given greater importance than certain attributes, this determines the individual's attitude toward that object.

A new domain of research has been introduced in the traditional agenda setting theory to expend its scope to address the question that who sets the media agenda. This new area of research is called inter-media agenda setting effects, or simply the agenda setting power of different media platforms on each other (McCombs and Bell, 1996). Danielian and Reese (1989) explained inter-media agenda setting as how different news media organizations influence the news agendas on each other. There have been various reasons provided in support of why news media are dependent on learning issue attention from each other. The three more prominent of them are as follows: The first argument put forth by Dearing and Rogers (1996) that professionals in the news industry tend to learn importance and priority of an issue from the other news media outlets when they are in a situation where they cannot maintain direct contact with their audience. The second argument is about indirect validity of the news. It occurs when the other media copy a medium's decision aimed at considering newsworthiness of an issue and then cover it. In doing so, the former's news selecting decision becomes validated indirectly. The third argument is that media markets do face an environment of competition. This leads to one medium likely embracing the decision taken by the peer media, especially when such a decision has gained popularity and goes on to benefit its taker (Mathes

& Pfetsch, 1991).

It is often seen that giants in the media industry hold sway on and influence the agenda setting of other media, thus bringing to the spotlight the term ''co-orientation'' for both economical and socio-psychological gains. Journalists tend to rely on the content circulating among different media outlets to help compile or polish their own reports as this reduces costs to a great extent and requires fewer resources. From a social-constructionist viewpoint, media persons are trained enough to know the newsworthiness of the news content, and thus develop the habit of keeping track of the events to be able to derive what to cover and what not. Nowadays, journalists have become well-versed in what story is to be covered on a particular day and what to be put off for another day, hence they have to deal with the question of noteworthiness on a daily basis, often implicitly (Beckers and Harder 2016; Chadwick 2013).

Professionally trained and abundantly socialized newsroom journalists always know the "news values" and can make particular judgments (Harcup and O'Neill 2016). However, these conclusions may still leave doubt and can be overturned by those calling the shots within one news organization. With the onslaught of social media, that is, the people becoming ever more informative and even going a step further in getting the grasp of what is happening around, journalists tend to be dependable on such means to keep developing their reports. That means a news item nowadays is not a finished product; it keeps developing to suit the tastes of audience, viewers and the readers. The journalists and the owners of media organizations are now at ease developing agendas and putting them forth for the public consumption. Media personnel, with the help of social media platforms, can polish their news items with the help video clips, making their stories more crisp, interesting and worthy of reading and viewing (Chadwick 2013).

Journalists, being the information gatekeepers with people "formerly known as the audience" (Rosen 2006), take much of the material needed to fine tune their reports from the content shared via the live blogs and other social media platforms. This makes the bloggers the co-producers of the news (Bruns and Highfield 2012). Once the journalists have developed their reports with the help of the social media inputs, they definitely tend to look out for the feedback from the audience to not only improve on their stories but also use it to develop the follow up stories (Beckers and Harder 2016).

Undoubtedly, the social media have provided ease of working to the journalists, who no longer have to go to the places to search for the story. If they want to cover a topic or an event they just float a piece of it on the social media platforms, and the rest is done by the latter. Eventually, helped by a variety of information they develop the full article. This varied information can be in the form of text, image or video clip (Hermida et al. 2014). Since this news reporting can be done while sitting in a newsroom or any other place away from the place of event, it saves the journalists from the hassle of travelling to the events with financial costs involved. This dependence on news websites, blogs and other forms of social media means the journalists have a round-the-clock liaison with the sources of information they need to accomplish their topics. This ''the now'' and 'immediacy' phenomenon has become so popular in most parts of the world that it has, to a great extent, overshadowed the importance of 24/7 Cable News Networks in the big markets like that of the United States and the United Kingdom. However, smaller media markets in the Western democracies have not been that forthcoming to such initiatives (Cushion 2010). This new form of affordable-to-all digital revolution with immediacy at its core has influenced both the journalists and the news organizations to the extent that they now consider it the production norm (Buhl et al. 2016). And, the consumers also attach great expectations to it (Thurman and Walters 2013).

Zaheer et al (2024) argues that social media forums/ online media forum are very helpful in removing communication barriers. Most research in inter-media agenda settings has dealt with politics and the political power of news media. Though, a few studies have also investigated the role of political advertising in inter-media agenda setting. During the 1990 Texas gubernatorial elections, scholars found that the election coverage agenda of the newspapers and television news programs was influenced by the political advertising. The findings presented that the political advertising influenced the coverage agenda of the newspaper and television.

Wu et al. (2013) analysed the inter-media agenda setting influence of blogs on mainstream media after a tragic train accident in China in 2011. The finding suggested that online media (i.e blogs) influenced the agendas of both the television and newspaper. In another study in Austria, scholars found that the influence of online news media influenced the issue agendas of tabloid media (Vonbun et al, 2016). Groshek (2013) conducted a study to examine the most prominent issue agendas on CNN, the New York Times, Facebook and X, and their findings suggested that issues agenda on X was quite different from the others. The CNN, the New York Time, and Facebook indexed culture, politics, crime and business as the most salient topics, whereas the dominating topics on X were culture oddities, sports, and media. Social media online forum influence empowerment of all masses including persons with disabilities as indicated in of study Zaheer et al, 2021)

Theory
The uses agenda setting used as a theoretical model for the study. The agenda-setting comprises two levels. The first level of agenda setting examines the salience of objects, issues, candidates, public figures, and organizations, whereas the second level agenda setting is about the attribute salience of those objects. A complete and comprehensive examination of the attitudinal outcomes of agenda-setting is highlighted in the second-level of research (McCombs, 2004). For this research study of the inter-media agenda setting effects between social media and mainstream traditional media, the employability of agenda setting theory seems working and appropriate in identifying the agenda and attribute agenda issues. As the researcher has and is investigating the salience of issue agendas and attributes, agenda setting theory is very much relevant to this dissertation because Kiousis (2004) denotes that measuring salience is valuable for inter-media agenda setting research at different levels and through different media platforms.

RQ1: What would be the distribution of attributes (of stakeholders) across selected media platforms during Elections 2018?

H-1 There would be agenda setting influence of X attribute agenda coverage by Social Media will influence the coverage of traditional media (Geo News & Dawn) during the selected time frame

Method
This dissertation examines the inter-media agenda setting effects between social and traditional media during political and strategic issues in Pakistan. To assess inter-media agenda setting effects, this study selected two events; general elections 2018 and post-Pulwama attack crisis. The research study investigates inter-media agenda setting influence of X, TV Channel and newspaper for both, at first level agenda setting (object/issue) and second level agenda setting (attributes).

The research technique of content analysis is used to draw replicable and valid conclusions from texts in the context of their use. Additionally, it provides many benefits to

researchers because it is unobtrusive, context-sensitive, and can help the researcher process large amounts of data. Krippendorff (2004).

This study sampled national newspapers, Daily Dawn, Geo News and X using purposive sampling technique which is a non-probability sampling method (Baxter & Babble, 2004). The purposive sampling technique is considered relevant to research on interim agenda setting. The researchers say this sampling technique allows the researcher to choose between media types that are hypothesized and shown in previous studies to play a role in agenda setting. In many studies of the effects of multimedia agenda-setting in the United States, researchers have deliberately selected elite newspapers such as the New York Times to measure their impact on print, broadcast, and online media (Sweester , Golan, Wanta, 2008).

Attributes of the political actors
McCombs (2000) found that attribute dimensions of candidates' characteristics are generally categorised into five substantive attributes. In this dissertation, these broader categories are adopted and refined to the Pakistani context. For example, political ideologies like democratic and populist are important attributes in Pakistani politics. Similarly, in strategic issues, courageous is a salient attribute. Therefore, these categories were incorporated into the categorization scheme for more thorough analysis. For examining attribute agenda setting, the researcher selected the heads of top three mainstream parties of Pakistan: Imran Khan, Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf, and Mian Mohammad Nawaz Sharif, Pakistan Muslim League. A total of six substantive attributes of the selected leaders were identified and coded. These include corrupt, change, popular, leadership, populist and democratic. The stakeholders were identified corrupt when a tweet and news covered their dishonesty, ill-amassed wealth, public fraud in accusation of wealth and involvement of their family or friend in illegal earning of money. Change Attribute: X post and news stories portraying candidates expressing ambition to turn the page, change agent, carving a new path, promising new vistas of opportunity and presenting new ideas, etc. The popular attribute included tweets and news describing the stakeholders being liked, followed and admired for their work. Leadership attribute: Tweets and news stories indicating candidates' willingness to take charge, showing leadership role and qualities, etc. Populist attribute referrers to a stakeholder's association with the establishment, particularly the military establishment. Finally, the democratic attribute of a stakeholder covered topics like when he is being referred to as the promoter of democratic values, political participation, voicing for strengthening of democratic institutions etc. To examine the inter-media agenda-setting effects of X, the newspaper and the TV channel during the Pakistan's general elections 2018, the posts and stories of selected media were collected from July 2, 2018 to July 25, 2018 before the polls with one-day time lag.

Cross-lagged correlations.
After collecting the data, the researcher tested the hypothesis by cross-lagged correlations model to analyse the relationship among the media agendas established in the content analysis. For investigating inter-media agenda setting influence, the scholars have used the cross-correlation method, or cross-lagged panel correlation (Dunn, 2005; Roberts et al. 1994; Sweetser, Golan & Wanta, 2008. Rosenthal & Rosnow (2008) denote that the cross-lagged correlation model was developed for evaluating competing causal hypotheses.

Cross-lagged correlation is measurement that allows the researcher to track the movement of two variables, X and Y, at two or more different times like 1 and 2 separated by the adequate time lag. It is proposed that variable 1 (X) at Time1 (X1) is believed to have effect on variable Y at Time2 (Y2) and conversely variable Y at Time1 (Y1) has affected Variable X at Time2 (X2). As a result of this correlation, three sets of correlations with two pairs each

correlation are produced (See Figure 4.1). As shown in the figure, the set of synchronous correlations is correlations between variable X and variable Y which is measured at the parallel times (PX1Y1 and PX2Y2). The correlation between the same variables at two different times (PX1X2 and PY1Y2) is called the autocorrelation. Conversely, cross-lagged correlation is the correlation between variable (x) and Variable (Y) at different times (PX1Y2 and PY1X2) (Shadish, Cook, Campbell, 2002). Synchronous correlations and auto-correlations are used to determine the Rozelle-Campbell baseline value by using the Rozelle-Campbell baseline formula [(PX1Y1 + PX2Y2)/2]{[(PX1X2)2 + (PY1Y2)2]/2}. The rationale behind cross-lagged correlation analysis is presented as; if the hypothesis says that the variable X causes an effect to variable Y then first the correlation between variable X (cause) at Time1 and variable Y (the effect) at Time2 (PX1Y2) is greater than from the reverse cross-lagged correlations between Y at Time1 and X at Time2 (PY1X2), and second the Rozelle-Campbell baseline value (RCB) is less than the PX1Y2 but higher than (PY1X2). Once these conditions (PX1Y2>PY1X2 and PX1Y2>RCB) are fulfilled, then it can be said that variable X at Time1 has influenced the variable Y at Time2 and no reverse correlation found (Campbell & Kenny, 1999; Ragas, 2010; Rosenthal, 2015).

Results

Results of cross-lagged correlations comparison of attribute agenda setting of the stakeholders between social media (i.e X) and traditional media (i.e Geo News and Daily Dawn) during elections 2018 in Pakistan. The study presents the findings of the stakeholders as:

Cross-Lagged Correlation Results of Imran's Attribute Agendas (Second Level) In General Elections 2018 In Pakistan
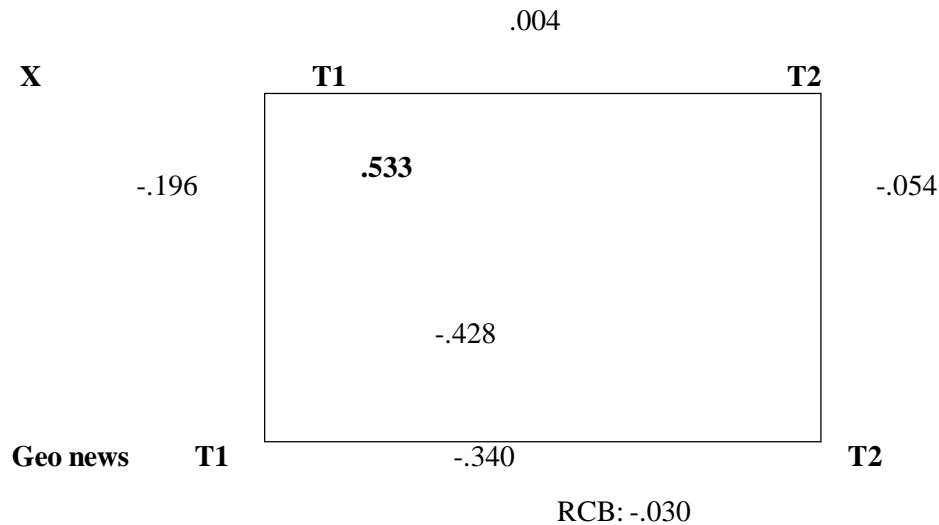

Figure 1 Cross-legged correlation results of Imran's substantive attributes in X and Geo news

H1- There would be agenda setting influence of X attribute agenda coverage by Social Media will influence the coverage of traditional media (Geo News & Dawn) during the selected time frame

Figure 1 summarizes the cross-lagged correlation result of Imran Khan's substantive attribute coverage in X and Geo News in Time1 and Time2 during the elections 2018 in Pakistan. The result finds a correlation of .533 between the X attribute agendas posted in Time1 and the Geo News attribute agenda broadcasted in Time2. Meanwhile, the reverse cross-lagged correlation result presents a negative correlation (-.428) between the Geo News attribute agenda coverage in Time1 and the X attribute agenda posts in Time2.
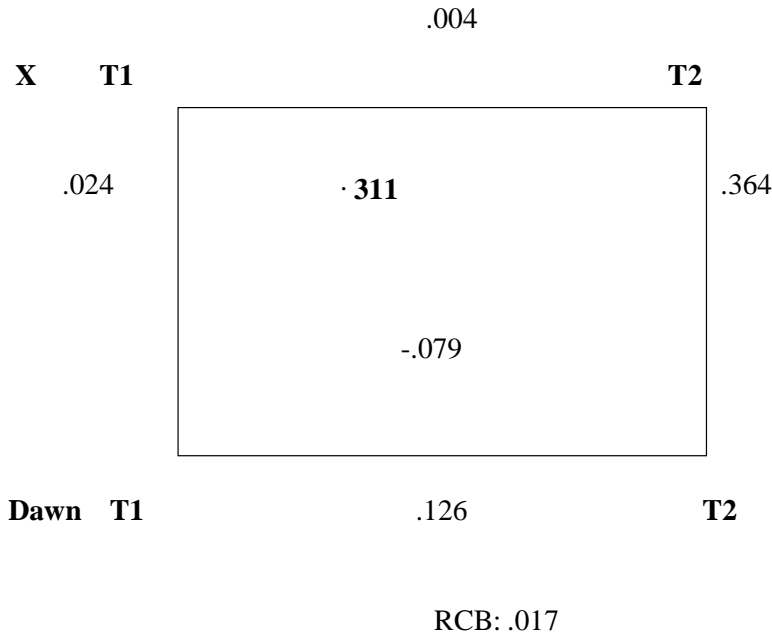
.004

X   T1   **T2**

.024   · **311**   .364

-.079

Dawn   T1   .126   **T2**

RCB: .017

Figure 2 Cross-legged correlation results of Imran's substantive attributes in X and Dawn

H-1 There would be agenda setting influence of X attribute agenda coverage by Social Media will influence the coverage of traditional media (Geo News & Dawn) during the selected time frame

Figure 2 presents cross-lagged correlation results of Imran's substantive attribute agenda coverage in X and Dawn in Time1 and Time2 during elections 2018 in Pakistan. The result offers a correlation of .311 between the attribute agenda coverage of X in Time1 and Dawn coverage of attribute agenda in Time2. Conversely, the reverse correlation of -.079 shows a negative relationship between the Dawn attribute agenda in Time1 and the X coverage of attribute agenda in Time2. Meanwhile, the Rosselle-Campbell baseline value is .017, which is less than the correlation between X at Time1 and Dawn at Time2, but greater than the reverse correlation. Hence, the Dawn coverage of Imran's attribute influenced the X agenda during this time span, and subsequently supporting the hypothesis.

The study presented the cross-lagged correlation comparison of Nawaz attribute agendas between social (X) and traditional media (Geo TV, Dawn) during elections 2018.
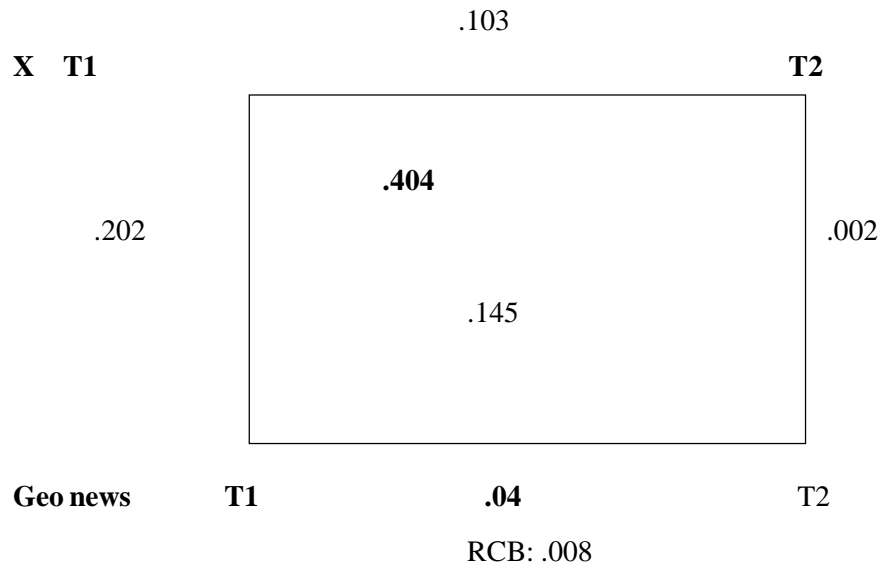
.103

X   T1   **T2**

.404

.202   .002

.145

Geo news   T1   **.04**   T2

RCB: .008

Figure 3 Cross-legged correlation results of Nawaz's substantive attributes in X and Geo News

H1- There would be agenda setting influence of X attribute agenda coverage by Social Media will influence the coverage of traditional media (Geo News & Dawn) during the selected time frame

Figure 3 offers cross-lagged comparison regarding inter-media agenda setting influence between the X attributes agenda and the Geo News attribute agenda of Nawaz Sharif during elections in Pakistan in Time1 and Time2. The cross-lagged correlation results illustrate a correlation of .404 found between the X attributes in Time1 and the Geo News agenda attribute in Time2. Meanwhile, the correlation of .145 found between the attribute agendas of Geo News at Time1 and those in X at Time2. The results of both the correlations were above the Rozelle-Campbell baseline of .008. As the result of X correlation is greater than the reverse correlation, this provides an evidence that X influenced the Geo News attribute agenda during this time span, and the hypothesis is supported.
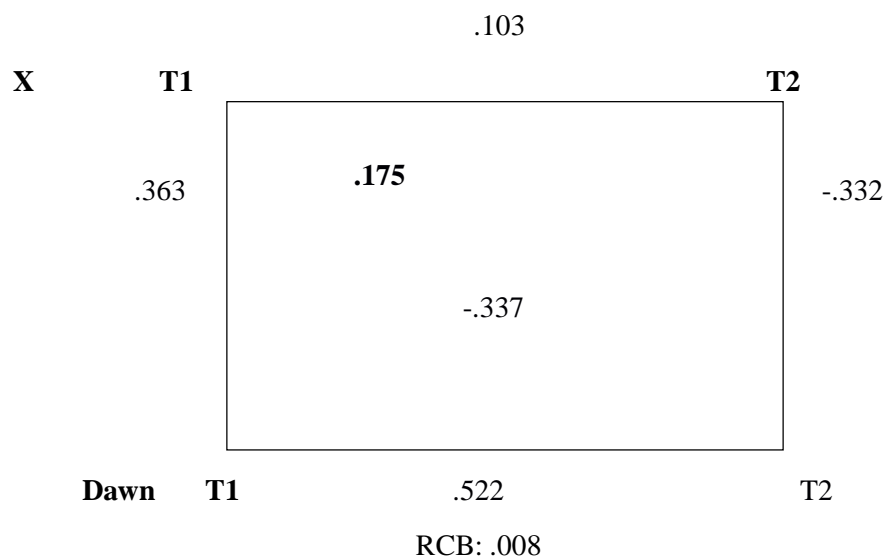
.103

X   T1   **T2**

.175

.363   -.332

-.337

Dawn   T1   .522   T2

RCB: .008

H- 1 There would be agenda setting influence of X attribute agenda coverage by Social Media will influence the coverage of traditional media (Geo News & Dawn) during the selected time frame

Figure 4 summaries result of the cross-lagged correlations of Nawaz's attribute agendas in the X posts and Dawn coverage in Time1 and Time2 during the elections 2018.

As the cross-lagged correlation presented in figure 4 indicates a correlation of .175 between the X attribute agendas posted in Time1 and the Dawn coverage of attribute agendas in Time2. Conversely, the reverse cross-lagged correlation result presents a negative correlation -.337 between the attribute agendas of Dawn in Time1 and those in X at Time2, while the Rozelle-Campbell baseline was .008. This result provides evidence that there is inter-media agenda-setting influence of the X attribute agendas at Time1 on the coverage of attribute issue agendas at Time2, which supports the hypothesis.

Discussion

The attributes agendas of key stakeholders (Imran&Nawaz) were also influenced by the X during elections 2018 and traditional media followed the attributes of the stakeholders posted on the X. These findings suggest that the politicians, political pundits and social media teams of major political heavily used the X for their political agendas. These findings suggest that the social media is becoming a key force during election related events and becoming a new powerful podium for political communication in Pakistan. The presence of political actors on the social media platforms has increased manifold which suggests that they feel the importance of social media platforms to galvanised support their agendas.

Limitations

As the study was not able to control the demographic characteristics of the X sample so there is likelihood that the X sample might have been little biased due to the over representing users with particular biases towards certain stakeholders who were investigated in the study. The dissertation is purely quantitative in nature and has only used content analysis. For better understanding of editorial judgment in traditional media and agenda setting power of social media users/actors, surveys and in depth interview with the editors and social media experts can offer insight about news selection process of the contents for social media and traditional media agendas.

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