

Analyzing Social Media And Traditional Media Coverage Of Elections 2018 In Pakistan

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Abstract

The study has been designed to investigate the social media and traditional media coverage of elections 2018 in Pakistan. For social media, X (formerly Known as Twitter)) was selected and for traditional media, Geo News and Dawn Newspaper were selected. The media coverage of the selected media was examined from 2nd July 2018 to 25th July 2018 in four equal time spans. The study uses agenda setting as a theoretical frame. Using content analysis, the study addresses research questions regarding first-level agenda-setting. The results indicated that the issue agendas of X, Geo News, and Dawn were similar during the elections 2018 in Pakistan.

Keywords: Social media; traditional Media, elections 2018; Pakistan; First-level agenda-setting; content analysis.

Introduction

This study is designed to examine the role of social media and traditional news media in agenda setting while covering political issues (elections, 2018) in Pakistan. Based on content analysis, this study analyzes the prominent agenda coverage of X (formerly Known as Twitter), Geo News TV and Dawn newspaper during the 2018 Pakistani general elections. Pakistan's path to constitutional supremacy was accompanied by repeated undermining of 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 (1999-2008). Repeated military takeovers have prevented democracy from gaining a foothold among the population. (Shah, 2014; Development and Cooperation, 2018; Hussain et al. 2021; Hussain et al. 2023).

After almost a decade of military rule in Pakistan, parliamentary democracy was restored through elections in 2008. From then on, 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 country's history, as two democratically elected governments were able to fulfill 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 in both governments two prime ministers were sent home because the courts declared them disqualified had. The 2018 elections paved the way for another civilian government to come to power, which boded well for the

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strengthening of democracy in a country that has been threatened by unconstitutional forces in the past (Behra, 2018).

The 2018 elections held immense significance for the country's democratic process, civil-military relations and showed great significance for the development and progress of the country. At the regional level, a stable government in Islamabad is essential for the Afghan peace process and the incident (Dawn, 2018). Although traditional print and electronic media remained very active players in Pakistan's election coverage, the use of social media during the 2018 elections was common among politicians, political pundits, journalists, and journalists. This new trend has added a new dimension to the country's political landscape and has become an essential factor during political campaigns. During the 2018 elections, social media sites were widely used to disseminate party platforms, political news, propaganda against rivals, live broadcasts of public rallies, speeches, messages from leaders and calls for support (The News, 2018).

Literature review

This original idea of Lippmann about the power of media was supported in the early 20th century when scientists introduced the idea of the theory of hypodermic effects. This hypothesis states that the persuasive effect of media would be immediate, like a bullet or a needle, when the content reaches the target audience (Lasswell, 1930, 1935). Later studies showed that the origins of the magic bullet concept were not used by those to whom they were attributed and did not accurately describe early researchers' theories of media effects, which were in fact much more nuanced and sophisticated (Chaffee and Hochheimer, 1982; Bineham, 1988; Sproule, 1989; Power et al., 2002; Lubken, 2008). However, the concept is still used because it represents important reasoning and allows researchers to represent another phase of research, namely the "minimal effects" in the 1950s and 1960s. The old narrative that the media had a large power was rejected by Paul Lazarsfeld and his colleagues at Columbia University and introduced a whole new area of research of limited effects (De Fleur & Dennis, 1981).

A new generation of researchers called the idea of minimal effects unfair and dismissive and spoke of a new direction in media effects. In this third phase, researchers introduced new theories, improved measurement tools, and better methodological concepts to demonstrate meaningful impacts and justify the discipline itself.

Klapper's idea of minimal effects was criticized when researchers uncovered various "not so minimal effects" (Iyengar et al. 1982), or noted that the media may fail to tell people what to think, but that they do very well at telling people what to think (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The central concept of agenda-setting research, which McCombs himself repeatedly traced to Lippmann's 1922 work "Public Opinion," often citing the idea that the media uses "an image in our minds" as a source of inspiration and appropriate representation. Explanation of the problem construct media agenda (McCombs, Escobar_Lopez & Llamas, 2000; McComb 2004).

The first empirical study of the agenda-setting effect was conducted by McCombs and Shaw (1972) in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, during the 1968 presidential election. They hypothesized that "mass media groups set the agenda of any political campaign and influence the direction of attitudes toward political issues" (p. 177). Nevertheless, McCombs and Shaw's (1972) study of American media coverage and the local electorate in Chapel Hill on the eve of the 1968 American presidential election, later published in *Public Opinion Quarterly* in 1972, was undoubtedly the starting point of the study. The study conducted 100 interviews with undecided voters in the region over a two-week period and asked respondents a series of Gallup-style questions about "key issues as they see them." and "What are you

most worried about these days?" Responses were coded into 15 general problem categories. During the same two-week period, researchers also coded articles from local and national print media as well as NBC and CBS evening newscasts. A ranking correlation conducted between the audience and the media data sets was an "astonishing" 0.967 for topics coded as "important" elements in the media and 0.979 for minor elements in the media - a level of correlation that was definitely a factor. Behind the rush of research in this area that followed after 1972. Equally important, the 1968 study introduced the basic elements, definitions, and concepts of research design that later researchers studying the effects of setting an agenda (i.e., setting a first-level agenda).

Since publishing their groundbreaking work in 1972, researchers have examined the effects of agenda setting in various fields. The following year, Funkhouser (1973) conducted another study in the United States to examine the relationship between media coverage and people's perceptions of the importance of issues. Gallup polls were conducted asking people to identify the Most Important Issues (MIP). . Article frequency is considered in each issue published in *The Times*, *Newsweek* and *U.S. News* and a global media content report are published. The result of his study showed a strong correlation (0.78) between public opinions and media content. Agenda setting has two levels. The first level of agenda setting examines the meaning of objects, issues, candidates, public figures, and organizations, while the second level of agenda setting focuses on the meaning of the attributes of these objects (McCombs, 2004, Shahzad et al. 2020; Hussain, S., Shahzad, F. and Hussain, M. 2020; Rawan, B., Hussain, S. and Khurshid, A. (2018). The present study analyzes the establishment of the first level agenda during the 2018 elections in Pakistan.

Theoretical framework and Methodology

The study uses agenda setting as a theoretical framework to analyze first-level agenda setting in the 2018 elections in Pakistan. The first level-agenda setting specifically investigates the salience of the object/object. The study uses content analysis technique to analyze the data. According to Krippendorff (2004), the research technique of content analysis is used to draw reproducible and valid conclusions from texts in the context of their use. In addition, it offers many advantages to researchers as it is unobtrusive, context-sensitive and can help the researcher in managing large amounts of data. The content analysis method is often used in mass communication research. The persistent connection between agenda-setting research and content analysis dates back to the time of McCombs and Shaw's original Chapel Hill study (1972). A longitudinal study was conducted by Kim and colleagues in 2018 to examine the research methods used in agenda-setting research from 1972 to 2015, and they found that agenda-setting studies in a diary were primarily (41 .7%) used content analysis techniques.

This study analyzed the traditional media, *Daily Dawn*, *Geo News*, and social media X using a purposive sampling technique, which is a non-probability sampling method (Baxter & Babble, 2004). The targeted sampling technique is considered relevant for cross-media agenda-setting research. The researchers found that this sampling technique allows the researcher to select between these types of media, which have been hypothesized and demonstrated in previous studies to play a role in setting priorities. In many studies of cross-media agenda-setting effects in the United States, researchers have deliberately chosen an elite newspaper such as *The New York Times* to measure its agenda-setting effects across print, audiovisual, and online (Gilbert, Eyal, McCombs, and Nicholas, 1980; Mazur 1987, Wallsten 2007; Sweester, Golan, & Wanta, 2008).

Rationality of selection of media

The *Daily Dawn* newspaper was chosen because it enjoys greater credibility among its readers due to its content and objectivity. Founded in 1941, the newspaper is the most

respected and influential print media in the country. Over the years, it has undoubtedly achieved the status of the torchbearer of objective journalism in Pakistan.

Geo News TV is arguably Pakistan's largest and most watched television channel in 2018 (media logic, 2018).

X (formerly Known as Twitter) has experienced exceptional growth since its inception in general and in the last decade in particular, becoming a very popular social media platform for knowledge/information sharing, public opinion formation, etc. thanks to the ecology of hashtags. X has received significant attention in traditional news media, and almost all news media, whether print or electronic, have established a good presence on X (Maul, 2009). X, a real-time social media tool, was launched in 2006 and quickly gained popularity with 460 million users worldwide X (2022). Kaigwa (2017) points out that X is playing a larger role in online conversations through initiatives, movements and various hashtags. It enables the exchange of ideas on a global scale and inspires people around the world to engage in discussions relevant to their interests. It not only serves the public but is also of great importance to politicians, media managers and other professionals from different walks of life (Kim, Gonzenbach & Vargo, 2016).

Time span of elections 2018

Time span	X (formerly Known as Twitter)	Geo news TV	Dawn newspaper
Time1	July 2 nd – July 6 th 2018	July 2 nd – July 6 th 2018	July 3 rd –July 7 th 2018
Time2	July 8 th –July 12 th 2018	July 8 th –July 12 th 2018	July 9 th -July 13 th 2018
Time3	July 14 th –July 18 th 2018	July 14 th –July 18 th 2018	July 15 th - July 19 th 2018
Time4	July 20 th -July 24 th 2018	July 20 th -July 24 th 2018	July 21 st -July 25 th 2018

Results

This study examined the issue agenda coverage by X, Geo News and Dawn during elections 2028 in Pakistan. The data collection sample comprised of four equal time spans from 2nd July 2018 to 25th July 2018. The issues present in the content analyses of Geo TV, Daily Dawn and X included corruption, economy, elections conduct, terrorism, foreign policy, rigging, development, news units, civic issues and personal attack. According to the data, the most frequent issues across Geo News, Dawn and X were corruption, elections conduct, personal attack and rigging.

RQ1a: What would be the distribution of the topics across different time periods (Time1, Time2, Time3 and Time4) in the selected media platforms during elections 2018?

Table 1.1 presents elections issue agendas posted on X from Time1 and Time4 in Pakistan. The frequency of the posts was broadly consistent with n=1120 in Time1, n=1160 in Time2, n=1304 in Time3 and n=1030 in Time4. In X posts from Time1 to Time4, the post about elections conduct was the most covered issue with 35.0% in Time1, 25.9% in Time2, 31.7% in Time3 and 36.7% in Time4. The second most frequent topic of X during elections was rigging with 24.3% in Time1, 29.3% in Time2, 28.2% in Time3 and 21.6% in Time4. X post placed corruption topic as the third frequent topic during the elections in Pakistan.

Meanwhile, the issue of personal attack received similar coverage in the X posts from Time1 to Time4. The percentage of X posts about terrorism increased from 1.1% in Time1 to 10% in Time2, similar 8.3% in Time3 but dropped to 3.7 % in Time4. X posts coverage of

economy, foreign policy and new units was very sparse from Time1 to Time4 during elections 2018 in Pakistan.

Table 1.1 Issue agenda in X posts during elections 2018 in Pakistan

Issue	Time1 (n=1120)		Time2 (n=1160)		Time3 (n=1304)		Time4 (n=1030)	
	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%
Elections campaign Conduct	1	35.0	2	25.9	1	31.7	1	36.7
Rigging	2	24.3	1	29.3	2	28.2	2	21.6
Corruption	3	17.1	3	12.4	3	9.2	3	17.7
Personal attacks	4	9.3	6	9.0	4	8.6	4	10.1
Civic Issues	5	8.6	4	11.7	5	8.3	5	5.8
Developmen t	6	3.6	8	.7	6	3.4	8	1.7
Terrorism	7	1.1	5	10.0	5	8.3	6	3.7
Economy	8	.7	7	.7	8	.9	9	1.0
Foreign policy	9	.4	10	0	7	1.2	7	1.4
New Units	10	0.0	9	.3	9	0.0	10	.4

RQ1a: What would be the distribution of the topics across different time periods (Time1, Time2, Time3 and Time4) in the selected media platforms during elections 2018?

Table 1.2 offers the results of broadcast issue agenda of Geo News from Time1 to Time4 during elections in Pakistan. The total number of frequencies of the ten issues in Geo News was n=65 in Time1, n=92 in Time2, n=78 in Time3 and n=80 in Time4. The coverage of Geo News largely remains consistent during the elections from Time1 to Time4. In Table 1.2, important issues for Time1 to Time4 of Geo News were corruption, election campaigns and rigging. In contrast, economy and new units received the least coverage from Time1 and Time4.

Table 1.2 presents that news coverage of the rigging (30.8%), the elections campaign (24.6%) and the corruption (21.5%) were the most mentioned topics during Time1 and they remained the frequent topics in Time2, Time3 and Time4. The least covered issues in Time1 of Geo News were economy (3.1%) and terrorism 1.5%, though the news coverage about foreign policy, development and new unites was non-existent in Time1. Though, the

terrorism coverage rose from 1.5% in Time1 to 8.7% in Time2 further increased to 12.5% in Time3 but slightly decreased to 5.0% in Time4.

Meanwhile, civic issues coverage was 12.3% in Time1 that dropped to 5.4% in Time2, 6.4% in Time3 but plummeted to 0% in Time4. Geo News coverage of development and new unit topics was very sparse. Interestingly, Geo News coverage completely ignored the news agenda about foreign policy in its coverage during elections 2018 in Pakistan.

Table 1.2 Issue agenda in Geo News during elections 2018 in Pakistan

Issue	Time1 (n=65)		Time2 (n=92)		Time3 (n=78)		Time4 (n=80)	
	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%
Rigging	1	30.8	1	31.5	2	20.5	2	31.3
Elections campaign	2	24.6	3	14.1	1	25.6	1	35.0
Conduct								
Corruption	3	21.5	2	19.6	3	16.7	3	20.0
Civic Issues	4	12.3	5	5.4	5	6.4	7	0.0
Personal attacks	5	6.2	3	14.1	3	16.7	4	7.5
Economy	6	3.1	8	1.1	7	0.0	7	0.0
Terrorism	7	1.5	4	8.7	4	12.8	5	5.0
Development	8	0.0	6	3.3	6	1.3	7	0.0
New Units	8	0.0	7	2.2	7	0.0	6	1.3
Foreign policy	8	0.0	9	0.0	7	0.0	7	0.0

RQ1a: What would be the distribution of the topics across different time periods (Time1, Time2, Time3 and Time4) in the selected media platforms during elections 2018?

Table 1.3 summaries the results of issue agenda of the Dawn Newspaper from Time1 to Time4 during the elections in Pakistan. The total number mentioned for the ten issues in the Dawn newspaper was n=53 in Time1, n=51 in Time2, n=57 in Time3 and n=52 in Time4. The frequency of the Dawn newspaper largely remains consistent during the elections from Time1 to Time4. In Table 1-3, important issues for Time1 to Time4 of Dawn were corruption, election campaign and rigging. In contrast, economy, foreign policy, and personal attack topics received the least coverage across all time spans from Time1 and Time4.

Table 1.3 presents news coverage of the election campaign (41.5%), the rigging (26.4%) and the corruption (13.2%). They were the most mentioned topics during Time1 and remained present with persistent frequency in Time2, Time3 and Time4. The least covered issues in Time1 of Dawn were terrorism (5.7%), development (3.8%), new unites (1.9%),

whereas the news coverage about economy, foreign policy and personal attack was nonexistent in Time1, and similar trends were shown in Time2, Time3 and Time4. Likewise, the Dawn news coverage of terrorism and civic issues followed similar trends from Time1 to Time4.

Table 1.3 Issue agenda in Dawn Newspaper during elections 2018 in Pakistan

Issue	Time1 (n=53)		Time2 (n=51)		Time3 (n=57)		Time4 (n=52)	
	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%
Elections campaign	1	41.5	1	31.4	2	26.3	1	32.7
Conduct Rigging	2	26.4	2	23.5	1	35.1	2	21.2
Corruption	3	13.2	3	19.6	4	15.8	3	13.5
Civic Issues	4	6.0	5	3.9	5	1.8	4	5.8
Terrorism	5	5.7	4	11.8	3	17.5	5	3.8
Development	6	3.8	5	3.9	6	0	5	3.8
New Units	7	1.9	5	3.9	5	1.8	4	5.8
Economy	8	0.0	6	2.0	5	1.8	5	3.8
Personal attacks	8	0.0	7	0.0	6	0.0	6	7.7
Foreign policy	8	0.0	7	0.0	6	0.0	7	1.9

Discussion

The results indicate that during 2018 election in Pakistan X (formerly Known as Twitter) posts gave more coverage to issues like rigging, election campaigns, and corruption as compared to issues like foreign policy, development, civic issues etc. Similarity, Geo News gave more coverage to issues like rigging, elections campaigns, corruption and all other issue like civic issues, development, foreign policy etc. received least broadcast during election 2018 in the selected time spans. Dawn newspaper also followed the similar pattern in their coverage by giving more coverage to issues like rigging, election campaign rallies, corruption and gave the lowest coverage to civic issues, development, and foreign policy etc., issues during elections 2018 in the selected time frame. The coverage patterns were heavily influenced by the speeches and manifestos of the political parties. During the elections 2018, rigging and corruption issues were overwhelmingly highlighted by the major political parties

of Pakistan. The social media usage was more effectively used by political parties in the 2018 elections and that may have influenced the coverage patterns not only on X but also the traditional media outlets such as Dawn and Geo News. According to Khan, M. Z., Malik, N., & Batool, Z. (2021), even persons with disability also using social media as means of communication and note the trends on social media platform. According to Dubious and colleagues (2020), journalists are using social media more frequently to report by relying on social media posts and comments. The frequency of exclusive stories has decreased as journalists are looking for readily available content which will lead to the uniformity of agenda on social media and traditional media. The present study has also concluded that issue coverage in terms of topics was similar on both social media and traditional media.

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