

## THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TOWARDS POLITICAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN PAKISTAN: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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**ABSTRACT:** *Democracy is globally accepted form of government, especially when the technological development going to make this world a global village. Scholars think about the ideas of global democratic government, wherein short fall of democracy is ill-fated. However, political accountability is the essential characteristics of democracy and it cannot flourish without it. This paper adopts a qualitative approach by using qualitative content analysis and observation over social networking sites (SNS), in which democracy, accountability, and freedom of expression will extensively use. The extensive literature review indicates that social media facilitates the freedom of expression, provides opportunities of direct political participation, improves the electoral process and increase political accountability in authoritarian countries and emerging democracies. However, an emerging democracy like Pakistan, where social media trend is up surging and accountability condition is destitute. It is highly justified to investigate the role of social media towards political accountability.*

**KEYWORDS:** Social Media, Political Accountability, Democracy, Freedom Of Expression, Pakistan.

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### INTRODUCTION

The democracy is a form of government that is globally accepted. It is evident from the fact that more than 165 countries of the world have democratic system. Though, functioning of the democracy is varied from country to country, whereas the economic and social stabilities significantly matters. Notwithstanding, the basic gist of the democracy is similar all over the world. The democracy protect the rights of the citizen, they have power of voting whereby select their leaders (politicians) to advocate their ideologies, promote citizen interest and country leads towards growth and development. Democratic government has an essential characteristic which is called political accountability. In democratic approach, it organize public power to make government accountable to general public. It goes as one with good governance, which concerns the workout of public power in the quest of the public good and equity for all (Gerven, 2005). When applied to democratic governments, then the political accountability means elected officials are accountable to the public of the country for following the rules of constitution, save public interest and deliver public services. According to democratic approach accountability happens when parliament is fully functional and elections process is freely and fair. These prerequisites require respect of freedom of expression, fair journalism, citizen raise voice and participate in political discourse.

The freedom of expression is critical to human rights, democracy and accountability. Indeed, the International Courts of Justice (ICJ) has been highlighted and recognized the role of freedom of expression. According to European Court of Human Rights, freedom of expression has critical role as under pinning democracy also been admitted by the European Court of Human Rights. Freedom of expression is a basic condition for the development of every man and constitutes essential fundamental of a democratic society (ECHR, 1976). By practicing

freedom of expression media persons play their watch dog's role and disclose the abuse of power in different sectors. Ironically, freedom of expression is not exercised or allows to exercise by the government and other pressure groups. Though, this phenomenon is passing through global crises but third world countries like Pakistan is more victimized. Pakistan is the 4th dangerous country in the world for journalists (AFP, 2016).

As taking the brief historical background of Pakistan, since inception in 1947, there is no stable democratic system established. Military interventions continuously damaged the democratic system. Military dictators wanted to prolong their tenure so they give selective accountability. Most probably military personnel and judiciary enjoyed immunity from accountability. After 1970 there is no example of free and fair elections. A culture of salience has been build no voice and demand accountability (Rasool, 2012). The irony behind is insufficient legislation that support freedom of expression voice and accountability directly by public. Few clauses are present in the constitution that address the freedom of speech. Although in recent past a right to information act has been passed but it is not functional yet. Subsequently, another bill approved by National Assembly namely electronic crime prevention bill. According to critics it is another effort to suppress the freedom of expression in Pakistan. Thus legislation regarding freedom of expression unfavourable to promote voice and accountability (Khan, 2016).

However, the countries like Pakistan where accountability is deficient and no freedom of expression (House, 2016). A ray of hope is social media that has been played an anecdotal role in authoritarian countries like Egypt (Alkazemi & Wanta, 2015), Libya, and Tunisia (Varnali & vigorous factors to bring accountability and register their expressions that finally lead to a social change as ousting Hossain Mubarak and end of dictatorship in Tunisia and conduct first democratic elections. In contemporary politics, it got a status of fifth estate (Dutton, 2015). However, social media is a surging trend in Pakistani political discourse since 2010 (Abid, 2012). It has been observed that social media tremendously penetrating and getting popularity among politician's, media persons and general public. It is witnessed several times at different events since 2005. These events are: the earthquake that hit the northern areas of Pakistan in October 2005; the assassination of ex-Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto on 27th December 2007; the deposing and then restoration of the Chief Justice of Pakistan in March 2007 and March 2009 respectively; 2013 elections; Azadi march 2014; 126 day Dharna 2014 and panama papers 2016. These events are chosen as one is a sudden calamity affecting the people of the country. All these events saw a reaction from the Pakistani people be it on the streets or on social media sites (Khan & Shahid, 2010). It is evident from the above instances, whenever any event ignite the public emotions they choose social media for catharses. Though, empirically social media is working but there is lack of studies that analyze its role (Arif, 2014).

## **Background**

*“Social Media is last standing whistle blower after all accountability institutions of Pakistan have compromised under vested interest or competence” (Jawad,2017).*

It was the year 1995 when social media made its debut in Pakistan. Although, according to pakwired.com (2018) Pakistan is ranked 6th position in south Asian countries and 27th in terms of internet usage globally. Pakistan has blessed with the 67% of youth bulge and social media applications especially Facebook and Twitter are most popular among the youth bulge of Pakistan. It is imperative to note that Pakistan has significant penetration rate 15.9% and Pakistan cross the landmark of 44.6 million internet users (Ahmad, 2018). However, only educated people can benefited with social media due to the supremacy of English language

over it. Thus, the literacy rate and social media usage have a significant relationship but conversely penetration rate of internet users are double than the enrolment in higher education (Arif, 2010).

However, social media brings revolution in communication means as well as it emerge as a big political power worldwide. Although in Pakistani political landscape, potential of social media was first realized by former Pervez Musharraf. He massively followed by public, he got 454,016 likes. This make him confident and decide to come back in Pakistan and take part in active politics. To date the biggest popular figure on social media is Chairman Tehreek-e- Insaf, Imran Khan. He is a chairperson of third leading party in parliament and considered the real opposition leader. He has eight million above followers on Facebook ([facebook.com/ImranKhanOfficial/](https://facebook.com/ImranKhanOfficial/), 2018) and his twitter account has 7.8 million followers ([twitter.com/ImranKhanPTI](https://twitter.com/ImranKhanPTI), 2018). In addition to the political leader's personal social media accounts, all major political parties (PML-N, PPP and PTI) establish their social media cells after 2013 general elections to support their representative's point of view and propagate their vision and mission (Aamir, 2016). However, it is also argued that political parties used their media cells to defame the other political parties. Despite both facts, it is evident that sixty percent of voter's turnout was recorded in 2013 general elections. In this regard, a survey claimed that majority of the increased numbers belonged to the class that breath with the social media updates (Hassan, 2013). However, it is pertinent to note that, voter's turnout is a one determinant of political accountability (Bond, et al., 2012).

## LITERATURE

A plethora of scholars take social media under cognizance but there is no single role that runs through the literature. A group of scholar discuss its general role such as in education, health, marketing however another set of researchers remain contextual to its political roles such as political expression, participation, collective action, electoral campaigning, policy making (Newman, 2017, Gil de Zúñiga and Valenzuela, 2012, Tess, 2013, DiGrazia, McKelvey, Bollen & Rojas, 2013). Though overall research can be categorized into following areas of research.

In first two areas scholars concentrated on impacts of internet usage and effects on individuals behavior (Dimitrova et al. 2014). These studies are about democratic behaviors such as political participation, political knowledge and civic engagement (Bakker and De Vreese 2011). However, some of them support internet usage and optimistic about political discussions over social media. According to them, discussions over social media bridging the gap between members and non-members and yield equalization by aiding non formal expression that leads to participation (Vaccari and Valeriani 2016).

Contrarily, other studies not in line with these implications rather demonstrating opposite results. These scholars specify that internet usage have no effects on political knowledge and participation. They even relate that democratic satisfaction and governmental trust decreases where in computer usage is high (Im et al. 2014). This dichotomy between optimism and pessimism run throughout the literature.

On the other hand, various scholars take social media and collective action under cognizance, such as occupy Wall Street movement, Arab spring, and indigenous movements. It was earlier

impression that social networking sites in relation to collective action and political protest are effective in western countries but this conception proved false after Arab spring. Studies implications showing that main reason behind popularity of online protest is the low cost and spontaneity of social networking sites (Bastos et al.2015; Tarrow, S. 2014).

Moreover, researchers took a step forward and attempt to elaborate a link between collective actions that leads to political protest and government responsiveness. But again response was mixed some studies indicate that responsiveness occur and some evidences shows that online political protest mainly ignored (Dekker and Bekkers 2015).

Third and fourth areas of research focused on electoral campaigning and public opinion, wherein these studies electoral online line campaigns are considered. Thereby studies compared the e-campaigns vs traditional campaigns and attempt to stab out which one are more effective for election winning (Ceron and d'Adda 2018).Furthermore, these studies investigate the policy preferences and political ideologies of political actors (Ceron 2017). Lastly, public opinion that are published on social networking sites in the form of comments and posts by the active online members. They express their emotions and attitudes over social media and that are measured by machine learning and survey polls (Ceron et al 2018). In this case, scholars argue that public opinion over social media can be supplemented by survey data so that triangulation of both approaches leads towards better outcomes.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In choosing appropriate methods, researchers are presented with a number of challenges. Researchers can adopt a variety of fundamentally different strategies to generate new knowledge. As far as this research is concerned, it has applied qualitative content analysis. Secondary data sources such as journal articles, online websites, social networking sites used for analysis.

### **Social Media & Pakistani Perspective**

Social media is widely popular in Pakistan, especially in youth use of social sites Facebook and Twitter are quite common (Zain-ul-Abideen, 2017). It can be argued that it becomes the part and parcel of our daily lives. It provides more option to acquire information about every aspect of life. Latest studies embracing social media as an authentic source of news. And there is a great scope and opportunity for online news websites and social media plates forms of political parties to run their political campaigns (Zulqarnain & Hassan, 2017). On the same note, implications of study acknowledge that Facebook is playing a very effective role in politics of Pakistan. Social media is challenging the traditional pattern of politics as an important forum of communication. Moreover, it is a disseminator of information and facilitator of political discussions. It is also expected that Pakistanis social media will be a very important agent of change in near future (Ali & Jan, 2013).

Rahman (2012) opined that internet turning Pakistanis towards sharing their opinions. In this regard, local citizen journalism portals and independent bloggers gave a chance to Pakistanis to access internet and have a chance to their voices heard. To promote citizen journalism, "Hosh media" is such effort by Sahar Habib Ghazi. It is manifested that social media strengthen the societies and play a complimentary role with traditional media not rivalry. Here is pertinent to

note that social media and latest technologies gave a tremendous boost to citizen journalism which is a requirement of modern day societies (Riaz, 2011).

Moreover, media is working as a source of empowering citizens in politics of Pakistan. In politics, influence of media including Press, Television, Radio and Internet to shape the youth's political opinion is anecdotal. Inferences of study manifest that media play an influential role to roll out the political opinion (Rehman, Raza, Ahmed, Zafer & Shahzad, 2013). Likewise, in recent past (2016), a study was conducted to investigate the relationship between the social media and citizen participation. In this study citizen participation means the social media as a tool empower the citizen to generate their own content, express their views and regular use of social media applications for political purposes. A survey method is used to measure the political participation among university students on demographic basis such as gender and age. The implications of study demonstrated that use of social media is greater among boys for political purposes relative to their girl's fellows. However, content credibility is higher on face book contrary to traditional media.

In this regard, an event was held in Islamabad under United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) focused on the theme, how technology can increase voice and citizen engagement. In this event digital strategist, innovation and technology directors and country director of UNDP participated and all share their views how social media can be used, (Dawn, 2014), citizen inputs are regularly incorporated in policy making process, development and services delivery. A system is developed to improve the government public interface.

Contrarily, Dr Jaffery and experts from MIT tried to engage people, government officials and political leaders for improving service delivery. But that model just only feasible in theory because there is high risk of failure in countries like Pakistan due to the opportunistic behavior ingrained in whole society (Marwat, 2016). However, Pankaj Mishra's argued that social media is changing Pakistan, it provides direct access of voters to approach their leader. While free campaigning on Facebook and other social media forums allowed candidates to avoid costs and confines of old media (Eijaz, 2013).

In this regard, a study had been done to investigate the use of social networks and political activism on the Internet by the students of three universities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi during the political crises for the last one year and the emergency imposed by the Government of Pakistan on November 3, 2007. The findings conclude that Internet use by the students promoted democracy, freedom of expression and greater awareness about their rights during the political crises in Pakistan. The survey method of research was used to collect data. The sample consisted of 420 students studying at the Quaid-e-Azam University Islamabad, Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi, and International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan. The questionnaire was sent to the students by email. The survey was administered through Survey Monkey website. The response rate was 72.23%. The study was a useful source of information about how the social networking tools have been influencing and changing communication channels in Pakistan (Shaheen, 2008).

Recently, another study investigates social media as a tool that allows people to create and share different ideas, information and pictures/videos. It is an online way of communication to develop interaction and collaboration among people. Thus, social media might be changing the attitude and behaviour of youth. It also spreads awareness among people by creating different online pages and accounts for sharing their agendas and information via these mediums. Role of social media in building the public perception is being analysed. The study also examines

the role of Facebook and Twitter in influencing political activism. It also intends to assess the level of empowerment due to awareness through social media. Survey method was used as a strategy to collect primary data. This study will enable us to understand the emerging role of social media in political activism and significant role of the online social media in political change (Farooq, 2016).

Similarly, a study conducted in Pakistan (Hussain, 2014) that investigate the social media a tool of transparency and good governance in Gilgit Baltistan. This study uses case study approach, collect data by participant observation, semi structured interviews and documents of chief secretary officer of Gilgit Baltistan. This study investigates different models of social media to enhance transparency and good governance. This study concludes that social media penetration enables the people and groups to disseminate information about corruption and politician's wrong doings and social media have a potential to create transparency that is prerequisite of accountability. Furthermore, this study imply that social media alone cannot do it alone there is need to future investigation about different cultural and social factors, public opinion surveys, or multiple case studies to analyse this phenomenon.

## CONCLUSION

Wholesomely, Pakistan literature is not substantially explained the social media role and its contribution towards political accountability. A few studies has been done in Pakistani perspective but literature is scattered and studies done so far with a limited scope. Though, plenty of studies done on social media internationally but most of the studies focused on electoral campaigns and political protest but everyday politics catches least no of scholar's attention. However, accountability through electoral process is very long procedure. Therefore, it is worthy to explore social media potential regarding political accountability. This paper is a minor endeavour to contribute in overall literature related to social media and political accountability and particularly in Pakistani context.

## Future Research

As far as future research is concerned, after reviewing extensive literature, the underpinning study find out that most of literature is based on electoral campaigns and their strategic pledges to win elections. However every politics is under studied area so future scholars must pay attention towards it. It is worthy to explore everyday politics thereby policy preferences of political party and influences of voters over them can be stab out. Moreover, electoral way of political accountability is long procedure rather social media conversation is a quickest way to discuss political graveness.

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