Discourse of Political Hate Speech on Twitter in Pakistan

Zunaira Shafiq

Department of English & Literary Studies, University of Management and Technology, Lahore
Email: zunaira.shafiq@umt.edu.pk

Abstract:

The purpose of this study is to offer a deeper understanding of political hate speech on social media by investigating e-political discourse. The data was based on the tweets before and after elections 2018 (held on July 25, 2018) from Twitter feeds of three Central Information Secretaries of three major Pakistani political parties. The selected texts were interpreted employing the Political Discourse Analysis approach. The analysis revealed several patterns (e.g., anti-deliberation, prejudice, and dehumanization) which were realized through the selected spokespersons' apparently strong language having an intention to sabotage their opponents. Moreover, the given data provided an insight into how the apparently plain political rhetoric is having implied negative connotations. This study provides reader/public an insight into the online political hate-mongering rhetoric while enabling them to decode the implied hatred in political discourse in general and online political discourse in particular.
Key Words: E-politics, Political Discourse Analysis, Political hate speech, Social media, Twitter. Discourse of PHS on Twitter

Introduction

Social media has paved the way to digital democracy by presenting an opportunity to all alike to render their opinion on local and global social and political issues (Hendriks, Duus & Ercan, 2016). Thus, now general masses have a presence too and they can voice their concerns on social media that provides them with numerous options in terms of multiple social networking sites to choose from. But when the political leaders use social media, there are multiple political motives at work: to amplify the party's visibility by significantly increasing its social media presence, social media mobilization, to have a dialogue with the voters (Soon & Samsudin, 2016). Thus, social media has been serving to achieve multiple political purposes. Similarly, now social media has started influencing Pakistani political arena in many ways by declaring, discussing and eventually molding political decisions (Abbasi, 2013). Apart from the role social media plays in political arena, the relationship of social media and hate speech is worth considering. Nowadays, the freedom of expression provided by digital media and the convenience of posting and sharing online content comes with its potential negative impacts. Mascaro and Goggins (2015) regarded social media responsible for promoting impulsive posting behavior because it requires almost no effort to get your message across and that's what promotes incivility among social media users. That being so, the age of twitter is also regarded as the age of impulse tweeting (Ott, 2017). Not only general masses but public and political figures also tend to giveaway their biased opinions and thereby receive backlash for sounding rude in some way. Hence, where there are countless pros of social media, it has certain cons too, and one of such drawbacks is cyber hate speech (Silva et al., 2016).

Hate speech is a broad term that covers many kinds of speech, but it can precisely be defined as any expression that is perceived to be as insolent or abusive due to certain characteristics like religion, gender, nationality or race. Hate speech covers not only intolerant verbal or written communication, but all forms of expression that may include arts, movies or gestures, etc (Gelber & McNamara, 2016; Rangel et al., 2021). Politicians are regarded the most frequent users of hate speech (Rugova et al., 2016). Political hate speech comprises of exclusionist, stigmatizing and

dehumanizing words against an individual or a group of individuals of another political party. In Pakistani context, political hate speech can easily be heard and seen on many instances. The political figures use inflammatory language and make highly personalized comments against their opponents to please certain kind of audience. The goal of politicians employing such hateful rhetoric is 'not to sound boring' (Essig, 2017). Hate speech can be offensive even without being a criminal offense, but still can actuate offline hate crimes (Mondal et al., 2018). Also, the intervention of social media seems to intensify the offline hatred being reflected in the online world. For instance, Imran Khan (Pakistan's PM), in an election rally, said "those going to welcome Nawaz Sharif (Pakistan's former PM accused of corruption) at Lahore airport are donkeys." Thus, Imran Khan was summoned by ECP for using foul language against his political opponents before elections when he addressed PML-N supporters as *Gadhay* (donkeys) and PPP supporters as *Lashen* (corpses) ("Imran Khan assures ECP," 2018). But since social media has no such restriction on hate speech, thus, this *gadhay*-narrative flowed through social media like anything. Then, we witnessed two disturbing instances of animal abuse as a consequence of the very political hate speech. A donkey was beaten to pulp in response to Imran Khan's hate speech when he called PMLN supporters as *Gandhay (*donkeys), and in response to that incident a dog was being wrapped in PTI's flag and was being shot thrice and then the emotionally distressing incident was also videoed by PMLN supporters ("Dog wrapped in political party flag," 2018). Hence, hate speech tends to yield grave consequences and the political leaders' choice of words to express disgust and contempt can have seriously disturbing contribution to social violence and aggression.

In the current age of digital media, e-Pakistani politics has been stirring up political cynicism ending up invigorating hate-filled rhetoric. On one hand, keyboard warriors are busy on social media making profane comments regarding personal lives of opposition party's representatives. On the other hand, political leaders address each other using derogatory titles and use aggressive language for other party's supporters as well. But in case of e-political hate speech, since politicians are public figures, they can't abuse or threaten like other people with unidentifiable ids on social media. Social media happens to be a stage where politicians are actors and are meant to perform according to the script they are being assigned with. Slogans, photos and hashtags are the props they use and audience is their supporter or opponent (Hendriks, Duus & Ercan, 2016). Thus, the political communication on social media is usually well thought out as compared to the language being used on traditional media because there they exhibit spontaneous discourse that might not be very thoughtful. Yet the online hate speech is more consequential as it stays online for long and gets viral quickly. Among other social media sites, Twitter is reportedly stoking extreme political hostility in Pakistan ("How social media is misused," 2018). Although Facebook is the most popular social media site with 30 million users across Pakistan, but Twitter was reported to witness the most violent and abusive language around elections 2018 ("More hate speech on Twitter," 2018). Hence, the relationship of hate speech with social media is worth considering because social media is becoming one of the reasons hate speech is proliferating (Awan, 2014). Furthermore, Pakistani political leaders are used to calling opponents names. For instance, Khawaja Asif tweeted likening Firdous Ashiq Awan to a 'dumper' ("Khawaja Asif calls Firdous," 2017, para.5). Consequently, general masses also tend to get into name-calling following their leaders' footsteps. It is also worth considering that, in the digital age, such derogatory titles given to political leaders often get viral in no time and sometimes become a permanent substitute for their actual name. Similarly, social media is flooded with such derogatory titles attributed to political leaders and their supporters. For instance, Imran Khan is often named as '*ladla'* (poppet), Maryam Aurangzeb (PML-N) as '*Daddu Charger'* (Frog-

Shapped Charger), and Nawaz Sharif as '*Mian Saanp'* (Mr. Snake) (instead of *Mian Sahab*) on social media. Hence, the e-political discourse in Pakistan seems getting insolent and inconsiderate. PTA (The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority) has already introduced social media censorship system according to which they've been forwarding the complaints (against hate speech, etc.) lodged by people to Facebook, etc. and thereby has taken down much blasphemic, anti-state and pornographic content, but the PTA chairman, in an interview to *The News,* admitted of not forwarding politically motivated requests (Waseem, 2018). Hence, political hate speech seems to have a way with social media. Besides, PEMRA has restricted hate speech on mainstream media but social media doesn't seem to curb hate speech as such. In addition, the political figures are the representatives of their party and ideology, and consequently their words have the power more than anyone's and are supposed to be more thoughtful. The youths especially tend to subconsciously follow their leaders. Our young generation growing around inflammatory and profane language can no way remain unaffected. Hence, hate speech happens to be a contemporary issue worth paying attention to, but the modern age of liberalism calls for freedom of speech that can easily be mistaken for the freedom to hate.

Purpose of the Study

The first and foremost goal of the study is to understand the linguistic patterns which perpetuate e-political HS as the online discourse is believed to be well-thought-out (Hendriks, Duus & Ercan, 2016). Moreover, social media is so intricately interwoven into everyone's life that it can't be kept from molding one's opinion or affecting one's language (Greenwood, Perrin & Duggan, 2016). Gainous and Wagner (2013) contended that Twitter is being used by the politicians to control the flow of political information and to encourage their followers to engage in it, consequently the followers being constantly exposed to hateful discourse on Twitter will be affected by it as well. Bilewicz and Soral (2020) rightly stated that while being constantly exposed to hateful expressions, people become insensitive to Hate Speech. Moreover, the group exposed to HS will be increasingly viewed as labels attached to them. Another potential outcome is that people can perceive HS as morally justified, a norm that's not discouraged especially in the case when it's used by political or religious leaders. Therefore, it's crucial to be conscious of both the implied negativity and explicit hate expressions in online political discourse because where the wise oratory of politicians can enlighten their followers; the derogatory discourse of political leaders will likewise be reflected in their followers' language. That being so, the study aims to give public/reader an insight into the contemporary e-PHS.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Underpinning

The procedure for analysis was derived from relevant existing theoretical work on Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) that analyzes the discursive aspect of political talk and also the political nature of discursive practice. Moreover, the prevalence of social media, in recent times, has influenced the political discourse, thereby changing the political landscape over the years (Leigh & Harding, 2011; Enli & Skogerbo, 2013; Blumler & Coleman, 2015; Fenton, 2016; Soon & Samsudin, 2016; Parker & Bozeman, 2018; Grimminger & Klinger, 2021). PDA helps to deconstruct the discursive dimensions of politics and reveals that political rhetoric (whether positive or negative, encouraging or demeaning) is nothing more than strategic use of language on the part of politicians who aim at molding public opinion by manipulating language. Hence, PDA can aptly interpret the online political HS that too is much strategic as compared to extempore media talks (van Dijk, 1997; Chilton, 2004; Al-Tahmazi, 2015).

Data Collection

Twitter was selected for collecting required data because of the way it facilitates political debate and represents politicians' ideology. Ott (2017) and Siegel et al. (2021) regarded Twitter as the staple among all social media sites while also declaring it the breeder of cyber-aggression and one of the reasons of growing intolerance on social media.

Sample

The sample was drawn from three Twitter accounts of Central Information Secretaries (Fawad Chaudhry, Maryam Aurangzeb and Maula Bakhsh Chandio) of three major Pakistani political parties (PTI, PMLN and PPP) respectively because of the role they play by voicing the party's ideology as the front-desk representative on social media and mainstream media alike. There are 182 political parties registered with Election Commission of Pakistan ("Political Parties in Pakistan," 2018). However, the aforementioned three parties have been selected because of the major role and contribution they have in shaping the face of Pakistani government as these three parties are the most popular among masses (Wu & Ali, 2020) (also see table 1). One thing worth-mentioning here is that the selected politicians no longer serve as information secretary, but they represented the party agenda as the party's elected spokespersons have a fixed rhetoric to repeat (Klüver, 2018).

Table 1: The selected parties

	Party Title (Abbreviation)	Ruling tenure	Ideology
1	Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI)	2018-till date	Pakistani nationalism, Populism, Inclusiveness and Islamic democracy
2	Pakistan Muslim League Noon (PMLN)	1990-1993 1997-1999 2013-2017	Conservatism, Pragmatism, and Pakistani nationalism
3	Pakistan People's Party (PPP)	1971 to 1973 1973 to 1977 1988-1990 1993-1996 2008-2013	Social democracy, and Liberalism

Time-frame

The tweets of a month before (24th June - 24th July, 2018) and a month after (26th July - 26th August, 2018) elections (held on July 25, 2018) were selected because it's the time around elections when emotions are heightened the most as the online newspaper *DAWN* reported that hate speech was embedded in political campaigning and was most pervasive on Twitter around Pakistani general elections, 2018 ("How social media is misused," 2018).

Nature of the Data

The data consisted of English, Urdu script, the mixture of English and Urdu, and a few images enveloped with text. Hence, the data were in the form of fragments, phrases and clauses, followed by hashtags, or solely hashtags at times. Of 188 selected Tweets, only 20% are in English, whereas 80% are in Urdu (see table 3). It is important to note that all the followers of the selected politicians can be regarded as literate as per 2017's Pakistan's literacy level entailing the ability to read and write ("Literacy rate in Pakistan," 2020). However, it is easier for the followers to understand Urdu unlike English which is not their second language.

Table 2: Number of selected tweets

Total number of tweets during the selected	Tweets selected on the basis of HS criterion

time-period	
370	188 (51%)

Table 3: Percentage of the types of language used

Total Selected Tweets	Tweets in English		Tweets in Urdu	
188	36	20%	152	80%

Tweets' Selection Criteria

Only those 188 tweets were selected in which the tweeter had targeted some other politician, political party, opponent's followers or an institution (National Accountancy Bureau, Election Commission of Pakistan, Pakistan Army, etc). The neutral tweets having nothing negative or critical (the tweets in which the tweeters were all praise for themselves or their party or had condemned some social issue (child rape cases or terrorist attacks) without holding anyone responsible) were not selected. Hence, the tweets were filtered on the basis of two parameters of PHS, i.e., 'criticism' and 'us vs. them dichotomy' (see table 4). Presence of either can act as an important predictor of PHS (Van Dijk, 1997; Kopytowska & Baider, 2017).

- 'Us vs. them dichotomy' translated into phrases like 'PTI did what our party would never do…', 'We are not dishonest like IK', etc. (also see examples. 1, 3, & 6)
- 'Direct criticism' translated into all kinds of abusive epithets and name-calling including 'loser', 'fraudulent' and comments on marital life failures of the addressee, etc. (also see examples. 2, 4 & 5, etc.)

After employing the two mentioned parameters, the selected tweets were further analyzed (c.f. table 5) for the emerging themes.

Table 4: Criteria of filtering the selected tweets

Basic Parameters	Nature	What it entails	Purpose
'Us' vs. 'Them' dichotomy	Mostly implicit	Othering Presence of one implies the presence of other.	To increase polarization
Direct criticism/name-calling	Mostly explicit	Encompasses threatening tweets, blaming, name-calling, epithets, etc.	To increase aggression

The tweets mentioned under each category (e.g., anti-deliberation, etc.) are only sample tweets. However, each category/theme was derived from and based on all the filtered tweets that could be grouped together as one theme.

Ethical Considerations

Since the selected politicians are public figures and their tweets are publicly available to all Twitter users, so it was deemed ethically acceptable to use their tweets as data to analyze (cf. Markham and the AoIR ethics working committee, 2012). Moreover, the researcher remained unbiased ensuring complete impartiality while collecting data and didn't let the political affiliations cloud her judgment while analyzing data by employing PDA as an established theoretical framework. The study intended to neither degrade nor elevate any particular politician or party. Also, the analyzed hate speech may tie into some broader and controversial debates but the very study interpreted it as stated by the tweeter and not according to the researcher's stance on these notions.

DATA ANALYSIS

The study analyzed Twitter feeds (tweets, retweets and hashtags) of the selected information sectaries in order to interpret all kinds of expression used by the politicians that are meant to express or incite hatred and anger against their opponents, their policy and followers. One hundred and eighty-eight examples were selected out of 370 tweets (cf. table 2) and 1-2 representative

examples were put under each theme accordingly. Most of the selected tweets were in Urdu, so they were first translated in English. The research was carried out through qualitative method by employing the Political Discourse Analysis approach. The basic process of data analysis was adapted from Ritchie et al. (2013) and was carried out on the similar lines (as illustrated in *figure.1*). Firstly, the selected examples were being coded for politicians' expression of aggression, contempt and disgust (c.f. 'codes' column in table. 5). An inductive approach was followed to develop the coding scheme by observing the themes emerging out of the selected texts. Then, the emerging themes were cataloged into eight major themes (see *figure.2*). Furthermore, the study briefly touched upon the context (political event that motivated language use) of tweets explicitly or implicitly referred to. Similarly, the co-text also helped to decode the political discourse. The strategic use/absence of pronouns, literary devices and techniques was also considered while analyzing the main nouns, verbs and subject of address.
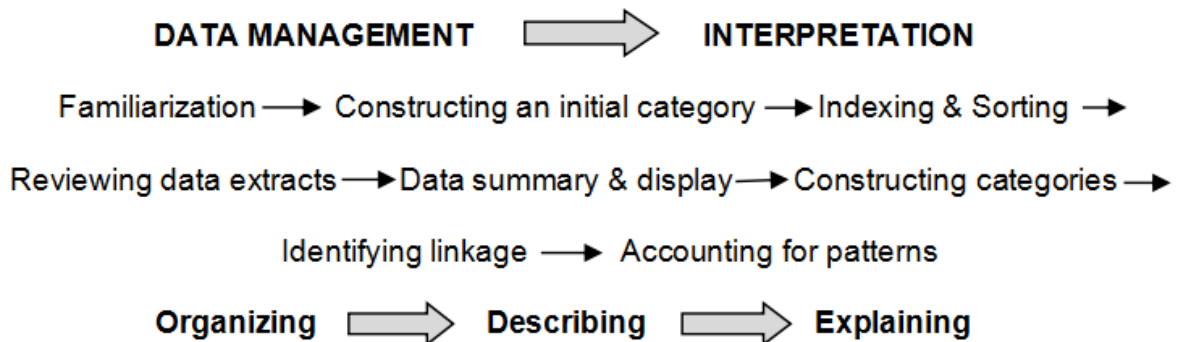
Figure 1. **The process of data analysis**

Kopytowska and Baider (2017) defined hate speech as discursive manifestation of 'othering' and maintained that the 'us vs. them' dichotomy helps to identify it. In case of PHS, both addresser and addressee have some political affiliations. On the similar note, hate speech is prevalent in political discourse and its proliferation in social media has increased manifolds (Bilewiczet al., 2017). Piazza (2020)'s study indicates that the intensity of PHS across all countries has heightened by 21.7% during 2000-2018. Bilewicz and Soral (2020) proposed that hate speech should be considered a large-scale societal issue that worsens living quality, heightens aggression, and negatively impacts the mental health and well-being of affectees. HS is a complex and subjective topic and machine learning approaches cannot detect the new and unseen hateful expressions (Modha et al., 2020). Detecting HS manually isn't difficult when there are explicit hate expressions. Hate key words like 'I hate, abhor, disgusting, etc.' are free of ambiguity (Mondal et al., 2018) and so are dehumanizing expressions and derogatory epithets, but where there sarcasm or implicit expressions are employed to convey contempt without sounding too harsh, then it becomes challenging to locate the HS. However, in absence of direct HS or criticism, the 'us' vs. 'them' dichotomy helps to identify the underlying theme of (political) hate speech (Van Dijk, 1997; Kopytowska, 2017). In other words, HS can simply be broken down into all kinds of anti-democratic and intolerant discourse and can range from minor inconsiderate remarks to intense cursing (Marincea & Chilin, 2016).

Table 5: The tweets of politicians exhibiting political hate speech

	Selected texts	Codes	Categories	Themes
1	We want PTI to get a chance, so that people themselves can see their	We vs PTI, Charms	Judging one's political opponents	Anti-deliberation

	charms.)			
2	Imran Khan should study history of Pakistani democracy before speaking.	Should study	Asserting oneself as the most eligible and righteous one	
3	If they think taking mobs to prison will cease Nawaz Sharif's trial then it can be carried out inside the prison as well. They're habitual of bringing the mobs. . .	They, Habitual, If-then	Stereotying opponents Maligning their reputation.	Stereotypic derogation
4	N-league and PTI are exactly the same! If once is the product of Zia so the other is that of Musharaf. These people cannot resolve public problems	Same, Product		
5	The language Parvez Khatak has used for people's party, suits you? You're Pakhtoon, is it Pakhtoon tradition? If that's so then Pakhtoon's are ashamed of you. When people were dying in KPK, Parvez Khatak was dancing at D-chowk.	Pakhtoon tradition	Playing the ethnic card Strategic political move	Prejudiced expressions
6	Mr. Khan, leaders like you are bought, not Sindhis.	Mr. Khan vs. Sindhis		
7	Imran Khan has climbed up the mountain shouting and beating the drums. Donkey brays loud but it cannot become a horse or an elephant. A scurrilous and liar cannot become a leader.	Shouting, Donkey brays	Likening political opponents to anything sub-human Offensive and derogatory comparisons	Dehumanization
8	What happened in Badeen is that the idols we sculpted have turned into gods. For the rest of their lives, doctor sahab and his wife will stay restless for the supremacy they enjoyed in people's	Idols, gods		

	party's era.			
9	PM House - get student tours started & open libraries within compound. Obliterating the use of such an official & politically relevant building is stupid. Also cleaners, maintenance, gate etc admin beyond personal butler hope some job security is ensured before firing everyone.	Stupid, Firing everyone	Criticizing political opponents Being critical regardless of the statement's factuality and rationality	Hostile censure
10	Prime Minister talked well about welfare, but didn't give an aftercourse	Aftercourse		
11	Great! You will beat the conman with a big margin. Best of luck!!!	Conman	Derogatory epithets Calling them names	Cursing
12	There's such a great gathering of opposition in Islamabad that it reminds of a flop movie's interval in cinema.	Great gathering, Flop movie	To sound less offensive and more skillful at being critical	Verbal Sneer
13	There comes the change in Jhelum. Imran Khan addressed an overwhelming crowd of empty chairs, trees and a few humans. Wow.)	Overwhelming crowd of empty chairs, trees and a few humans		
14	That's Mr. Khan's last election, his screams are like fluctuations of a dying oil lamp.	Fluctuations of a dying oil lamp	Metaphorical aggressive expressions to sound less offensive and emphasize the point being made	Figurative Hate Speech
15	Politicians planted in pots cannot solve people's problems	Politicians planted in pots		

Anti-deliberation

Janto-Petnehazi (2012) defined anti-deliberation as a form of negative interactivity that captures the attempts made to stop deliberation by making claims of exclusive right to judge others (politicians or political party in this case) or by making claims of exclusive sincerity for the self or other (political party or nation in this case) by dismissing other's statement or action as invaluable

and insincere. Another expression of anti-deliberation is questioning others' (politicians') intellect, goodwill and uprightness (as cited in Marincea & Chilin, 2016). The use of personal pronoun 'we' is quite meaningful in political discourse as it implies othering and exclusion of the opponent group (Adetunji, 2006; Kopytowska & Baider, 2017). In the under-mentioned tweet, 'we' implies that only the tweeter and his/her party know how to rule and the other person or party won't succeed even if they try (see example. 1). The pronoun 'we' is contrasted with 'PTI' to signify that 'we' are the protagonists whereas 'PTI' is the antagonist. 'We' may not only include the tweeter's party but all the opponents of PTI. Moreover, the noun '*adaen'* is a cultural (Pakistani/Indian) word that can loosely be translated as 'charms' and is locally interpreted as misleading tactics meant to deceive others. '*Adaen'* is a feminine noun and is commonly linked with prostitution because prostitutes are known for faking charisma to seduce their clients. Hence, it implies that PTI's election promises are nothing more than empty bluffs meant to captivate their voters and public will get to realize that soon after PTI gets into power. It also implies that PTI is not going to get successful at forming a government, but even if they do they won't be able to handle it because they don't have the required potential like that of tweeter's party. Example.2 proclaims Imran Khan as someone lacking in knowledge about democracy and suggests that he 'should study' about Pakistani democracy. Imran Khan's recently been stereotyped for being unable to be a democratic leader because he is backed by Pakistan Army (c.f. example. 4). The use of the modal verb 'should' make it an imperative statement that sounds more like a command to the noun of address (Imran Khan).

Stereotypic Derogation

Stereotyping is deemed to be a measure of incivility when certain groups are being given labels having a negative connotation. It implies that since an individual belongs to a certain group (political party in this case), so he/she must be having the characteristics or behaviors that group is attributed to (Marincea & Chilin, 2016). It includes negative generalizations too (Yee & Bailenson, 2006) which are used as identity markers (Bal & Van den Bos, 2019). Example.3 refers to 1997 when Nawaz Sharif was the Prime Minister of Pakistan and the Supreme Court of Pakistan indicted him in contempt of court case, and thereby a violent mob of PML-N stormed the court building forcing the chief justice to withdraw the case against Nawaz Sharif. 'They' is intentionally used by repeatedly portraying the referred group in the unfavorable light for the negative identity construction (Van Dijk, 1997). The use of adjective 'habitual' is meant to accuse N-league leaders and supporters for being persistently uncivil. The very tweet is a conditional statement stating a hypothetical situation and conditional consequences. 'If' marks the hypothetical situation and 'then' marks the conditional consequences. However, this time it didn't happen the same way. When Nawaz Sharif was disqualified and sentenced to 10 years jail, there were no violent mobs attacking Supreme Court, etc. Example.4 compared the two parties (N-league and PTI) declaring both exactly the 'same'. Moreover, both the mentioned parties are proclaimed as the 'products' of military establishment. N-league is stated as the product of the late dictator Zia-ul-Haq's Martial Law whereas Imran Khan is said to be the product of Musharaf because there have been similar members in Musharaf's cabinet and that of Imran Khan. It implies that the said parties have neither an original nor a democratic agenda to implement. Zia-ul-Haq is still recalled for his strict policies and Mushraf for his dictatorial model of politics. So, the very tweet suggests supporters of the said parties to reconsider their approach because voting for these parties (PTI and PML-N) will result in military-influenced democracy. The aforementioned example is a declarative statement that doesn't include any reference to support the argument, but rather states it as the self-evident fact. Hence, example.4 is an attempt at stereotyping the mentioned democratic parties (PML-N and PTI) for being backed by dictators.

Prejudiced Expressions

Prejudice is an umbrella term that can include some other categories of intolerant discourse and HS (Soral, Bilewicz & Winiewski, 2018). Aslan (2018) regarded HS a consequence of political, racial or ethnic alienation. Politicians also play the race, sect or ethnicity card to amplify animosity and deepen divisions among individuals and groups (Lim, 2017). This category encapsulates conformism asserting that this is how things are or should be in this/that/our culture. Politicians play the race, sect or ethnicity card for their own good and to amplify animosity and deepen divisions among individuals and groups (Lim, 2017). Example.5 intends at inciting [i]Pashtoon/Pakhtoon nation by making a point that the kind of abusive language Parvez Khatak used is not expected by a Pashtoon and that's why Pashtoons are ashamed of him. The use of noun 'tradition' is meant to intensify the reference by projecting one person (Pervez Khatak) as the representative of the whole Pashtoon community and thereby that one person is blemishing the whole community's reputation. Further, there's a reference made to his dance during PTI's sit-in [ii](d-chowk dharna) by comparing two irrelevant events and projecting as if Pervez Khatak danced to celebrate the innocent killings in [iii]Peshawar school massacre, 2014. Example.6 is a similar attempt to *other* Imran Khan for having an ethnic background different than [iv]*Sindhi*. Since Imran Khan belongs to a [v]*Pathan* family and the tweeter is probably a *Sindhi*, so 'leaders like you' implies that you are not *Sindhi* and *Sindhis* are not like you. The tweet may also suggest that *Sindhis* may not vote for *Pathans* and vice versa. Thus, the tweeters in both the below-mentioned examples mainly played the ethnic card. The practice of alienating ethnic groups and portraying them as the source of concern is an established kind of hate speech (Burkay, 2017).

Dehumanization

Dehumanization is denial of a person or group's humanity or comparing them with animals or something sub-human (Vollhardt et al., 2007). It is used as a positioning device to degrade the addressee (Kteily & Bruneau, 2017). Example.7 is a derogatory comparison of Imran Khan with a 'donkey' by comparing a donkey's 'braying' to Imran Khan's 'shouting'. Imran Khan's 'shouting' refers to his election campaign in which he constantly criticized corrupt politicians and claimed of seizing and punishing them. The noun 'mountain' refers to the stage Imran Khan delivered speeches on during pre-election rallies. The very example states that as a donkey can't be a horse, Imran Khan can't be a leader. A 'donkey' is the common symbol of obstinate stupidity like a cliché states 'as stupid as a donkey', whereas 'horse' and 'elephant' generally stand for strength and wisdom. It implies that no matter how much Imran Khan tries to convince public against his opponents, he won't be able to do so because people know that he isn't a seasoned politician like his opponents. Example.8 employs figurative language and also dehumanizes their former party members as a mere '*but*' (carving/statue). The noun 'idol' is used as a metaphor for Mirza family whose hometown is Badin, Sindh and they left PPP to join PTI before election, 2018. Dr. Fahmida Mirza won from PPP's ticket in elections of 2002, 2008 and 2013 and she was former speaker of National Assembly. Her husband, Dr. Zulfiqar Mirza was former provincial minister of PPP in Sindh. The addressees are dehumanized as 'idols' who were created by PPP and then they later became 'gods. 'Idols' imply the political impotence of Mirza family who actually got strengthened because of the support of PPP, whereas the journey from 'idols' to 'gods' refer to their taking selfish decisions on their own without consulting the party leadership or without being concerned about their former party's interest. They left their former party and joined another right before elections and that's the most critical time for transformation of the political landscape.

Hostile Censure

Hostile censure refers to expressions of disapproval and comments noting the faults of the opponents (Sevasti, 2014). Politicians use digital space and especially Twitter as tool for

opposition (Van Kessel & Castelein, 2016), which is why hostile censure is a prevalent form of online PHS (Wodak, 2002). Example.9 condemns new government's decision of turning official buildings into public places and declares it a 'stupid' move. Although many critics in general applauded the new government's innovative initiative of turning PM house and governor houses into libraries, public parks and guest houses, but the tweeter condemned it by presenting another side of the coin. The tweeter directs people's attention towards those employees who might have been 'fired' as if the government has closed the official buildings down 'firing everyone'. Although critics and analysts appreciated Imran Khan's inaugural speech as the Prime Minister of Pakistan for sounding mature and encouraging, but the example.10 criticizes it searching for the loop holes like lacking in practical 'aftercourse'. The 'talking well' of Imran Khan implies that it was a mere talk that's not gonna result in any positive action at all because it lacked 'aftercourse'. However, a speech is supposed to be a talk only and cannot incorporate predictions about future actions.

Cursing

Marincea and Chilin (2016) classified disrespectful online discourse into certain categories and cursing is the most intense one. It includes all kinds of offensive and derogatory epithets that are meant to induce rejection and shame or to degrade the one being addressed (Jucker & Taavitsainen, 2000). Song and Wu (2018) deem the use of strong language in digital space as a contagious practice that results in heightening group polarization. Example.11 accuses his/her opponent for being a 'conman'. Although it's a passive statement yet it's clear that the one being referred to is Imran Khan because some of his opponents and critics, before election, have been regarding him as a 'conman'. A 'conman' is the one who deceives people into thinking what's not true. The use of 'conman' for Imran Khan implies that he's a deceiving politician because he falsely projects himself as a democratic leader, whereas in reality he's a stooge for the military establishment. 'Conman' also refers to Imran Khan because the tweeter is wishing someone (most probably the tweeter's leader) luck against 'conman' because Imran Khan's opponents, long before elections, saw him as their most powerful opponent and had also foreseen themselves being defeated. Some other derogatory epithets used in the selected tweets were 'pathetic piece of shit', 'disqualified man', 'coward', 'shameless', 'hypocrite', 'timid' and 'power-hungry'.

Verbal Sneer

Drawing on the given data, politicians seem to use verbal sneer as a political tool to skillfully criticize the agenda or actions of their political opponents as hate speech is mainly a kind of stigmatization (Delgado & Stefancic, 2009). The tweeters, in example.12 and 13, have employed paradox with hostile humor by mentioning contradictory expressions. The two contradictory expressions 'overwhelming crowd' and 'few humans' are meant to mock at PTI's failure in gathering enough people to address. Similarly, example.12 mocks at PML-N for lacking in a support system. 'Great gathering' and 'flop movie's interval' refer to two contradictory notions. 'Great gathering' point towards post-election protest against alleged rigging that opposition parties held outside Election Commission of Pakistan in Islamabad, but did not have much people with them. The noun 'movie' implies that the protest was a pre-planned attempt at feigning concern for nation. 'Flop' implies that the opposition parties didn't succeed at disrupting government. Hence, the protest is regarded as being unnecessarily dramatic.

Figurative Hate Speech

Figurative language (e.g., metaphors, similes, hyperbole, rhetorical questions and understatements) is often regarded as an irony marker (Burgers et al., 2016). Politicians tend to employ obliqueness in order to avoid politically risky topics and sometimes use metaphors, etc. to only sound polite (Obeng, 1997). Example.14 uses a simile '*diya*' to refer to Imran Khan. '*Diya*' is

native to Indo-Pak culture. It is similar to a candle and can be translated as an oil lamp. *Diya* is short-lived and is used for temporary decoration. Moreover, the noun 'screams' alludes to Imran Khan's election campaign and addresses. Similarly, 'fluctuations' of the dying oil lamp is used as a euphemism to refer to Imran Khan's age implying that he will soon have his name inscribed in the book of life. Example.15 uses the metaphor 'planted politicians' for those politicians who have been propped by military establishment and have never struggled on their own. Just as a 'plant is planted by someone in a pot and then watered and taken care of, similarly, such politicians are being backed by non-democratic forces and don't have a history of tolerating tortures like imprisonment, etc.

CONCLUSION

The selected political Twitter feeds seem lacking in respectful and thoughtful discourse. The spokesperson of government seems targeting opposition's shortcomings as observed in the past, whereas, those in opposition are more into character assassination and making highly personalized comments against their opponents. Hence, the spokespersons from opposition especially seem more active perpetrators of hate speech. Perhaps the opposition just aims at degrading the government by even discrediting their good practices and making ad-hominem attacks so that public's attention can be diverted from bad policies of the self (Van Dijk, 1997). Since criticism is inherent to political discourse (Van Dijk, 1997), so all the selected tweets mainly infused 'criticism'. Criticism can be constructive too, but the political discourse under discussion contains criticism that involves derogatory language and personalized verbal attacks. Moreover, apart from some extremely explicit remarks, all spokespersons seem to resort to sarcastic and implicit hate speech. The article-19 (freedom of speech) of the Constitution of Pakistan acknowledges the freedom of expression that doesn't violate the standard of 'decency or morality'. Thus, state does recognize the slanderous content and may be that's what politicians fear and that can be the reason they don't risk their designation at the cost of explicit hate speech on social media that would go viral in minutes. Hence, e-political discourse seems getting violent, slanderous and all the more sarcastic.

The online PHS cannot be delimited to expletives only as the e-political discourse is replete with sarcastic expressions having manifold meanings and implied hatred. The given data, by employing PDA, gave an insight into how the apparently plain language has implied negative connotations. It revealed that e-political discourse is the actual 'carefully crafted rhetoric'. The PDA approach assisted in deconstructing the manifestation of HS in political discourse. Analyzing the linguistic components and structure of the selected tweets unveiled the underlying actualities of e-political discourse. The information secretaries are meant to voice their parties' ideologies and their linguistic/word choices effectively reveal their socio-psychological conceptualizations. Taking data around the most sensitive time-period (i.e., elections 2018) aided in revealing the PHS that's pervasive around elections. That being so, online PHS appears to be a calculated kind of HS that seems motivated by certain political patterns which aim at putting the targeted ones on inferior end of the continuum. Moreover, the selected social media platform 'Twitter' seems to have its fair share in the sort online PHS turns out to be. Since twitter's character limit delimits the user from producing a lengthy text including details regarding the historic events, etc. so the political tweeters tend to use code-words in order to convey the complex ideas without sounding much controversial and rude. Moreover, Twitter (social media in general) allows them to think through their hate speech and get more strategic with their words. Also, the role of social media in promoting incivility among youths is worth considering nowadays when hate speech is getting popular among youth. Since hate speech on social media gets viral like anything, so our politicians'

indecent and profane language inevitably affects the language of youth that is 24/7 on social media and admire their political leaders.

REFERENCES

Kteily, N., & Bruneau, E. (2017). Backlash: The politics and real-world consequences of minority group dehumanization. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *43*(1), 87-104.

Van Kessel, S., & Castelein, R. (2016). Shifting the blame. Populist politicians' use of Twitter as a tool of opposition. *Journal of contemporary European research*, *12*(2).

Song, Y., & Wu, Y. (2018). Tracking the viral spread of incivility on social networking sites: The case of cursing in online discussions of Hong Kong–Mainland China conflict. *Communication and the Public*, *3*(1), 46-61.

Modha, S., Majumder, P., Mandl, T., & Mandalia, C. (2020). Detecting and visualizing hate speech in social media: A cyber Watchdog for surveillance. *Expert Systems with Applications*, *161*, 113725.

Wu, X., & Ali, S. (2020). The Novel Changes in Pakistan's Party Politics: Analysis of Causes and Impacts. *Chinese Political Science Review*, 1-21.

Piazza, J. A. (2020). Politician hate speech and domestic terrorism. *International Interactions*, 1-23. doi: 10.1080/03050629.2020.1739033

Bilewicz, M., & Soral, W. (2020). Hate Speech Epidemic. The Dynamic Effects of Derogatory Language on Intergroup Relations and Political Radicalization. *Political Psychology*. doi:10.1111/pops.12670

Abbasi, N. M. (2013, February 10). Social media and politics. *Pakistan Today*. Retrieved from https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2013/02/10/social-media-and-politics-2/

Adetunji, A. (2006). Inclusion and exclusion in political discourse: Deixis in Olusegun Obasanjo's speeches. *Journal of Language and Linguistics*, *5*(2), 177-191.

Aslan, A. (2018). Online hate discourse: A study on hatred speech directed against Syrian refugees on YouTube. *Journal of Media Critiques [JMC]*, *3*(12). doi:10.17349/jmc117413

Al-Tahmazi, T. H. (2015). The pursuit of power in Iraqi political discourse: Unpacking the construction of sociopolitical communities on Facebook. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, *10*(2), 163-179. doi:10.1080/17447143.2015.1042383

Awan, I. (2014). Islamophobia and Twitter: A typology of online hate against Muslims on social media. *Policy & Internet*, *6*(2), 133-150. doi: 10.1002/1944-2866.POI364

Badjatiya, P., Gupta, S., Gupta, M., & Varma, V. (2017, April). Deep learning for hate speech detection in tweets. In *Proceedings of the 26th International Conference on World Wide Web Companion* (pp. 759-760). Perth, Australia: International World Wide Web Conferences Steering Committee. doi:10.1145/3041021.3054223

Bal, M., & Van den Bos, K. (2019). Worldview Defense, Prejudice, and Derogating Others. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Psychology*.

Kopytowska, M., & Baider, F. (2017). From stereotypes and prejudice to verbal and physical violence: Hate speech in context. *Lodz Papers in Pragmatics*, *13*(2), 133.

Blumler, J. G., & Coleman, S. (2015). Democracy and the media—Revisited. *Javnost-The Public*, *22*(2), 111-128. doi:10.1080/13183222.2015.1041226

Burgers, C., Konijn, E. A., & Steen, G. J. (2016). Figurative framing: Shaping public discourse through metaphor, hyperbole, and irony. *Communication Theory*, *26*(4), 410-430. doi:10.1111/comt.12096

Burkay, A. T. (2017). *Hate speech in new media analysis of hate speech against Syrian Refugees in digital participatory dictionaries* (Doctoral dissertation, Istanbul Bilgi Universitesi).

Chilton, P. (2004). *Analysing political discourse: Theory and practice*. Routledge.

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2009). Four observations about hate speech. *Wake Forest L. Rev.*, *44*, 353.

Dog wrapped in political party flag shot dead, captured on film (2018, July 27), *Dawn*. Retrieved from https://www.dawn.com/news/1423270

Political Parties in Pakistan (2018), *Urdu Point*, Retrieved from https://www.urdupoint.com/politics/political-parties.html

Literacy rate in Pakistan 2017 (2020, July 22), *Statista*, Retrieved from https://www.statista.com/statistics/572781/literacy-rate-in-pakistan/

Enli, G. S., & Skogerbø, E. (2013). Personalized campaigns in party-centred politics: Twitter and Facebook as arenas for political communication. *Information, Communication & Society*, *16*(5), 757-774. doi:10.1080/1369118X.2013.782330

Essig, T. (2017). How the Trump campaign built a political porn site to sell the pleasures of hate: What do we do now?. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, *53*(4), 516-532. doi:10.1080/00107530.2017.1384265

Fenton, N. (2016). Left out? Digital media, radical politics and social change. *Information, Communication & Society*, *19*(3), 346-361. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1109698

Gainous, J., & Wagner, K. M. (2013). *Tweeting to power: The social media revolution in American politics*. Oxford University Press.

Gelber, K., & McNamara, L. (2016). Evidencing the harms of hate speech. *Social Identities*, *22*(3), 324-341. doi:10.1080/13504630.2015.1128810

Greenwood, S., Perrin, A., & Duggan, M. (2016). Social media update 2016. *Pew Research Center*, *11*, 83. Retrieved from http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2016/11/10132827/PI_2016.11.11_Social-Media-Update_FINAL.pdf

Grimminger, L., & Klinger, R. (2021). Hate Towards the Political Opponent: A Twitter Corpus Study of the 2020 US Elections on the Basis of Offensive Speech and Stance Detection. arXiv preprint arXiv:2103.01664.

Hendriks, C. M., Duus, S., & Ercan, S. A. (2016). Performing politics on social media: the dramaturgy of an environmental controversy on Facebook. *Environmental Politics*, *25*(6), 1102-1125.

How social media is misused for election campaign (2018, July 23), *DAWN*. Retrieved from https://www.dawn.com/news/1421827/how-social-media-is-misused-for-election-campaign

Imran Khan assures ECP of not using hate speech again (2018, July 19), Khyber News. Retrieved from https://khybernews.tv/imran-khan-assures-ecp-of-not-using-hate-speech-again/

Jucker, A. H., & Taavitsainen, I. (2000). Diachronic speech act analysis: Insults from flyting to flaming. *Journal of Historical Pragmatics*, *1*(1), 67-95. doi:10.1075/jhp.1.1.07juc

Khawaja Asif calls Firdous Ashiq Awan a 'dumper', a year after his Sireen Mazari 'tractor trolly' remarks (2017, June 13), *The Express Tribune*. Retrieved from https://tribune.com.pk/story/1434551/khawaja-asif-calls-firdous-ashiq-awan-dumper-year-shireen-mazari-tractor-trolley-remarks/

Klüver, H. (2018). Setting the party agenda: Interest groups, voters and issue attention. *British Journal of Political Science*, 1-22.

Leigh, D., Harding, L., & Arthur, C. (2011). *WikiLeaks: Inside Julian Assange's war on secrecy*. Public Affairs.

Lim, M. (2017). Freedom to hate: sociaaal media, algorithmic enclaves, and the rise of tribal nationalism in Indonesia. *Critical Asian Studies*, *49*(3), 411-427. doi:10.1080/14672715.2017.1341188

243

Marincea, A., & Chilin, T. (2016). Anti-democratic intolerant discourse in Romanian online comments. (Working paper). Retrieved from https://www.openpolitics.ro/wp-content/uploads/Working-paper-ADID-in-online-comments.pdf

Markham, A., Buchanan, E., & AoIR Ethics Working Committee. (2012). Ethical decision-making and internet research: Version 2.0. *Association of Internet Researchers*.

Mascaro, C. M., & Goggins, S. P. (2015). Technologically mediated political discourse during a nationally televised GOP primary debate. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, *12*(3), 252-269. doi:10.1080/19331681.2015.1071687

Mondal, M., Silva, L. A., Correa, D., & Benevenuto, F. (2018). Characterizing usage of explicit hate expressions in social media. *New Review of Hypermedia and Multimedia*, 1-21. doi:10.1080/13614568.2018.1489001

More hate speech on Twitter than on Facebook in Pakistan: study (2018, July 22), *The Express Tribune*. Retrieved fromhttps://tribune.com.pk/story/1764267/1-hate-speech-twitter-facebook-pakistan-study/

Obeng, S. G. (1997). Language and politics: Indirectness in political discourse. *Discourse & Society*, *8*(1), 49-83. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926597008001004

Ott, B. L. (2017). The age of Twitter: Donald J. Trump and the politics of debasement. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, *34*(1), 59-68. https://doi.org/10.1080/15295036.2016.1266686

Parker, M. A., & Bozeman, B. (2018). Social media as a public values sphere. *Public Integrity*, *20*(4), 386-400. doi:10.1080/10999922.2017.1420351

Rangel, F., Sarracén, G. L. D. L. P., Chulvi, B., Fersini, E., & Rosso, P. (2021). Profiling hate speech spreaders on twitter task at PAN 2021. In CLEF.

Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., Nicholls, C. M., & Ormston, R. (Eds.). (2013). *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers*. Sage.

Rugova, R., Dibrani, E., Fetahaj, R., Bacaj, H., & Krapi, F., (2016). The influence of hate speech as a political tool on the youth of Kosovo. *Internet Foundation for Electoral Systems*. Retrieved from https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/2016_ifes_the_influence_of_political_hate_speech_as_a_tool_on_youth_of_k.eng_.pdf.

Sevasti, C. (2014). *Social media and political communication: Hate speech in the age of twitter* (Master's thesis). Erasmus University Rotterdam, Netherlands. Retrieved from https://thesis.eur.nl/pub/17740/Christoforou.pdf

Siegel, A. A., Nikitin, E., Barberá, P., Sterling, J., Pullen, B., Bonneau, R., ... & Tucker, J. A. (2021). Trumping Hate on Twitter? Online Hate Speech in the 2016 US Election Campaign and its Aftermath. Quarterly Journal of Political Science, 16(1), 71-104.

Silva, L. A., Mondal, M., Correa, D., Benevenuto, F., & Weber, I. (2016). Analyzing the targets of hate in online social media. In *Proceedings of the Tenth International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media (ICWSM 2016)* (pp. 687-690). Germany. Retrieved from https://www.aaai.org/ocs/index.php/ICWSM/ICWSM16/paper/download/.../12829

Soon, C., & Samsudin, S. N. (2016). General election 2015 in Singapore: What social media did and did not do. *The Round Table*, *105*(2), 171-184. doi:10.1080/00358533.2016.1154388

Soral, W., Bilewicz, M., & Winiewski, M. (2018). Exposure to hate speech increases prejudice through desensitization. *Aggressive Behavior*, *44*(2), 136-146. https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.21737

Van Dijk, T. A. (1997). What is political discourse analysis. *Belgian Journal of Linguistics*, *11*(1), 11-52.

Vollhardt, J., Coutin, M., Staub, E., Weiss, G., & Deflander, J. (2007). Deconstructing hate speech in the DRC: A psychological media sensitization campaign. *Journal of Hate Studies*, *5*(15), 15-35.

Waseem, A. (2018, November 18). Pakistan No 1 in Facebook content censorship, *The News*. Retrieved from https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/395159-pakistan-no-1-in-facebook-content-censorship

Wodak, R. (2002). Friend or foe: The defamation or legitimate and necessary criticism? Reflections on recent political discourse in Austria. *Language & Communication*, *22*(4), 495-517. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0271-5309(02)00022-8

Yee, N., & Bailenson, J. N. (2006). Walk a mile in digital shoes: The impact of embodied perspective-taking on the reduction of negative stereotyping in immersive virtual environments. *Proceedings of Presence*, *24*, 26.

Bilewicz, M., Soral, W., Marchlewska, M., & Winiewski, M. (2017). When authoritarians confront prejudice. Differential effects of SDO and RWA on support for hate- speech prohibition. *Political Psychology*, *38*(1), 87-99.

Kottasová, I. (2017). Europe says Twitter is failing to remove hate speech.

Notes

i. Pashtoon is a member of Pahto-speaking tribe inhabiting southern Afghanistan and north-western Pakistan.

ii. Democracy-Chowk is a large square located in Islamabad, where now-in-power party PTI held a protest to demanding a new Election Commission of Pakistan. There party anthems were played and followers danced to celebrate the fore-seen victory.

iii. On 16th December 2014, six gunmen affiliated with the Tehrik-i-Taliban attacked the Army Public School in the northwestern Pakistani city of Peshawar, which left 141 children dead.

iv. A native or inhabitant of the province of Sind in Pakistan.

v. A member of the Pashto-speaking people of Afghanistan, NW Pakistan, and elsewhere, most of whom are Muslim in religion.