Impact of Cyber Bullying on Political Behavior and Youth’s Perceptions about Use of Social Media by Political Parties of Pakistan

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**ARTICLE DETAILS**

**Purpose:** Present study analyses social media users’ perceptions about presence of cyber bullying in political contents on Facebook and Twitter. In the presence of social media cells of political parties, this study designed to analyze impact of cyber bullying on political behavior of users.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** Present study utilized survey research techniques and data from 300 male and female social media users was collected through a well-designed questionnaire.

**Findings:** Major findings indicate consistent use of social media by youngster and users believe that there is rise in political contents on social media. Social media bullying is creating a political divide among supporters of different political parties. Bullying contents creating hatred, enmity, hostility, aggression and anger against supporters of other parties. Users are the view that offensive language, photo shopped images, impersonation, spoofing, misleading facts are faced by users in political contents. Results also reveal that male users face more offensive language as compared to female users of social media due to wider friendship circle.

**Implications/Originality/Value:** It is evident from the finding that bullying, trolling and memes has emerged as new way of political agenda setting and major area to reinforce voters about certain political ideology in the context of Pakistan’s political atmosphere.

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Introduction

Social Media

“Social Media” are “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 60). Popular social media include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Flickr, and Tumblr. In Pakistan Facebook and twitter are the dominant social media platforms. Facebook users are grown tremendously over the years.

Facebook

Mark Zuckerberg in 2004 founded Facebook as social networking website. Initially it was for Harvard university students but soon it has gained popularity across the globe crossing billion monthly active users. Facebook still stands out among other social media platforms for being popular and heavily utilized application. (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Twitter

Twitter was launched by Jack Dorsey in 2006. It is a micro blogging facility. Twitter has achieved a significant role mainly because of its unique users. Twitter users are mainly from elite political, media and business groups. Twitter has become trend setter in highlighting important political, social, religious and economic issues. Twitter hash tags help is setting up a particular agenda among public and media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Social Media and Political Behavior

According to Eldersveld and Katz, (1961) political behavior refers to how people act and participate in political process. Subsequently, according to Rose (2007) Political Behavior is the study of the behavior of political factors such as voters, lobbyists, and politicians. Platforms of cyber media have become part and parcel of our daily lives. Social media has started playing a key role in opinion formation and setting up direction of different political and social issues. Public is taking part in social media discussions actively and vigorously. Social media has created new virtual society where people group and align themselves to political narratives. Social media has produced positive effect on political mobilization and participation due to rise of certain platforms like Facebook and Twitter (Stieglitz, Dang-Xuan, 2012). Social media now has major effect on traditional advertising and public relations practices. Political communication has emerged as an area of concern due to presence of cyber bullying (Husain et al, 2014).

Offensive Language on Social Media

It is commonly known as bad language, strong language, coarse language, foul language, bad words, vulgar language, lewd language, swearing, cursing, cussing, or using expletives. This use is a subset of a language's lexicon that is generally considered to be strongly impolite, rude or offensive. It can show a debasement of someone or something, or show intense emotion. Profanity in this sense takes the form of words or verbal expressions that fall into the category of formulaic language (Moore et al., 2010). There are two major terms used for offensive language on social media i.e., cyber bullying and flaming.

Flaming

According to O’Sullivan and Flanagan (2003) the concept of flaming is used inconsistently across and imprecise within research projects. It has been used to describe the display of offensive language or it has included all kinds of emotional expressions (Moore et al., 2010).

Cyber Bullying

According to Kowalski et al., (2008) bullying is an aggressive behavior that is intentional and that involves an imbalance of power or strength. Bullying is deliberate course of action where a person, group or organization plan and design communication campaign in order to achieve some
objective. Main target of bullying is often to demoralize, defame, ridicule or spread hatred against opponents. In the broadest sense cyberbullying refers to bullying that occurs through social and digital media (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013).

Haque, J. (2014) explained amount of hate speech present in online platforms in Pakistan through content analysis. In this research high impact content was analyzed and findings suggest that there is huge amount of hate speech on social media in political sphere. This gives clear indication and complete picture about bullying and hate speech are major area of concern as more and more researchers are focusing cyber bullying as area of research. Many other researchers have focused hate speech via cyber space like Harris et al., 2015; Spiegel, 1999; Nemes, 2002; Eichhon, 2001; Leets, 2001; Duffy, 2003; Erjavec & Kovavic, 2012; Reed, 2009 and Perry & Olsson, 2009). As predicted by Spiegel (1999) cyber space with emergence of time will become a free space for racist, hate mongers and ideologically influenced users. Web 2.0 has grown swiftly across glop providing opportunity to all users for sharing their ideas and thoughts over internet platforms. According to Nemes (2002) social media has become very important channel for spreading messages and specifically political messages get good response from users. However, hate speech is one the areas of concern over social media. Duffy (2003) considers social media as a fertile place for creating culture of hate speech and cyber bullying.

In a research study by Haque (2014) analyzed 15000 tweets including replies and mentions from 30 different twitter accounts. According to the findings 350 tweets included hate speech. Similarly, Facebook recorded more evidences of hate speech in comparison to other social media outlets. Detailed analysis depicts that majority of hate speech consists of personal attacks and abuse of opponents. State actors are among others targeted more often. Another very important aspect is users’ response toward such cyber bullying, findings of study indicate that more often such post get good response from users and such post and celebrated through different ways like comment, like and share. Indeed, hate speech threatens community’s functionality and can also lead to the political disengagement of the citizens. Therefore, even though Haque’s research revealed a small amount of hate speech expressions in the Pakistani Twitter sphere, researching the phenomenon in a different social, cultural and political context is essential and important. Increasing trends of cyber bullying causing serious concerns for national integration and unity by creating political divide among stake holders of political process including general public. According to Velasquez (2012) role of cues in participating in online political communities has increased inequalities and social media has played a negative role in creation of political divide. It hinders creation of a true public sphere required democracies to flourish and pluralism to take effect specially in developing countries.

Significance of Study
Present study is significant because it will allow to measure the impact of cyber bullying on political behavior of supporters of different political parties. It will also take into account different factors which influences offensive Language and offensive discourse in cyberspace. The goal of the study is to explore the effects of cyberbullying and flaming on the political behavior of youngsters of Sargodha city, all those who use social media faces offensive language in daily life. Political emotions of many people are involved and these emotions are aroused when offensive or bad language is used against the political party or political leader of their choice. Present study will explore whether classification like age, sex, environment, social status, social organizations, and social interaction /acceptance influences a character and identity construction, self-esteem, and behavioral construction in cyberspace.

Offensive Language may result in life altering problems such as change in political thoughts, aggression in life, change in attitude with friends and relatives, change in living style, change in political participation patterns and affiliations. There has been a rise in aggression because of
social networking sites like Facebook. According to Fox 5 News (2010) online news article, "Paulding County authorities say a teen arrested for making threatening statements on Facebook posted that he would use a firearm against three of his class mates" (FOX 5 News, 2010, p. 1). On another note, recent studies indicate that it does not stop at criminalization. Currently, there has been a rise in suicide cases specifically connected to cyberspace interaction. "There have been several high-profile cases involving teenagers taking their own lives in part of being harassed and mistreated over the internet. This mental behavior has been referenced and termed as cyberbullicide-suicide indirectly or directly influenced by experiences of online aggression" (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). In the light of above it will be matter of interest to explore youngster’s perception about cyber flaming and cyber bullying and its impact on political behavior of youth.

**Methodology**

This is an empirical study, uses the method of survey and going to be conducted to analyse “Impact of Offensive Language Used in Social Media Political Content on the Political Behavior of Youth (A Case of Sargodha).” Statisticians integrate these inputs to develop a survey design that will meet the data users, requirements within the specified resource constraints.

**Survey Research**

This is an empirical study and using the survey research. In this study, the universe is the male and female social media users of Sargodha city. The unit of analysis of the present study consists of male and female youngsters of Sargodha City. In this study the sample is of 300 students and teachers from university of Sargodha. Stratified sampling procedure has been used through which specification of the respondents’ demographic characteristics included: Age (below, high) and Gender (male, female). After the division of the respondents into the mentioned stratum. Data was collected from three hundred respondents (Males=150, Females=150) of Sargodha City. The researcher divided the questionnaires between Males on the basis of age groups (18-23=50, 24-29=50, 30-35=50) and Females (18-23=50, 24-29=50, 30-35=50).

**Theory of Media Ecology**

Present study is based on media ecology theory mainly on two grounds, first wide spread and growth and penetration of information and communication technology and secondly ability of social media in shaping public communication. Present study is about impact of cyber bullying over voters and supporters’ intents and opinion. According Marshal Mcluhan (1964) medium has a critical role in not only dissemination of messages as well as impact it leaves on its users. Communication has now become a global phenomenon with the help of world wide web. Griffin, (2009) has explained how in 2021st century information and communication means has grown and expanded its reach to public. Physical distance has become meaningless and social media platform has created a new virtual world, where public opinion climate is now assessed and maintained through digital means. Social media is helping humans in extending their senses and abilities to consume and understand communication. Social media messages are creating new media environment where user feel they have more power and control over contents. his theory is relevant to the current study as we are going to check the change in political behavior of youngsters which is caused by the use of offensive language on social media. After the modernization of communication tools and due to increase in use of social media world have become global village and social media have got immense importance now a days and this mode of communication has great influence on life of its users in every aspect of their life. It has a forceful influence over political system and political behavior of social media users specially youngsters. Media Ecology theory is found very close to this current study because aim of this research was to explore the influence of offensive language used in social media political content on the behavior of youngsters. As per the theory two main variables were also included in this current study to know the relationship between the use of social media and its influence on
According to table 1, Male respondents (83.3%) responded that they are exposed to political content more on Facebook as compared to Twitter very frequently (23.3%), also female respondents are also exposed to political content somewhat (83.3%) on Facebook as compared to Twitter. Results of the study dig out that sample 57.9% who belong to age of 18-23 years are exposed to political content more on Facebook as compared to other selected age groups. It is also observed that 34.8% youngsters belong to age group 30-35 years are very frequently exposed to political content on Twitter than other selected age groups.

Figure 1 reveals that respondents face more offensive language in images on social media. (65%) very much, followed by status (50%) and Videos (41.7%). According to respondents’ response,
8.3% users did not face offensive language in videos, as compared to status and images. Comparative analysis of gender response present that 90% of male users face very much offensive language in images but 40% female users face very much offensive language in images. It is also evident from figure 5.6 that 60% of female respondents face somewhat offensive language in videos but in somewhat category 43.3% males responded that they face offensive language in status.

Figure 2 (A): Offensive Language in Political Content on Social Media

Figure 2 (B): Types of Offensive Language Faced

Figure 2 shows the type of offensive language faced by respondents on social media. All male and female respondents (80%) responded that they face very much offensive language in form of edited images, followed by 65% in form of name calling and Bad Cartoons, 63.3% in form of bad slogans, 61.7% in form of derogatory language, 46.7% in form of parodies and 40% in form of abuses. It also explain that 21.7% male and female users of social media didn’t face any offensive language in form of parodies.
Table 2: Types of Offensive Language Faced by Social Media Users

|                      | Gender          | Age    | Age    | Age    |
|----------------------|-----------------|--------|--------|--------|
|                      | Male            | Female | 18-23  | 24-29  | 30-35  |
| Name Calling         |                 |        |        |        |
| Very Much            | 73.3*           | 56.7   | 78.9   | 50     | 65.2   |
| Some What            | 26.7            | 30     | 21.1   | 27.8   | 34.8   |
| Not At All           | 0               | 13.3   | 0      | 22.2   | 0      |
| Very Much            | 50              | 30     | 52.6   | 38.9   | 30.4   |
| Abusing              |                 |        |        |        |
| Some What            | 50              | 46.7   | 36.8   | 44.4   | 60.9   |
| Not At All           | 0               | 23.3   | 10.5   | 16.7   | 8.7    |
| Very Much            | 80              | 43.3   | 47.4   | 50     | 82.6   |
| Derogatory Language  |                 |        |        |        |
| Some What            | 20              | 36.7   | 52.6   | 22.2   | 13     |
| Not At All           | 0               | 20     | 0      | 27.8   | 4.3    |
| Very Much            | 86.7            | 40     | 52.6   | 61.1   | 73.9   |
| Bad Slogans          |                 |        |        |        |
| Some What            | 13.3            | 40     | 31.6   | 27.8   | 21.7   |
| Not At All           | 0               | 20     | 15.8   | 11.1   | 4.3    |
| Very Much            | 90              | 40     | 63.2   | 50     | 78.3   |
| Bad Cartoons         |                 |        |        |        |
| Some What            | 10              | 43.3   | 31.6   | 27.8   | 21.7   |
| Not At All           | 0               | 16.7   | 5.3    | 22.2   | 0      |
| Very Much            | 93.3            | 66.7   | 84.2   | 61.1   | 91.3   |
| Edited Images        |                 |        |        |        |
| Some What            | 6.7             | 23.3   | 15.8   | 22.2   | 8.7    |
| Not At All           | 0               | 10     | 0      | 16.7   | 0      |
| Very Much            | 40              | 53.3   | 47.4   | 38.9   | 52.2   |
| Parodies             |                 |        |        |        |
| Some What            | 40              | 23.3   | 31.6   | 38.9   | 26.1   |
| Not At All           | 20              | 23.3   | 21.1   | 22.2   | 21.7   |

*: Values Show Percentages

Table 2 shows that 93.3% male users face very much offensive language in the form of edited images as compared to females (66.7%). Empirical findings of the study indicate that 23.3% female did not face any offensive language in form of abusing and parodies, followed by derogatory language and bad slogans (20%), bad cartoons (16.7%), name calling (13.3%) and edited images (10%). Comparative index of age groups presents that 91.3% users of age group 30-35 years faced very much offensive language in form of edited images, followed by age group 18-23 years (84.2%) in form of edited images and 78.9% of age group 18-23 face offensive language in form of name calling.

![Figure 3: Actions took on offensive posts against your favorite leaders](image-url)
Figure 3 shows that significant portion of respondents (83.3%) took action against the post containing offensive language against their favorite leader by ignoring the post, followed by 41.7% users comment on post, 21.7% like to hide the post and only 10% take action by reporting the post which contains offensive language against their favorite political leader. Figure 3 reveals that male users (86.7%) of social media take actions on the offensive posts against their favorite political leader very much by ignoring the posts. Female users (80%) prefer to ignore the posts containing offensive language against their favorite political leader very much. Very few females (13.3%) prefer to hide the posts very much as compared to male users (30%) to the posts containing offensive language against their favorite political leader. In comparison of age groups 91.3% users of age group 30-35 years responded that they also prefer to ignore the posts very much against their favorite leader, followed by users of age group 18-23 years (78.9%) and users of age group 24-29 years (77.8%). Response index also shows that users who belong to age group 18-23 years (52.6%) like to comment against the post containing offensive language against their favorite political leader followed by age group of 24-29 years (50%) and users who belong to age group 30-35 years (26.1%).

Figure 4: Action took against the person who use offensive language

Figure 4 shows that significant portion of the respondents (91.7%) ignore the person very much who use the offensive language against their favorite political leader. Empirical results of the study indicate that only 20% users of social media un-friend the person very much who uses the offensive language against their favorite political leader, followed by 16.7% who unfollow the friend, 11.7% block who block the friend and only 6.7% report to the relevant authority against the person who use offensive language against favorite political leader of users.
Figure 5: Offensive language used by the political followers

Figure 5 shows that PML’N stands at first position among the followers who use offensive language against their opponents on social media. Over all findings of the study explain that significant portion of the male and female social media users 86.7 % responded that followers of PML’N uses very much offensive language in their posts on social media, followed by PTI social media users (83.3%), PPP and MQM (46.7%). Analysis also reveals that Majority of respondents 46.7% responded that followers of JI Not at all use offensive language on social media while 41.7 % responded that JI followers use somewhat offensive language in their posts.

Figure 6: Effect of offensive language/Change in Behavior

Figure 6 illustrate that offensive language used on social media is making significant respondents (65%) to increase the hate against political system; also same number of respondents (65%) responded that offensive language is increasing the hate against those political parties whose followers use offensive language on social media. Over all findings of the study reveals that 58.3 % users of social media responded that offensive language influence their voting behavior very much.

Summery and Discussion
Current study with the title of “Impact of cyber bullying on political behavior and youth’s perceptions about use of social media by political parties of Pakistan)” to explore the effects of
cyberbullying and flaming on the political behavior of youngsters of Sargodha city, all those who use social media faces offensive language in daily life, when it’s the matter of politics emotions of many people are involved and these emotions are aroused when offensive or bad language is used against the political party or political leader they are favoring also to explore whether classification, major factors like age, gender, environment, social status and social interaction/acceptance influences a character and identity construction, self-esteem, and behavioral construction in cyberspace.

Use of offensive language is a key factor of current study which was investigated and found that respondents face more offensive language (65%) in images on social media very much, followed by status (50%) and Videos (41.7%). These findings rejected the hypothesis “It is more likely that male and female users of social media more use offensive language in status than images or videos”. Results also reveal that male users face more offensive language as compared to female. It presents that 67.7% of male users face very much offensive language on social media but 36.7% female users face very much offensive language on social media which is very low as compared to male users of social media and approve the statement “It is more likely that male users more face offensive language than female users of social media”. Literature shows that there are different types of offensive language used by social media users. It is also observed that name calling is common type of offensive language used on social media. As per the guidance of past studies researcher draw a hypothesis “It is more likely that male and female users more use name calling than other type of offensive language on social media”. But, empirical statistics of the study show that, all male and female respondents (80%) responded that they face very much offensive language in form of edited images, followed by 65% in form of name calling which disapprove the hypothesis of the study.

Findings show that users who face offensive language against their favorite language take different type of actions. Most commonly users take action by blocking the person who uses offensive language against their favorite political leader, as formed hypothesis describe “It is more likely that male and female users more take action by blocking the person than ignoring the person who uses offensive language on social media”, while observed values gave the different findings which shows that 91.7% of the respondents responded that they take no action against the person and ignore them who uses offensive language against their favorite political leader on social media.

Findings of study unexpectedly reveal that 86.7% of PML’N followers who uses social media use offensive language which is slightly higher than PTI followers (83.3%). Offensive language has great impact not only on political system but influence the overall social structure. Empirical findings reveal that 65% respondents responded that offensive language on social media increase hate against political system, such findings accepted the hypothesis of current study which states “It is more likely that offensive language increase hate against political system”. It is also observed that majority of respondents believe that followers of PML’N significantly use offensive language in comparison with other followers of different political parties. Cyber bullying is unethical practice to win a political narrative and it has led to a new political sphere where social media has gained a central role in influencing voters toward political parties and leaders. In recent studies (Qaisar & Riaz 2020; Qaisar and Riaz 2021; Qaisar, Faiza and Azhar 2021) has shown social media can play an important role in setting the agenda for main stream media. Contents appearing on social media are often presented as it is on traditional media. It leads to discussions and impact gets bigger. Such posts on social media are then adopted by political leadership in public gathering. This indicates role of trolling and bullying in setting up political agenda for media and public as well. Present study recommends immediate policy interventions and national digital literacy program.
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