

Manipulation of Political Discourse of Pakistan on Social Media

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Abstract

The main aim of this study is to investigate how memes have manipulated the ideologies and beliefs of political parties on social media in Pakistan. The data has been collected from social media platform i.e. WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter to accomplish the purpose of this study. Data is analyzed on the basis of Fairclough model. Qualitative paradigm is used to interpret data. Findings of this research suggest that every common man has used this platform to manipulate the ideologies of political parties. Social media has huge potential for providing enough and latest information within no time. Social media has freed common man from the clutches of print media and electronic media.

Keywords: Manipulation, Political Discourse, Social Media, Memes, Pakistan

Social media plays significant role in the production of political discourse. It involves speaker's ideology and his mindset. It is believed that freedom of expression ensures unbiased and transparent information. Van Dijk claims that role of media is not unbiased and true information is not disseminated. Discursive strategies are used which affect the local semantics of talk and text. The most significant feature in the production of media discourse is the role of audience. This study aims to explore the role of social media in manipulating political discourse in Pakistani context. It investigates how memes have manipulated the ideologies and beliefs of political parties on social media. Being descriptive study qualitative paradigm is used to interpret the obtained data from social media platform WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter. The researcher has used Fairclough

model to analyze data. Fairclough's discourse analytical model promotes the principles that texts can never be analyzed or understood in isolation. They can be understood and analyzed in relation to webs of other texts and social context. Political discourse is pervasive and influential due to its strong power to assess the public at large. It exercises the influence on the public perception due to the political support of the system; they assume the power of representing public sentiments. The important events are properly shaped through the political discourse to present before the public. Political discourse is meant for masses. It defines the proper objective of the study. Political discourse is identified by its actors or authors viz politicians. The vast bulk of studies of political discourse is about the text and talk of professional politicians or political institutions such as president's and prime minister's and other members of the government, parliament or political parties, both at the local, national and international levels. Some of the studies of the politicians take a discourse analytical approach (Carbo 1984; Dillon et al, 1990; Harris 1991; Holly 1990; Maynard 1994; Feidel 1988b). Language is an influential instrument for the creation of reality. It facilitates the masses to construct a meticulous vision of that reality. Language of the politician assumes a critical role in acquiring the favors and endorsement of the public. The practices and realization of a language depends on the performance of an individual that how one shares one's ideas through this medium of language (linguistic and paralinguistic both features come under this umbrella term). Then, comes the understanding of his ideas by the other individuals in society. To what extent the communication is successful depends on the code sharing of both speaker and listener. It is a two-way procedure. Subjective choices have made

this easy for people to interpret the things according to the level of their understanding. When we talk about political discourse, immediately some examples come to our minds of some political events and their response from the public. Here you upload a post on social media there you start getting response from people which may or may not save your face. Social media liberates the abstract notions in society more efficiently and quickly than any other medium. Ekström and Östman (2015) confirms that people, referring to youth specially, want to be engaged and entertained with their interests on social media like sports, hobbies, popular culture along with political issues or causes.

Information and communication technologies revolutionized the world more than a decade ago. Internet is the most powerful source in Pakistan for political involvement. 193 million people have quick access to fast flourishing internet markets. 20% population of Pakistan has an easy access to internet via mobile phones. During the last two decades there is rapid increase in the frequency of internet. It is all because of the policies of government and mobile phone companies keeping in mind the economic benefits. The people of the Punjab have free Wi-Fi access at many palaces. Social media has become an integral part of political culture. In Pakistan the usage of internet is mainly limited to literate middle as well as elite class that allows people to create and share different ideas, information and picture/videos. Social media has huge potential for providing enough information within no time. It is an online way of communication to develop interaction and collaboration among people. To be social means not only socialization of a particular society but also the globalization of whole humanity with or without discrimination of race, ethnicity, social class, age or gender. Social media

has become part and parcel for political events Boulianne's (2015) reports that there is a positive association between social media use and political engagements. It does not remain with a single social class or individual rather it covers all. Most of us have access to social media without discrimination of age, gender, beliefs or social division. If big political parties are active on social media, we can find smaller parties on social media as well. Social media allows for a level playing field for majority and minority political forces (Martínez-Rolán, 2015).

When it comes to the relation of political memes on social media and their influences, no political party can escape itself in this era of technology and internet. They are just a click away from public's opinion.

In 1976 Richard Dawkins coined the term meme. Memes are the useful keys to understand digital culture at a broader level. Memes work as cultural keys. Memes are the source for public opinion on some issue. They show discontent against prejudices, raise voice against the social threats and thus represent the opinion of the public (Tazanfal Tehseem, 2015). When we talk about memes; memes diffuse person to person (Shifman L. , 2014). It becomes subjective when it comes to the interpretation of memes but the implied idea remains there very much due to the sharing of same context. Referring to Knobel and Lankshear (2007) Martinez concludes that studying political memes give space to explore ways of thinking, behaviors and actions on the part of both political parties and the community who gives value to them (Martínez-Rolán, 2015). Memes have been used in different context with different captions and objectives. World has become a web of communities. In isolation these communities provide a limited view of

memes confined to one culture but when these communities influence each then memes posted on one site are often reposted on another. (Cristofaro, 2018)

Social media is a great success. Digital natives as well as digital Immigrants have shifted traditional media to social media. Memes work as a bridge between politicians and public. Memes talk through their semantic and semiotic features. Memes are not only positively political oriented, these also bring harassment, anger, frustration elements to political parties. Innocent animal animation is manipulated rather exploited as in case of Pepe the frog. There are those social groups as well who are said to be from Alt-right movements which may work for government or opposition to get favor or public support for sure. For example, Shahid writes:

Even so, what makes PTI the torchbearer of the Alt-Right in Pakistan, is the *tehrik*'s use of modern technology and the internet to marshal its adherents. Like other Alt-Right movements, PTI successfully captured the imagination of the hitherto apolitical social media savvy generation and gave them a Utopia to chase in the shape of 'Naya Pakistan' – (Shahid, 2016)

Social media sites also work to poison the people's mind (Brunben, 2019). It works for the conspiracies floating in the society. Moreover, memes and tweets on social media are not only the source of above-mentioned issues but also takes the responsibility to proceed political campaigns. As Bowyer is of the view that internet (social media) is emerged as a powerful force in collecting funds for campaigns and investment of those funds (Bowyer, 2018)

Purpose

The main purpose of this study is to identify the power and resistance portrayed in memes in Pakistani political discourse. Social media is a great source of globalization. It is not only popular in advanced countries but in Pakistan which is a developing country, it has its strong impact. This study talks about how people manipulate political discourse through social media portrayed via visual political memes and tweets. The researcher wants to probe into the power of social media. How politicians resist, manipulate political discourse when politicians back out of their promises and go against their ideologies. Memes are the cultural production of a society and depicts the happenings in specific time and space. Memes are more related to semiotics which made them more culturally based (Tazanfal Tehseem, 2015).

Implications

The above-mentioned purpose is to generalize the findings in society. This research implicates that social media has penetrated among our digital natives, young generation. Its productive results would be more effective if applied in society. It can motivate others to probe more on memes and tweets on other areas issues which demand attention and consideration in Pakistan for the more critical but positive analysis of memes in future.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Know the politics of power and resistance through memes.
2. Become familiar with the power of social media to educate public opinion.

Research questions

Research questions of this study are as follows:

1. How politics of power and resistance is portrayed through memes?
2. How memes showcase public voice in the prevalent political scenario?

Research Methodology

Fairclough model is applied in this study to examine the role of social media in manipulating political discourse. Aims and objectives are accomplished through this method. Researcher kept in mind the code of ethics. A good research is based on the observance of ethical values which should not be should not be violated. Researcher selected data from social media platform. Memes and tweets taken from Facebook WhatsApp and Twitter are shared by different participants of social media.

Theoretical Underpinning

The researcher has taken Fairclough model. According to Fairclough (1999a) CDA is an approach that proves the interactions between excursive practices and the communal construct in which they are engaged. Politics can be viewed as a battle for power among groups who fight for it and those resisting it (Chilton, 2004, p.3). The history of imitation goes back to Aristotle's and Plato's age. Plato was of the view that this world is an imitation of world in heavens. To make imitation in this world means to copy the idea twice which goes far from the reality. If we look in the matter same is the case with memes. We manipulate it once and then again and again and due to which it seems hard to know the origin of meme as in the case of innocent frog 'Pepe' who was first originated as innocent meme but later it was rememorized time and again that it lost its

originality as a good boy and appears now as a ‘bad boy’

Memes do not only serve the micro-macro propagation but also replication through imitation (Waugh, 2006). The researcher has selected Fairclough theoretical framework. Fairclough (1999, pp. 97-98) has developed the following methods of discourse analysis which include: “(a) linguistic description of the language text, (b) interpretation of the relationship between the (productive and interpretative) discursive processes and the text, and (c) explanation of the relationship between the discursive processes and the social processes” (Iqbal, 2015). Along with this Dawkins should also be kept in consideration as he coined the term meme which developed the meme theory which talks of the possibility that ideas were subject to the same pressures of evolution as were biological attributes was discussed in Darwin’s time.

Data Collection

Data is collected from internet. Memes are selected randomly to see different functions of them. Selected memes are shared on tweeter and Facebook after political events. These memes are sometimes dramatized to put a satirical and funny element.

Sample and Demographics

Twenty-two memes are selected for analysis. The selected memes are pasted and analyzed side by side. Memes are selected from Facebook and Tweeter.

Nature of Data

Qualitative data is drawn from Twitter and Facebook i.e. political memes which are famous on social media and are designed to create better understanding of political situation in a satirical manner.

Ethical Considerations

By keeping ethical considerations in mind only those memes are selected which may not serve as any exploitation of religious and sexual issues. The dank memes are deliberately avoided as they may serve as social taboos. The selected political visual memes and tweets are funny humorous, satirical in nature represent public voice. On classical level humor is meant to teach moral lesson on a lighter note.

Data Analysis

Following memes are analyzed on Fairclough model. The given figures are proceeded with commentary starting with the latest issue.

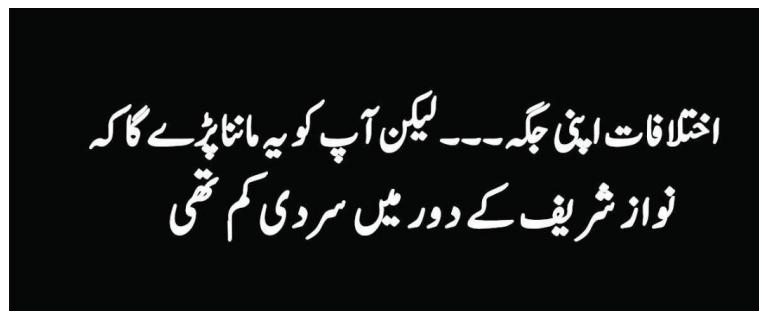
Fig. 1



The picture is quite Ironic in nature, showing how prime minister before coming into the government had made many promises and people invested their trust in him but in the present situation Pakistan is facing problems to restore peace. The situation of the country is getting worse. Inflation is uncontrollable and even the commodities of daily use are out of the reach of citizens of Pakistan. Even there is no increase in salaries and

if there's in some governments, it's just like a drop in the ocean.

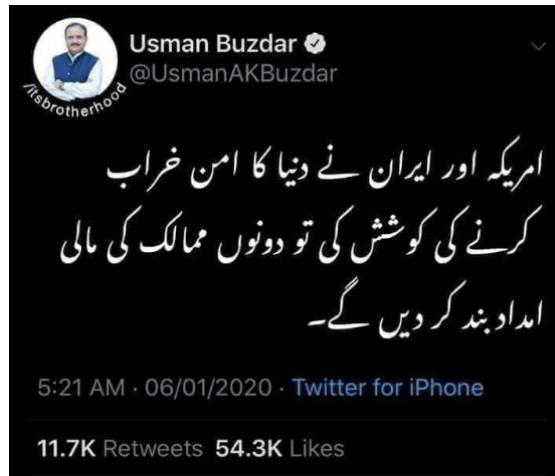
Fig. 2



This picture is exhibiting the thoughts of the PLMN supporters. There seems to be quite an argument between the supporters of both the parties. Hence the PLMN crowd goes, at least winters had been better under the party of Nawaz Sharif.

Pakistani people as a nation are hilarious and they can make jokes out of the very tragic & hard situations. That is why it is said Pakistani people are very hopeful. Example is when Indian guy came here, Pakistanis released him by giving him much honour, respect & hospitality & a cup of tea and he became very famous. Example is at that time Indian Media was mad & outrageous with hatred with such comments. Pakistani social Media was laughing their hearts out and was making jokes about it. So Pakistani Nation has one side of his hopefulness about things, about extreme weather, about entrance Politics. So that is why they survive through lively nature in difficult times. That is why they are making fun نواز شریف کے دور میں سردی کم تھی

Fig. 3



In this figure, there is a sharp criticism on Usman Buzdar. Imran Khan keeps on saying that Usman Buzdar is a sincere person. There are hundreds and thousands of sincere persons among people of Pakistan but they are not elected as Wazir e Aala and Khadm e Aala. In order to run the biggest province Punjab, we must have most capable person who knows how to talk, how to deliver a speech and how to act.

Fig. 4



There is a sort of taunt on Prime minister Nawaz Sharif. He remained prime minister of Pakistan three times but he didn't build even a single hospital which could be ranked to

the international standards to provide health facilities to masses.

Fig. 5

ٹینڈوں کو لال رنگ کر کے ٹھاٹر بنانے پر کام کر رہے ہیں،

فواد چوبدری وزیر سائنس و ٹیکنالوژی

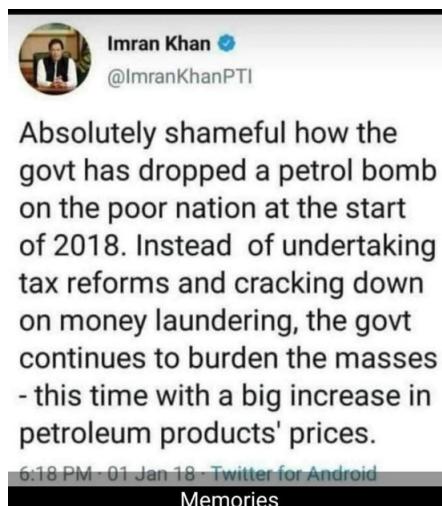
People are making fun of him as he doesn't know anything about science and he is minister of science and technology. He keeps on commenting about the issues he is not supposed to interfere and keeps snapping the journalists. Tomatoes are so expensive that he can colour other vegetables to make them tomatoes. It is hilarious that he doesn't know anything about science and he is talking about science.

Fig. 6



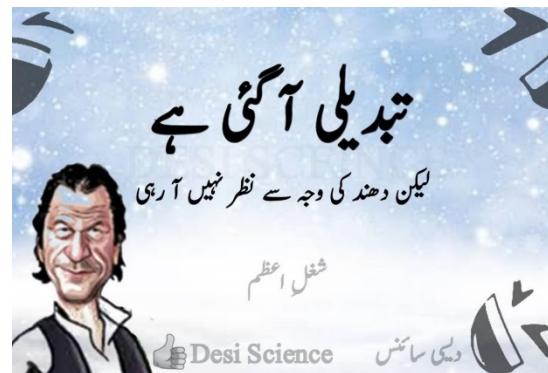
The picture of Mahateer of Malaysia as the Head of Malaysia for more than two decades and people didn't let him down and Imran Khan walking beside him and saying that he has to take U Turn from here is true. He is not walking straight means he is not straight into matters. He is taking U Turn every now and then from whatever he has said before his pledge. His pledge to change the country's situation has become so oblivious , so confusing and whatever he has changed, has gone down the drain of taxes .Everything has become so much expensive. Everybody is talking about his facing the hardships, middle class is becoming poor class of Pakistan .It is a symbolic picture very meaningful ,conveying very powerful message for the people that he is not going straight in form of progress and he is just taking U Turns on different issues and that is not going to take him anywhere in terms of progress.

Fig. 7



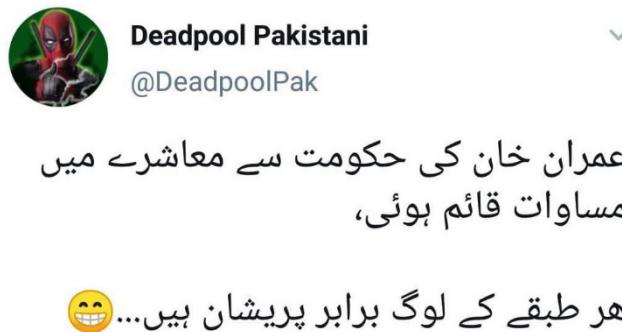
The above-mentioned words were said by Imran Khan himself when PLMN was in power and are quite backfiring on him now.

Fig. 8



No progress seems to be “visible” in the fog they say. Seems like, it’s quite “invisible” and “nonexistent”. The situation of uncertainty is there.

Fig. 9



The name “Tehreek e Insaaf” was taken by Imran Khan as his slogan to show justice and equality to all but the people have other ways of putting it.

Fig. 10



This picture speaks about the feminine character of Bilawal. A prominent PPP worker Shela Raza is expressing her love for PPP by being loyal and nostalgic about Bibi (Benazir Bhutto). Bilawal used to speak in a very feminine way. That is why this meme is mocking him with ‘Software zanana’. Moreover, PPP’s leader has the purely feministic characteristics which may never lead the party in the right direction.

Fig. 11



Apart from all critical memes, this real picture is taken as a meme. A clear contradiction is here of having high inflation rate. But this man is contented on a single issue that his leader is not corrupt.

Fig. 12 & 13:

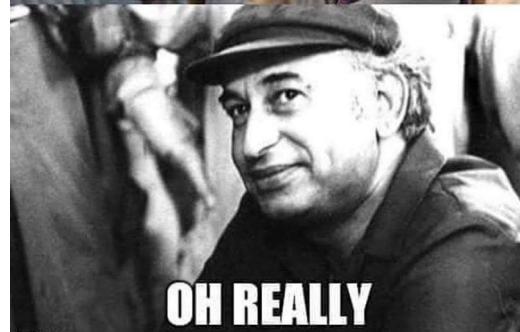
Bhutto Jani is That You???



SAB MAR JAYE GAY

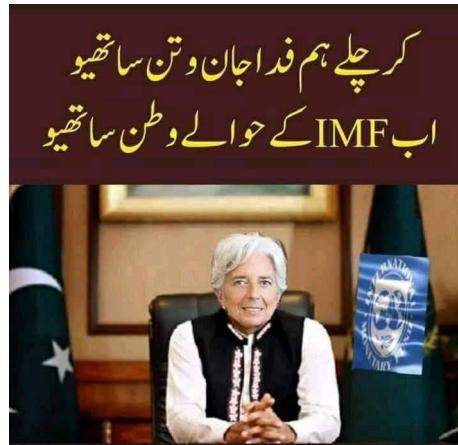


OH REALLY



Both pictures are mentioning Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Shaheed. These both point to the famous slogan; ‘Kal bhi Bhutto zinda tha aaj bhi bhuto zinda hai’. In figure 12 a petrol station is shown with nobody filling petrol and it says; “Bhutto Jani, is that you?” which makes a lighter fun of the above-mentioned slogan. In figure 1 one two characters are shown talking about the universal truth, “sb mar jaein gay” (everybody will die). But Bhutto’s picture is given with a caption, ‘OH REALLY ‘On a lighter note it seems that Bhutto himself has this realization that he would stay alive even after his death.

Fig. 14



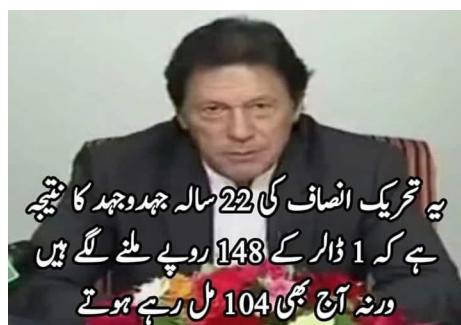
This picture is a great satire on the part of PTI. Imran Khan said, “bhookay mar jaein gay magar qarza nai mangay gay”. This statement was taken and accepted by public warmly and they donated in dam fund warmly. But the verse in the figure 14 shows the PM chair with the IMF secretary. While the verses say; ‘kr chalay hm fida jan o tn sathiyoo’ means we have done our best to avoid loan but all efforts are in vain. ‘ab IMF k hwalay watan sathiyoo’ means this country is on auction or sold out to IMF.

Fig. 15, 16 & 17

The highest price of dollar claims to have worse economy in country.



This picture speaks of the highest price of dollar in a religious context. As Muslims do believe in Jihad and believe in taking active part in Jihad leads to higher ranks in the world hereafter. Now talking of dollar as a participant in Jihad implies two meanings; 1) Dollar is denoting USA directly and what USA forces have done in Afghanistan and Iraq that is a mere killing of innocent people by purchasing heavy arms against them. This participation of USA against jihad has made them more powerful and their economy is rising in the form of currency value. 2) On the other hand, it is a mocking dollar as a participant of jihad where dollar is spent to buy arms for Taliban. The personification of dollar is highly appreciative.



This meme is a direct satirical attack on PTI that how they are defending themselves with funny statements. These statements are mere memes where Imran Khan is defending his government by converting the dollar into Pakistani currency.



Pooh the bear is shown in two dresses. In the upper one he is in casual rather local dress and saying; 'meray pass 150 rupay hain' (I have one hundred and fifty rupees). The pooh in the lower picture is wearing a suit and saying; 'meray pass aik dollar hai' (I have one dollar). It clears the idea of ruling currency whether it is equal to the local currency you have but the economy power rises with international currency.

Fig. 18 & 19



The dream and realization can never be the same. Both pictures are combined in collage and thus a meme is created where the speaker is opposing his own statement. This depicts that to rule and to howl are two entirely different things. The expectations and believing yourself are entirely apart from reality and practicing as shown in meme 18. The people were made to dream 'naya Pakistan' in upper image while the realization is entirely different in the lower image. The dream was of a bright successive future but the reality is dark and passive. PTI as alt-right figure has portrayed a negative face.

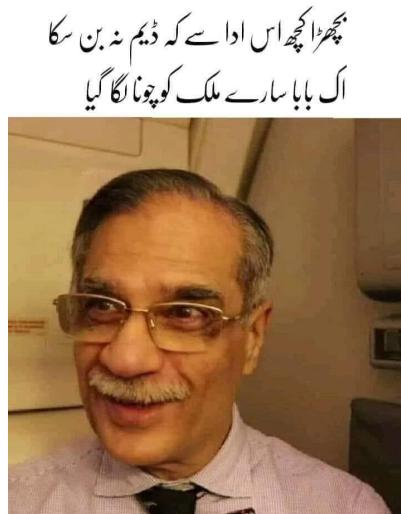


Fig. 20

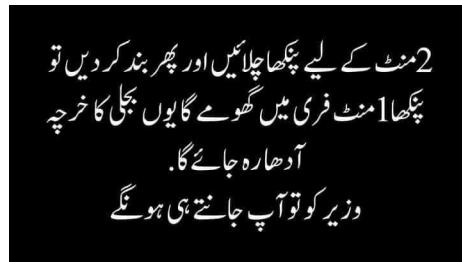


Memes do not spare anyone; even religious parties are caricatured. The religious parties were united but their unity was for the benefit of religious parties if they won election. But now they are working as pole apart. Every religious party like other political party aims to rule the country without thinking that their unity may be beneficial for country and nation. The unity ‘tragedy’ was only meant for elections not for practicing unity.

Fig. 21



This meme shows the picture of ex-chief justice Saqib Nisar. He has remained an active participant in fund collecting scheme of PM. He was the one who legally called for funding. Many visits were done in and out of the country. Media gave him a complete coverage. This meme mocks at the present situation of Dam Funding. People want to know how much collection has been made and when the dam building will get a start. ‘Dam na bn saka’ is something beyond expectations of the people and ‘choona lag geya’ refers that ex-chief justice has not accomplished the task and deceived public like many others.

Fig. 22

This meme shows an implied meaning to guess the Minister of Science and Technology. Such memes are viral everywhere on social media. The one without having scientific experience is serving as science minister. The Minister of Science and Technology should be doctorate in Natural Sciences having great experience. If such ministers would be elected then these outcomes are obvious as this meme says. It is actually representing the true poor condition of our countries in most of the walks.

Results and Discussion

These are some functions which are performed through political memes and tweets to portray politics of power and resistance. Where there is power there is resistance. Social media has provided free will to common man to raise his voice against wrong use of power and exploitation of the rights of citizens.

Memes and tweets manipulate the ideologies, beliefs and promises of political parties make fun to lead the leaders if get noted to educate them to positive direction. Memes and serve as a pungent satire, though sometimes on a lighter note. They have the power to convey that serious issues needed much attention as well as showcase public voice for those who are unheard and wronged. Memes are not only funny but they are a

source of great mock to others which may result to ban these memes as saying 'zanana software'. Memes portray satire that our leader is taking U-Turn and there is no positive change and their government is nonresistant. Memes and tweets allow the people to understand more in fewer words. These memes and tweets are the source to bridge the gap between political parties and public. Memes and tweets portray that Pakistanis are a lively people. They are optimistic by nature. They take the positive side of picture and they are hospitable by nature. Memes portray that there is a contradiction in leaders' sayings as prime minister Imran Khan takes U-Turn as well as Nawaz Sharif could not bring positive change in Pakistan despite of the fact that he remains prime minister for 3 times. He prefers foreign hospitals over Pakistani Hospitals. These leaders in their campaigns raise slogans that they will work wonders for humanity. They talk as they are the champions of human rights but here, they themselves are usurping the human rights by not providing the basic facilities of health to common man. Being citizens of Pakistan, their motherland and true Patriots as they enthusiastically portray during elections, the responsibility of proof rests upon their shoulders. They should not disgrace others and hurt the feelings of their country men. They should not work as so-called leaders.

Social media has freed man from the clutches of print media as well as social media. This is because of technical advancements in information technology and media industries. The availability of internet, free Wi-Fi access has made it far more successful, independent and aware. Social media is powerful enough to highlight trivial well as serious issues. This should be kept in mind that leaders are human beings. Code of ethics should be followed. Ethical values are the basic criteria of judgement. Social

media having pervasive influence on social media participants including children, immature minds can have bitter effects. To call them 'choor' and 'zanana' is not a good practice as we are penetrating this term to society and which is surely absorbed by our children which will lead them to unethical values. Such memes and tweets should be discouraged. We have to recall and consider the great services rendered by them in some way or the other and avoid calling them with bad names just for the sake of fun. To call them corrupt or 'choor' or 'zanana' may result in losing the intensity which these words actually have.

Conclusion

This study showcases that every common man has used social media platform to manipulate the ideologies of political parties. Social media has huge potential for providing enough and latest information within no time. A decade ago, common man was unfamiliar with political discourse and practices of politicians. Social media has not only engaged them in the current political discourse but it has become part and parcel of providing latest information, entertainment and awareness. Now a day's common man has himself become a journalist. He can comment, share and upload latest material which is not only informative, funny, ironical and satirical in nature but also witty. This research implicates much more is required to be done in the field of social media. Political memes and tweets are strong enough to highlight trivial issues as well as convey serious issues in lighter satirical note to grab the attention of public as well as political parties. Research should be constructive, it should serve the purpose of serving humanity rather than serving the purpose of research only. Participants of social media

should be aware of their responsibilities as these memes are public voice to raise voice against injustice, usurpation of the rights of downtrodden. Political memes and tweets have strong power to affect people's behavior and view point. It can have strong impact on vote bank of political parties.

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