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POLITICAL CANVASSING IN THE DIGITAL AGE: ANALYZING THE USE OF FACEBOOK BY MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES IN PAKISTAN DURING THE 2024 GENERAL ELECTIONS

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Abstract
Like many other domains of mass communication, political communication in the world has been significantly reshaped by digital transformation. This ongoing digital revolution has challenged scholars to revisit and reformulate traditional theories of mass communication, political communication, and the public sphere. One of the prominent theoretical propositions is the Networked Public Sphere Theory (NPS) proposed by Yochai Benkler (2006) and later expanded by Manuel Castells (2012). This framework suggests that social media platforms, such as Facebook, facilitate decentralized and participatory political engagement by enabling users and political actors to create, distribute, and respond to political content in real time. Grounded in this theoretical perspective, the present study explores the empowering and constraining dynamics of Facebook as a tool of political canvassing during Pakistan's General Elections 2024. For analytical clarity, political canvassing as a construct in this study is categorized into three thematic concepts: general information/awareness, voting instructions, and political polarization. The study examines Facebook posts published on the official pages of five major political parties—Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F), and Jamaat-e-Islami (JI)—during the two weeks preceding the election (January 24 to February 7, 2024). The findings reveal that PTI, PML-N, and PPP were substantially more active on Facebook compared to JUI-F and JI. While most parties focused their content on general political awareness and polarization, PTI distinguished itself by emphasizing voting instructions and electoral guidance. This shift in focus is attributed to PTI's confrontational stance with state institutions and its marginalized position during the electoral process. The dominant narrative on PTI's Facebook page centred on mobilizing support against perceived fascism and lawlessness, often linking the act of voting to the release of its incarcerated founder, Imran Khan, and other party leaders.

INTRODUCTION

The 16th General election 2024 were held in Pakistan to elect the 265 national Assembly and 590 Provincial Assembly members across the country, following two years' time of political upheaval triggered by former

PM Imran Khan's ouster in 'No Confidence Vote' and subsequent arrest. The election was initially scheduled for 2023 but postponed amid mounting legal ensuing and social unrest (Curtis, 2024). Supervised by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) the GE 24 were contested by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) as major political contenders along with other political parties. However, the revocation of PTI's electoral symbol, the incarceration of its leader Imran Khan, and restrictions on campaign coverage introduced significant political tension (*Dawn*, 2024, ECP, 2024).

After Pakistan's turbulent political time, international media gave tough coverage to the controversial 2024 general election. Most of the reports focuses on military irregularity, interference, and yet solid success of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Pakistan (PTI) backed independents despite obstacles the Pakistani newspaper the *Dawn* reported the statement of British newspaper "Financial Times" and highlight that the young voters preferred Khan's "new Pakistan" vision over Sharif family rule (*Dawn*, 2024).

In Pakistan, both state-owned and privately-run news media outlets provided extensive coverage of the general elections. However, this coverage drew considerable criticism due to allegations of partiality—particularly accusations of favouring certain political parties and operating under pressure from the military establishment. These concerns raised questions about the media's capacity to maintain impartiality and offer balanced, comprehensive reporting during such a crucial democratic process. "Several news channels allegedly reduced or censored coverage of PTI candidates, many of whom were running as independents without their party's symbol" (HRCP, 2024). The leading international media organization like CNN, BBC and Al-Jazeera have devoted important attention to Pakistan' General elections. Through live update and in-depth analysis, such channels are closely covering different aspects of the polls, consisting security, profiling of candidates and the temporary suspension of digital communication services. CNN highlighted the UN human rights chief appeal for a free and fair vote and discussed the challenges facing huge political parties, especially PTI and it founder. The BBC focused the disruption caused by communication service suspension, reported on Maryam Nawaz casting her vote in Lahore, and noted Nawaz Sharif's statement about the military (*The Express Tribune*, 2024).

In a scenario where mainstream media could not and did not perform the much anticipated 'national duty' of keeping the nation up to date and of fair reporting, the social media platforms in Pakistan turned out to be the only places for public awareness and opinion sharing during the GE 2024. Despite restrictions, social media played an unprecedented role in documenting and disseminating election-related developments. Platforms like X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook were flooded with videos of polling booths, voter grievances, and real-time result updates. Citizen journalists and political vloggers like Imran Riaz Khan and Asad Toor garnered large followings by offering alternative narratives to state media. However, the lack of regulation and fact-checking on these platforms also led to the spread of misinformation, particularly about rigging, vote tampering, and fake result sheets. The absence of a coordinated effort to monitor or verify digital content left many voters confused and polarized, reinforcing existing political biases.

The election produced an expected result, with independents, denial of his party symbol, and a hostile military establishment while, PPP, PML-N and MQM trailed behind and no party secured a majority. The result has triggered a scramble to form a partnership, most likely led by PMLN with PPP and MQM, but it faces credibility concerns due to allegations of rigging delayed outcome and pre poll bias against PTI. The results are widely seen as a rejection of dynastic politics and military interference, reflecting people frustration with Pakistan' financial decline and government failures. With PTI unwilling to ally with rival parties, it will likely sit in opposition while attempting to handle KP and Panjab, raising the risk of more protest and political instability. The uncertainty comes at a time when Pakistan urgently needs to negotiate a long-term IMF program to manage external debt. For the US and other partner, the fractured political landscape means engaging with a government emphasis more on domestic survival than on security and policies problems (Mir & Salikuddin, 2024)

The international observer reported extensive pre poll ringing mainly targeting PTI. Allegations consist

rejection and snatching of PTI nomination paper, arrests, gerrymandering favouring PML-N suppression of rallies and banning media coverage of PTI founder. PTI candidates were forced to contest under confusing symbols such as, Eggplant, dice and heater, inducing voter confusing. Most of the PTI leaders were exiled, Jailed and pressured to quit, while rallies faced attacks and support sere harassed. A national wide newspaper as just before voting that proclaimed Nawaz Sharif as a PM, further fueled accusations of election engineering undermining believes in the fairness of the poll (Voice of America, 2024, February 06).

The 2025 election saw a mass voter cost that defied the attempts to rig the contest. Contrary to predictions, the PML-N leader Nawaz Sharif failed to win outright, while independent back bay jailed PTI leader secured the most seats, with PPP third. Such upset dealt a "bloody nose" to the establishment, long dominant in politics. PTI used social media circulated content generated by AI to deliver the Khan's Message. The result reflects solid public resistance to military involvement and a remarkable voter revolt in election 2024 (*The Guardian*, 2024).

This whole scenario calls for an in-depth analysis of various aspects of GE 24 in Pakistan. This study is an attempt to explore and analyse how did the major political parties in Pakistan including PTI, PML-N, PPP, JUI-F, and JI use Facebook as a tool of 'political canvassing' before GE 24. So, here is our broader research question;

Research Question; How did PTI, PML-N, PPP, JUI-F, and JI use Facebook as a tool of 'political canvassing' two weeks preceding GE 2024 i.e. January 24, 2024 to February 07, 2024?

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review critically examines general elections in Pakistan from 1999 to 2024, focusing on the role of media and the socio-political and religious dynamics shaping electoral outcomes. Drawing upon peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and credible reports, it highlights key debates, developments, and the complex interplay between democratic institutions and non-democratic forces in Pakistan.

Pakistan's democratic trajectory since its inception in 1947 has been punctuated by repeated disruptions. The democratic process and elected governments have been directly interrupted three times through military coups and, more frequently, indirectly through proxies or manipulated democratic arrangements. The most recent direct military regime under General Pervez Musharraf (1999–2008) exemplified a hybrid political system, wherein fragile and unpopular political figures were accommodated under military oversight—further weakening institutional integrity (Rizvi, 2003; Shah, 2014). The 2002 general elections, held under overt military influence, drew significant criticism from domestic and international observers for lacking credibility (International Crisis Group, 2002; Zia, 2018). Likewise, the 2008 elections, though signaling a political transition, were also widely viewed as compromised due to the lingering effects of military control and weak civilian institutions.

A major paradigm shift occurred in 2002 with the liberalization of the media landscape, marking the emergence of private electronic media that challenged the state's monopoly over information. This expansion diversified discourse, increased public engagement, and offered space to marginalized voices. However, several scholarly analyses contend that media ownership structures and fear of state censorship have led to alignment with dominant narratives rather than true pluralism (Siraj, 2009; Yusuf, 2013). The 2013 general elections underscored this tension, with numerous claims of media bias and partisan reporting influencing voter opinion (Hussain & Saltman, 2020). The growing use of social media in the 2018 and 2024 elections further complicated the landscape. Political parties, state institutions, and non-state actors increasingly employed digital platforms to shape public opinion—raising concerns around misinformation, algorithmic manipulation, surveillance, and suppression of dissenting views (FAFEN, 2024; Freedom House, 2023; Riaz, 2024).

Religion has remained a central pillar of Pakistan's state identity and electoral politics. Religious political parties have long exerted influence on electoral outcomes and constitutional development, particularly during critical geopolitical moments. For example, during the Soviet-Afghan War and later the post-9/11 War on Terror, religious parties found renewed significance. These periods saw the instrumentalization of religious discourse in electoral campaigns. The Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), led by Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F), governed Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa from 2002 to 2007, illustrating the electoral viability of religious coalitions (Nasr, 2004; Haqqani, 2008). More recently, parties like Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) have employed sectarian narratives and blasphemy rhetoric to mobilize voters, deepening socio-political polarization and undermining institutional resilience (Ahmed, 2021; Rehman, 2020; International Crisis Group, 2002).

Pakistan's electoral behaviour is also shaped by deep-rooted structural and socio-cultural factors. Politics is often influenced by ethnic, tribal, patriarchal, and dynastic considerations. The major political parties continue to exhibit dynastic characteristics, limiting internal democracy and reinforcing elitism (Zia & Bari, 2020). Despite an increase in female voter turnout and political participation, women remain significantly underrepresented in leadership roles, particularly in rural and conservative regions. Voter preferences are frequently determined by caste, ethnicity, religion, and personal gain rather than ideological alignment—reflecting the broader socio-economic disparities prevalent in the country (Baxter, 2015; Javid, 2019).

Historically, Pakistan's elections have been marred by controversy and allegations of manipulation. Military interference, judicial overreach, and bureaucratic complicity have cast long shadows over electoral integrity. In response to longstanding electoral deficiencies, the Election Act of 2017 was introduced to institutionalize reforms. Nevertheless, both the 2018 and 2024 general elections continued to attract criticism regarding fairness and transparency, with persistent claims of pre-poll rigging, uneven playing fields, and institutional bias (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2018; FAFEN, 2018; FAFEN, 2024).

International observers, including the European Union Election Observation Missions and Commonwealth Observer Groups, have consistently monitored Pakistan's elections. While commending logistical arrangements, they have raised serious concerns about the impartiality of the electoral process. Reports from the 2024 elections highlighted undue influence by the military and judiciary, casting doubts on the autonomy of key democratic institutions and the overall integrity of the process (EU EOM, 2018; Commonwealth, 2024).

Umber et al. (2024) stated in their study that global media often focused on Imran Khan as "charismatic personality" and instability while downplaying organizations, broader movement, and systematic problems such as military interference, and election fairness. Reports form channels like France 24 and New York Time etc. reflect inconsistency, with some stressing unrest and other portraying democratic success. Such focused-on personalities over context simplifies Pakistan's complex politics, shows international interest and alliance and sidelines local voices.

PTI leader being jailed silenced and the party barred from contesting under its cricket symbol, despite it all, PTI backed independents perform strongly in 2024 election. They got 100 out of 265 seats ahead form both party (PML-N and PPP). The result reflects the Khan's enduring popularity, driven by Young, and middle-class voters frustrated by inflation and disillusion with Sharif and Butto dynasties. Khan claims the 1st right to form the government, while Sharif supported by Army (Dilawar, 2024).

According to the Goldbaum (2024) Khan's success broke the long-standing political dominance of Pakistan's military. The Independent News criticized credibility due to internet blackouts, slow vote counting, and military interference (Sharma, 2024). Sky News clarified that the election left Pakistan in political limbo; PPP may become kingmaker; military's influence weakened (Lynch, 2024). The Time Magazine reported a story that despite attempts to sideline him, Khan and PTI remain a major political force (Campbell, 2024).

The France 24 termed the 2024 elections the most rigged in history, dubbing them the "generals' elections." (Jactinto, 2024). According to India Today any government formed against public mandate could spark mass unrest, the India Today indicated to the general election of 2024 held in Pakistan (Mohan, 2024). The CNBC reported Nawaz Sharif early victory claims amid accusations of vote-rigging and economic crisis (Turak, 2024). And the CBC News questioned whether the military will accept the electorate's clear support for Khan (Shivii, 2024).

The finding of the current analysis shows that despite such strictness (Jailed to Imran Khan and restricted his party and other ouster effort) shocked Pakistan's Military establishment by wining the most seat in the general election 2024. Coverage of international media to the election reflect the unexpected

performance of the candidates backed by Imran khan. Channels such as CNN, BBC, Al-Jazeera, The New York Times, Bloomberg and the Guardian cover that the PTI supported independently won the most seats, shaped the result as huge public rebuke to elites. The coverage focused how Imran Khan is famous especially among the youth and middles class people.
In conclusion, the democratic process and electoral politics in Pakistan remain under sustained pressure from both institutional weaknesses and structural inequalities. Public opinion is often shaped less by policy platforms and more by religion, ethnicity, tribal affiliations, and economic patronage. The disenfranchisement of women, especially in peripheral regions, and media's co-optation by state interests further erode the democratic fabric. Despite constitutional safeguards and reformist legislation, meaningful democratization requires transparent elections, institutional independence, and an inclusive political culture that guarantees a level playing field to all actors.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Networked Public Sphere Theory (NPS) proposed by Yochai Benkler (2006) and later expanded by Manuel Castells (2012) suggests that social media platforms, such as Facebook, facilitate decentralized and participatory political engagement by enabling users and political actors to create, distribute, and respond to political content in real time. The NPS offers a vigorous theoretical framework to examine Facebook's role as a digital platform of political canvassing in GE 24 in Pakistan. The NPS would help to determine that how did Facebook as a digital platform of political canvassing supported participatory politics, evaded media restrictions, and empowered Pakistani citizens during GE 24.
Therefore, keeping in view the relevance and suitability, we have provided this study with the theoretical underpinnings from the Networked Public Sphere theory.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

Employing the 'advanced search' options on the Facebook pages we have found out that during the selected period of time (January 24th to February 07th, 2024) PTI posted 39 posts, PML-N posted 35, PPP posted31, JUI-F posted 15, and JI posted 19 times. We employed lottery method to select an equal size of sample from all the available data. Hence, we selected two posts from each data set and complied a set of 10 posts as a sample for this study.

Data Analysis; Thematic Analysis

For the sake of data analysis, keeping in view the broader research question and research objective, we have employed thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) deductively. We have a broader theme under study i.e. political canvassing and we have delimited this construct into smaller and measurable concepts i.e. general information/awareness, voting instructions, and political polarization. The study examines Facebook posts published on the official pages of five major political parties—Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F), and Jamaat-e-Islami (JI)—during the two weeks preceding the election (January 24 to February 7, 2024).
We have developed a coding sheet for clarity and for comprehensive thematic analysis;

Content Category	Definitions	Indicators (Coding Units)
GE Information/Awareness (GI)	It means the information which is mentioned in FB posts regarding general elections, 2024.	#KasurSherKa (Hashtag tells that where the jalsa was) #HumSabKaNishanTeer Hash tag: "Vote for captain's freedom". تحریک انصاف کی جانب سے اب سے کچھ ہی گھنٹوں میں ٹک ٹاک پر منفرد اور اہم جلسہ ہوگا جلسہ رات 9 بجے تحریک انصاف کے تمام سوشل میڈیا پلیٹ فارمز براہِ راست نشر کیا جائے گا

		(On behalf of Tehreek-e-Insaf, there will be a unique and important meeting on Tik Tok in a few hours from now! The meeting will be broadcast live on all social media platforms of Tehreek-e-Insaf at 9 pm) سندھ دورہ کا مدظلہ الرحمان فضل مولانا جمعیت قائد / شیڈول (Leader of Jamiat Maulana Fazlur Rehman visit to Sindh / Schedule)
Voting Instructions (VI)	These are the instruction given by a political party to instruct them how to vote and other election related guidance.	رہیں۔دور سے پروپیگنڈے فیک سے قسم تمام (Stay away from all kinds of fake propaganda) Name: Rana Atif (nominated candidate of PTI). Constituency: NA 101 Faisal Abad. Election Symbol: "Bottle". Election Symbols
Pol Polarization (PP)	A content found against other political parties will be termed as PP	The screengrab of Suno News about PTIs stepping back from election, labeled with a fake news. e.g. a quote by PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto: پہلا گا، کروں کام ہی دو صرف میں وزیراعظم بطور کرکے خاتمہ کا سیاست کی اورتقسیم نفرت کو عوام کام دوسرا اور گا، جوڑوں کو ملک پورے ہوگا دیلیف ناریل (As the Prime Minister, I will do only two things, the first will unite the entire country by ending the politics of hatred and division, and the second will be to give relief to the people.) #نوچنی_ذ_سوچ_و_ک (Choose new thinking)

FINDINGS & ANALYSIS;
Description Post N0. 01:
Post- Type of Data: It is a screenshot of *Suno New HD*, having Text, Graphics,
Date: Feb 7, 2024
Link: https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=982942673187608&set=pb.100044156543245.-2207520000&type=3

Coding Sheet

Content Category	Definitions	Indicators (Coding Units)
GE Information/Awareness (GI)	It means the information which is mentioned in FB posts regarding general elections, 2024.	اکستان تحریک انصاف بھرپور طریقے سے الیکشن میں حصہ لے گی Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf will actively participate in the election
Voting Instructions (VI)	These are the instruction given by a political party to instruct them how to vote and other election related guidance.	تمام قسم سے فیک پروپیگنڈے سے دور رہیں۔ Stay away from all kinds of fake propaganda

Political Polarization (PP)	A content found against other political parties will be termed as PP	The screengrab of Suno News about PTIs stepping back from election, labeled with a fake news.
Political Canvassing (PC)	All the efforts and attepts to convince the voters for a specific party or candidate.	تحریک انصاف کسی صورت الیکشن سے دستبردار نہیں ہوگی۔ Tehreek-e-Insaf will not withdraw from the election under any circumstances #VoteForImranKhan

Interpretation:
This post was actually produced for countering the fake propaganda spread on the channels like Suno News. It stated that PTI has withdrawn from the election. A post having a screenshot of the channel and labelled it as "Fake." It also has boost morale of the PTI supporters by informing that PTI will take part in election actively and they were instructed to stay away from all type of fake propaganda تمام قسم سے فیک پروپیگنڈے سے دور رہیں۔
It convinces its workers by saying that party will never withdraw from the election and it add a hashtag #VoteForImranKhan

Description Post N0. 02:
Post- Type of Data: Text, a Poster of PTI TikTok Jalsa, having Text and Photos
Date: Jan 24, 2024
Link:
https://www.facebook.com/PTIOfficial/posts/pfbid02z9feNcCgcvy8XcHbB6wvpVgCg5iLsARkR7rXkkcuPVr2rbmPriunajYdt8S3j2Qkl

Coding Sheet

Content Category	Definitions	Indicators (Coding Units)
GE Information/Awareness (GI)	It means the information which is mentioned in FB posts regarding general elections, 2024.	تحریک انصاف کی جانب سے اب سے کچھ ہی گھنٹوں میں ٹک ٹاک پر منفرد اور اہم جلسہ ہوگا جلسہ رات 9 بجے تحریک انصاف کے تمام سوشل میڈیا پلیٹ فارمز براہِ راست نشر کیا جائے گا ! On behalf of Tehreek-e-Insaf, there will be a unique and important meeting on Tik Tok in a few hours from now! The meeting will be broadcast live on all social media platforms of Tehreek-e-Insaf at 9 pm
Voting Instructions (VI)	These are the instruction given by a political party to instruct them how to vote and other election related guidance.	It doesn't have any voting instruction
Pol Polarization (PP)	A content found against other political parties will be termed as PP	

Political Canvassing (PC)	All the efforts and attepts to convince the voters for a specific party or candidate.	It has a poster which has announced the first ever TikTok jalsa and photos of the speakers

Interpretation: This post against announced the first ever TikTok jalsa of PTI. In the text and poster, it announced the time and date of the Jalsa, the poster has also included the photos of the speakers. It includes, Shehbaz Gill, Faisal Javed Khan, Zulfi Bukhari, Shandan Gulzar and Monis Elahi. The workers were asked to watch the live jalsa.

Description Post N0. 03:
Post- Type of Data: Text, almost 49 photos of Nawaz Sharif, Maryam Nawaz and Shahbaz Sharif
Date: Feb 07, 2024
Link:
https://www.facebook.com/pml.n.official/posts/pfbid0W1xdMmc9HPrxD8qMD2r7ihFvh9sBST8ycaPucPmzTMfAiZt6pZn7v2RTn66fjDgMl

Coding Sheet

Content Category	Definitions	Indicators (Coding Units)
GE Information/Awareness (GI)	It means the information which is mentioned in FB posts regarding general elections, 2024.	#KasurSherKa Hashtag tells that where the jalsa was
Voting Instructions (VI)	These are the instruction given by a political party to instruct them how to vote and other election related guidance.	It doesn't have any voting instruction
Pol Polarization (PP)	A content found against other political parties will be termed as PP	
Political Canvassing (PC)	All the efforts and attepts to convince the voters for a specific party or candidate.	محبتوں کا شکریہ کھڈیاں Thank you for the love #ووٹ شیر کا Vote for Lion #فیر فیر فیر شیر Lion, again, again, again #پاکستان کو نواز دو Bless Pakistan or Give Nawz regime to Pakistan through vote

Interpretation: It is a simple post of PMLN political gathering (Jalsa) in Kasur district of Punjab. This post has used the hashtags. It tells that Kaur belongs to Lion of Nawaz. It has the thanks to people from PMLN leadership. Other than the text it has 49 photos of different leaders including Nawaz Sharif, Maryam Nawaz and Shahbaz along with some local leadership.

Description Post N0. 04:
Post- Type of Data: Text, Poster of having Nawaz Sharif photo
Date: Feb 06, 2024
Link:
https://www.facebook.com/pml.n.official/posts/pfbid02T9CGM5E8EMKWV3VsxJxG7kdcgMgRmyVt9iGoN4yEr67sFpfCEZcHKReaRbo7J8821

Coding Sheet

Content Category	Definitions	Indicators (Coding Units)
GE Information/Awareness (GI)	It means the information which is mentioned in FB posts regarding general elections, 2024.	#KasurSherKa Hashtag tells that where the jalsa was
Voting Instructions (VI)	These are the instruction given by a political party to instruct them how to vote and other election related guidance.	It doesn't have any voting instruction
Pol Polarization (PP)	A content found against other political parties will be termed as PP	
Political Canvassing (PC)	All the efforts and attempts to convince the voters for a specific party or candidate.	نوجوانوں کو ہنر سکھائیں گے باعزت روزگار دیں گے" ہمیں قوم کی تقدیر بدلنی ہے ہمیں قوم کو مشکلات سے نکالنا ہے پاکستان کا ایشئن ٹائیگر بنانا ہے" We will teach skills to the youth and give them decent jobs. We have to change the destiny of the nation; we have to get the nation out of difficulties." Pakistan has to make an Asian Tiger

Interpretation: It is a post again about the same political gathering and having the same hashtag about Kasur jalsa. This post has focused on the youth. The PMLN post addressed the youth and vowed that they will make the youth skilled that will help them to get a decent job. The party post also used the rhetoric پاکستان کا ایشئن ٹائیگر بنانا ہے. This post has photos of Nawaz Sharif, supremo of PMLN, some slogans and monograms on the posters. The PMLN posts doesn't have any general information, voting instruction or political polarization in its content, their main purpose was political canvasing.

Description Post N0. 05:
Post- Type of Data: Text, Poster of having Bilawal photo and Sindhi Text
Date: Feb 06, 2024
Link: https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=966899691467137&set=pb.100044413447081.-2207520000&type=3

Coding Sheet

Content Category	Definitions	Indicators (Coding Units)
GE Information/Awareness (GI)	It means the information which is mentioned in FB posts regarding general elections, 2024.	Date of the election Feb 08 on the poster
Voting Instructions (VI)	These are the instruction given by a political party to instruct them how to vote and other election related guidance.	#HumSabKaNishanTeer
Pol Polarization (PP)	A content found against other political parties will be termed as PP	

Political Canvassing (PC)	All the efforts and attempts to convince the voters for a specific party or candidate.	مزدور کي ان جي محنت جو مڪمل اجورو ڏيڻو آهي ته تير کي ووٽ ڏئي ڪامياب ڪندا. The worker has to be fully remunerated for his labor. #چنو_نئی_سوچ_ریلی Choose New Thinking rally

Interpretation: The post has both a poster and text. The text was written both in Urdu and local Sindhi language. The poster has informed the public about the date of the elections; it also has a photo of Bilawal distributing Mazdoor card among the people. The post narrated "The worker has to be fully remunerated for his labor." Through a hashtag #HumSabKaNishanTeer the post reinforces its political symbol and while doing political canvasing it asked the youth to join their caravan of new thinking.

Description Post N0. 06:
Post- Type of Data: Urdu Text, Poster of having Bilawal photo
Date: Feb 06, 2024
Link: https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=967041724786267&set=pb.100044413447081.-2207520000&type=3

Coding Sheet

Content Category	Definitions	Indicators (Coding Units)
GE Information/Awareness (GI)	It means the information which is mentioned in FB posts regarding general elections, 2024.	
Voting Instructions (VI)	These are the instruction given by a political party to instruct them how to vote and other election related guidance.	#HumSabKaNishanTeer
Pol Polarization (PP)	A content found against other political parties will be termed as PP	
Political Canvassing (PC)	All the efforts and attempts to convince the voters for a specific party or candidate.	A quote by PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto: بطور وزیراعظم میں صرف دو ہی کام کروں گا، پہلا نفرت اورتقسیم کی سیاست کا خاتمہ کرکے پورے ملک کو جوڑوں گا، اور دوسرا کام عوام کو ریلیف دینا ہوگا As the Prime Minister, I will do only two things, the first will unite the entire country by ending the politics of hatred and division, and the second will be to give relief to the people. #چنو_نئی_سوچ_کو Choose new thinking

Interpretation: This post has Bilawal Bhutto photo and his quote. It totally supports the political canvasing of Pakistan Peoples Party. Using the political rhetoric about the politics of divide and hatred. This post in its second segment talks about the relief to public. But it was also said that these things are associated with Bilawal PM

designation. It doesn't have any general election information, but it's through a hashtag narrated about its political symbol arrow and about new thinking.

Description Post N0. 07:
Post- Type of Data: Urdu Text, Posters of having Maulana Fazal and JUIF leaders' photo
Date: Jan 24, 2024
Link:
https://www.facebook.com/juipakofficial/posts/pfbid02outiwAzEkhsXU5TyGcERXL1fd6S5GNzVGXopcretMkAnJ16hHtKhbCTD6fuPMRSpl

Coding Sheet

Content Category	Definitions	Indicators (Coding Units)
GE Information/Awareness (GI)	It means the information which is mentioned in FB posts regarding general elections, 2024.	This post has a one-line text and posters which has a schedule of JUIF supremo Maualna Fazal Ur Rehman jalsas in Sindh. قائد جمعیت مولانا فضل الرحمان مدظلہ کا دورہ سندھ / شیڈول Leader of Jamiat Maulana Fazlur Rehman visit to Sindh / Schedule
Voting Instructions (VI)	These are the instruction given by a political party to instruct them how to vote and other election related guidance.	Having its political symbol book
Political Polarization (PP)	A content found against other political parties will be termed as PP	
Political Canvasing (PC)	All the efforts and attempts to convince the voters for a specific party or candidate.	It attracts the youth to Maulana Fazal JUIF for their political gathering and vote.

Interpretation: The JUIF Facebook was also active during the elections. The post under study is an announcement is the schedule about Maulana Fazal Ur Rehman Sindh political jalsa tour. It has a slogan like خوشحال سندھ آؤ مل کر بنائیں ..
The text is just one line but it has a number of photo posters having time and date of the gathering along with the personal contacts of the people.

Description Post N0. 08:
Post- Type of Data: Urdu Text, photos
Date: Jan 25, 2024
Link:
https://www.facebook.com/juipakofficial/posts/pfbid0dxiar4UPuwVMa35nzYVqHynUJ1bt8aR2Q5gRukDGVsP4sKExXxC85ehU6W3peA2il

Coding Sheet

Content Category	Definitions	Indicators (Coding Units)
GE Information/Awareness (GI)	It means the information which is mentioned in FB posts regarding general elections, 2024.	ملتان : قائد جمعیت مولانا فضل الرحمٰن مدظلہ جامعہ قاسم العلوم میں تقریب سے خطاب کر رہے ہیں -

		Multan: Quaid Jamiat Maulana Fazlur Rehman is addressing the ceremony at Jamia Qasim Uloom.
Voting Instructions (VI)	These are the instruction given by a political party to instruct them how to vote and other election related guidance.	
Pol Polarization (PP)	A content found against other political parties will be termed as PP	
Political Canvasing	All the efforts and attempts to convince the voters for a specific party or candidate.	The photos of Maulana in such a known and big Darul Aloom may help them to do political canvasing among the people who are hardcore religious.

Interpretation: This is just a news of JUIF supremo Maulana Fazal Rehman that he has addressed the students and Ulema in a seminary in Punjab. It has a number of photos of his speech. This kind of posts help a lot in canvasing the things.

Description Post N0. 09:
Post- Type of Data: Urdu Text, Poster having Sirajul Haq photo and some graphs
Date: Feb 05, 2024
Link: https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=943456254016860&set=pb.100050574815596.-2207520000&type=3

Coding Sheet

Content Category	Definitions	Indicators (Coding Units)
GE Information/Awareness (GI)	It means the information which is mentioned in FB posts regarding general elections, 2024.	ازہ سروے میں جماعت اسلامی تیسری مقبول ترین جماعت بن کر سامنے آئی ہے In the latest survey, Jamaat-e-Islami has emerged as the third most popular party.
Voting Instructions (VI)	These are the instruction given by a political party to instruct them how to vote and other election related guidance.	Having its political symbol Balance.
Pol Polarization (PP)	A content found against other political parties will be termed as PP	اردو نیوز سروے عام اندازوں کے برعکس اس نے پیپلزپارٹی کو بھی پیچھے چھوڑ دیا ہے۔ And contrary to common estimates, it has also left the PPP behind.
Political Canvasing	All the efforts and attempts to convince the voters for a specific party or candidate.	ردو نیوز کے تازہ سروے میں 21.6 فیصد لوگوں جماعت اسلامی کے حق میں رائے دی۔ 21.6% of the people voted in favor of Jamaat-e-Islami in the latest survey of Redo News.

Interpretation: It is a comparatively complete post. It has general information about JI that it became third major party in the country according to Urdu News Survey. This is the post which has shown comparison of JI with other political parties and it left PPP behind. In this post the party given its leader Sirajul Haq photo. It has shown the survey in the form of Pie char which make the understanding of data easier.

Description Post N0. 10:
Post- Type of Data: Urdu Text, Poster having Sirajul Haq and his jalsa 37 photo
Date: Feb 06, 2024
Link:
https://www.facebook.com/JIPOfficial1/posts/pfbid0MejrzYxaNeEWiERiiKYviRurumLY3WNHEVSsp1y3ioNgMSiFxnpWAUE5Xjym2LW2l

Coding Sheet

Content Category	Definitions	Indicators (Coding Units)
GE Information/Awareness (GI)	It means the information which is mentioned in FB posts regarding general elections, 2024.	دیر لوئر - امیر جماعت اسلامی سراج الحق کی زیرقیادت این اے 6 میں ترازو کارواں، کارواں نے ثمرباغ، بلامبٹ، لال قلعہ، منڈا، تیمرگرہ میں مختلف علاقوں اور بازاروں سے گزرا جہاں ان پر پھولوں کی پتیاں نچھاور کرکے شاندار استقبال کیا گیا۔ Dir; Tarazo Caravan led by Ameer Jamaat-e-Islami Sirajul Haq in NA-6, the caravan passed through various areas and bazaars in Samarbagh, Balambat, Lal Qila, Munda, Tamergarh where they were showered with flower petals.
Voting Instructions (VI)	These are the instruction given by a political party to instruct them how to vote and other election related guidance.	Having its political symbol, Balance.
Political Polarization (PP)	A content found against other political parties will be termed as PP	
Political Canvasing	All the efforts and attempts to convince the voters for a specific party or candidate.	

Interpretation: This is the general news type of post which tells about the JI jalsa and its caravan. It also tells that how the people welcome it in Lower Dir. It doesn't have anything about voting instruction, political polarization**.** Though the overall post can help JI canvasing their motive for the upcoming elections.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Discussion

Our findings are pretty much aligned with the Networked Public Sphere Theory (NPS) proposed by Yochai Benkler (2006) and later expanded by Manuel Castells (2012). Within the context of General Elections in Pakistan in 2024, our findings endorsed that social media platform, such as Facebook, facilitated decentralized and participatory political engagement by enabling users and political actors to create, distribute, and respond to political content in

real time. Facebook turned out to be a platform for social media users and the political actors to create and disseminate their political narratives, electioneering, and voter mobilization. Election campaigns in Pakistan are now incomplete without the use of social media for promotion and activism. This study analyzed Facebook posts from the official pages of five major political parties—PTI, PML-N, PPP, JUI-F, and JI—during the pre-election period of 2024, specifically from January 24 to February 7. Two posts from each party were examined.

A deductive thematic analysis was employed to interpret the data. Posts were initially selected, and subsequently, categories were developed based on recurring themes identified within the content. It was observed that all political parties had activated their social media teams and maintained a visible presence throughout the election season. Four key categories were identified, which guided the development of the coding sheet for this study: General Information/Awareness, Voting Instructions, Political Polarization, and Political Canvassing. Specific indicators were then selected to identify these categories in the analyzed posts.

Among all, PTI appeared to be the most proactive in utilizing Facebook. While all parties engaged in political canvassing, PTI went a step further by using the platform to issue voting instructions and share real-time updates with its supporters, along with messages like سے پ روپ یگنڈے یکف سے ق سم ت مام رہ یں دور ("Stay away from all kinds of fake propaganda").

The PPP also maintained an active presence on Facebook. Notably, it localized its content by using the Sindhi language and conducted extensive political canvassing. The party frequently used the platform to raise awareness, particularly by educating voters about their election symbols.

JUI-F, like the other parties, used its Facebook pages mainly to share jalsa (public gathering) schedules and general campaign information. However, JI utilized the platform more strategically for image-building and to appeal to potential voters.

PTI, in particular, employed Facebook not only as a canvassing tool but also for political polarization and counter-propaganda. Their posts included compelling graphics and visuals that effectively communicated the party's message and mobilized public support.

Conclusion

Our research findings, consistent with Bankler's theory, suggest that during the 2024 general elections in Pakistan, Facebook emerged as a platform where the general public, and especially political parties and political leaders, freely exercised their political manifestos, campaigning, and voting rights. This study found that all major political parties in Pakistan actively utilized digital media as part of their election campaigns. However, the scope of this research was limited to the official Facebook pages of five key parties: PTI, PML-N, PPP, JUI-F, and JI. Among them, PTI emerged as the most efficient in leveraging Facebook for political activism. The platform not only supported their campaign outreach but also served as a tool to counter what they identified as fake propaganda.

While other parties such as PML-N and PPP also used Facebook, their approaches were relatively less active and more narrowly focused compared to PTI. PTI shared a diverse range of content, whereas the others typically circulated one or two specific types of posts.

Facebook now offers a variety of features including text posts, images, videos, reels, and stories. It was observed that most parties preferred using text and images, which often carried political rhetoric, awareness content, and polarized narratives. Some parties leaned more toward visual content, while others used a mix of text and videos.

PTI, in particular, used its Facebook presence to sensitize supporters against what it described as false propaganda, while also educating them about the election process and their democratic responsibilities.

PPP, on the other hand, promoted a pro-labor narrative through slogans like کو_سوچ_ذ ئی_چ نو ("Choose a new way of thinking"). Their use of the Sindhi language and localized content supported a nationalist narrative.

PML-N focused its political messaging on youth empowerment, with slogans such as ہ نر ک و ذ وجواذ وں گ ے دیں روزگ ار ب اعزت گ ے، س کھائ یں ("We will teach skills to the youth and provide them with respectable employment").

Both religious parties—JUI-F and JI—used Facebook to support their party goals. JUI-F primarily utilized the platform to mobilize workers for political rallies and jalsas, while JI strategically promoted its accessibility

and engagement, particularly with the youth across Pakistan.

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