

ANALYSIS OF TWITTER HANDLES OF PAKISTAN'S PROMINENT POLITICAL PARTY LEADERS AFTER THE MAY 9 INCIDENTS

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Basar Ali, Zia Ullah**Abstract**

The present study investigates how Pakistan's prominent political parties responded on Twitter following the May 9, 2023, events in Pakistan, which evoked enormous protests and political unrest. The research analyzes the tone, messaging, and interaction trend of tweets by three prominent political leaders: Imran Khan (Leader-I, PTI), Maryam Nawaz Sharif (Leader-II, PML-N) and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari (Leader-III, PPP). The research uses content analysis as its primary approach, categorizing the tweets as according to the content variations such as news, updates, and official statement. The study also analyses the language (formal or informal) and tone (positive, neutral, or negative) of the tweets. The research concludes that Leader-I (PTI) received significant popular support and attention and attempted to justify the events to some extent, and his tone throughout the incidents was found to be largely negative, while Leader-II (PML-N) made a calculated response and condemned the incidents, her tone in the tweets is notably negative. Leader-III (PPP), on the other hand, preferred to focus on keeping politics active rather than confronting the issue at hand. This study offers useful insights into how Pakistani political leaders used twitter to manage a national crisis and influence public perceptions.

INTRODUCTION

Twitter was originally a concept that was similar to texting. In 2006, Twitter founder Jack Dorsey came up with an idea for building a communication platform in the form of SMS, in which users would tweet the status and view one another updates. At the 2007

South Bay Southwest Interactive Conference, more than 60,000 tweets were sent, and Twitter quickly began to grow. Twitter utilized the conference as a tool to attract more users. The 140-character limit was one of the original norms since Twitter began as an SMS

based platform, where everybody could write 140 characters express their thoughts. Twitter become a medium that generated highly accessible content for our modern, technologically oriented, deficit culture (Forsey, 2019).

Politicians, candidates, and representatives learned to realize the value of using Twitter as a means for direct communication to the people and their electorates. They could easily express their view, opinions, and stance on a variety of issues with the following through the development of Twitter handles. In comparison to mainstream media, Twitter offered individuals a nearer and authentic platform for contacting audience. Apart from short but impactful tweets, they could also engage with audiences directly, answer queries, and maintain positive debate. Through direct connection on Twitter, political figures were able to connect with their following, personalize themselves, and interact with people on an interpersonal level. It also gave them a forum for conveying their views (Stromer-Galley & Rossini, 2024). Three significant political parties in Pakistan are investigated in this study: the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP).

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) was founded on April 25, 1996, by Imran Khan and commenced as an answer to Pakistan's conventional political parties with the objective of creating an equal, Islamic welfare state. PTI failed to win a single seat in the 1997 and 2002 elections, showing their initial failures to become well-established in Pakistani politics. But since its exhibition in Minar-e-Pakistan in 2011, the political significance of the party rose, and by 2013 had attracted 7.5 million votes with a government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. When PTI established the federal government in 2018 with the highest votes, it was a conclusive victory (Wikipedia, 2025d).

Pakistan Muslims League: One of the most widely used and oldest political parties in Pakistan is Pakistan Muslim League (PML), which was established in 1947 after the creation of the country. It was established

initially to represent the Muslim League, which played the foremost role in the creation of Pakistan. The PML has split into numerous factions over the years, the most prominent of which is the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) led by Nawaz Sharif. The PML-N is a strong party in Pakistani politics and has taken over the federal government for a couple of occasions, the most prominent one being that of Nawaz Sharif. The party is known to be in the middle of political scandals and also advocates for pro-business policies, economic development, and democratic institution-building. Notwithstanding many changes in leadership and political strategy, PML remains a player to be counted upon in Pakistani politics (Wikipedia, 2025b).

Pakistan People's Leader: The Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) was founded in 1967 by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, whose vision was to discover socialist and progressive laws as part of an effort to build an equal society. Through its focus on land reforms, nationalization of key industries, and quest for social justice, the party was instrumental in the history of Pakistan. Zulfikar's daughter Benazir Bhutto took the PPP to history by being elected twice as prime minister of the country. PPP is very popular due to its alignment with rights of women and labor and against military rule and for democracy. PPP remains one of Pakistan's most powerful political parties, especially in Sindh province, albeit with various challenges, including internal disintegration and military coups (Wikipedia, 2025c).

9 May 2023: Former prime minister Imran Khan was arrested on May 9, 2023, at the Islamabad High Court on charges of corruption and involvement in illicit land transactions. After his arrest Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), held mass-scale protests following his arrest, which many initially thought to be politically charged. Protests became violent with the protesters targeting key administrations and military outposts, including Corps Commander official residence in Lahore and Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) headquarters. Severe damage was caused by the protests, and

unfortunately, at least eight people lost their lives and many others were injured. The violence reflected the nation's deep political divide and intense anger over Khan's incarceration (Kaunert & Khan, 2025). In response to the violence, Pakistanis' military establishment had termed the May 9 incidents as an "assault on the state." The characterization was fitting because attacks on key military installations were perceived by the military leadership as direct desecration of their authority. Curfews had been declared,

and PTI members rounded up and arrested as a response to the swift military and government crackdown. While the crackdown accelerated, the army seized control of key cities in a bid to restore order, a strategy referred to as securitization. The event proved the vulnerability of Pakistan's democratic institutions and amplified the political crisis through accentuating tensions between Imran Khan's PTI and the military establishment (Wikipedia, 2025a).

LITERATURE REVIEW:

1. Arab Spring:

Arab Spring referred to the wave of protests and anti-government uprisings which erupted in the latter part of 2010 and swept across the Arab world, particularly in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain. The protests were against the autocratic governments and for democratization, social justice, and political reforms. President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was deposed by the enormous protests ignited by Mohamed Bouazizi's auto-immolation in Tunisia during December of 2010. The protest action initiated these uprisings in surrounding states (Wolfsfeld et al., 2013). Social networking websites such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, because they provided activists with easier means of mobilizing, communicating, and coordinating, were most accountable for the Arab Spring. The activists were able to organize protests, spread news, and get publicity from all over the globe due to these pages. But whether social media played a role in the Arab Spring is uncertain. While some scholars believe that social media played a pivotal role in organizing the protests, other scholars believe that social media's role was overestimated and that the revolutions rested more heavily on fundamental socio-political forces (Wolfsfeld et al., 2013). For instance, social media facilitated the circulation of news and the staging of demonstrations in Egypt. They were formed against government corruption and police brutality by the Facebook site "We Are All Khaled Said," which was a resistance symbol (Reed, 2016). The Arab Spring arrived

with hope initially, but its off-season arrived with hard problems. Political unrest and the creation of military regimes were the consequences of not only President Hosni Mubarak's removal from power in Egypt but also that of other social movements. A human crisis was escalated in Syria when peaceful protests turned into a violent civil war. These outcomes indicate the complexity of social movements and failing to initiate long-term political change via internet platforms (Gire, 2017).

2. The 2016 Turkish Coup Attempt:

One of the Turkish military forces attempted to overthrow President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's administration on 15th July 2016. The coup plotters announced a declaration of martial law and occupied major buildings like the presidential palace and parliament. Nevertheless, after a mix of civilian resistance in large numbers and loyalist soldiers, the coup was terminated. In an effort to involve the public freely, President Erdoğan used social media, more precisely FaceTime, in calling the citizens to rise up for democracy by marching into the streets (Demirhan, 2022). Social media platforms proved necessary during the attempted coup. Facebook and Twitter helped citizens march, disseminate news, and debunk false information. Anti-coup protesters employed the hashtag #DarbeyeHayir (No to the Coup) as a battle cry (Demirdis et al., 2023). The Turkish government subsequently initiated a sweeping crackdown, arresting tens of thousands and deporting those suspected of having ties with the coup plotters. The administration further implicated journalists and media outlets in

facilitating the coup plot. Press freedom and human rights in Turkey were compromised due to the closure of several media outlets and arrest of journalists (Kaplan, 2024). The 2016 coup attempt shed the light on the dual role which social media assumes as an agent of mobilization and an agent of state control. Social media provided the citizens with the power to protest and mobilize, and at the same time left the government with an outlet where it could propagate its message and silence its opponents. The event shed the light on the complex relationship between the political authorities and digital platforms in contemporary states (Tanash et al., 2017).

Problem Statement:

The study is crucial because it examines how political communication is influenced by social media, particularly Twitter, in response to key events in Pakistan. The research gives light on significant political parties' crisis management techniques, communication tactics, and public involvement on the site by analyzing how they used their Twitter identities after the May 9 Incident. This analysis contributes to a greater comprehension of political parties' digital communication strategies by offering insightful information on how they used Twitter to communicate their responses and messages during a crucial time. The study also investigates the tone and content of the tweets, which enables us to assess their influence on public opinion and how they influenced political discourse in the wake of the occurrence.

Research Questions:

- 1) What are the engagement patterns exhibited by political parties on Twitter following the May 9 Incident?
- 2) How does the content and tone of tweets posted by political parties during the post-May 9 Incident period differ?
- 3) In what ways does the Twitter activity of various political parties vary, and how does this impact their approaches, messaging, and public reception?

METHODOLOGY:

The research methodology defines the structured approach used to analyze the Twitter communication patterns of political leaders following the May 9, 2023 incident. This methodology employs both qualitative and quantitative research techniques to gather and analyze data. Content analysis serves as the primary method, allowing for the identification of recurring themes, topics, and communication strategies across the leaders' tweets. The process involves organizing the data through a coding sheet and analyzing it statistically to extract meaningful insights. The objective is to explore the political stances of Imran Khan (PTI), Bilawal Bhutto Zardari (PPP), and Maryam Nawaz Sharif (PML-N) as expressed on their Twitter accounts after the incident.

Content Analysis:

Content analysis is a systematic research method used to evaluate both qualitative and quantitative data from various forms of media, such as written text. It is designed to detect patterns, themes, and relationships within the data (Krippendorff, 1999). In this study, content analysis was applied to examine the tweets of the political leaders, sorting them into different categories based on content such as official statements, policy discussions, responses to the May 9th event, and interactions with followers. This thematic categorization helped identify the strategic communication and narrative construction used by these leaders.

Unit of Analysis:

In this study, the unit of analysis is each individual tweet posted by the political leaders in the one-month period after May 9, 2023. Each tweet is treated as an independent communication event that offers insights into the political leaders' responses, tone, content, and engagement with their followers.

Independent Variables:

The independent variables in this study are the Twitter accounts of the selected political figures. These accounts serve as the focal points for analyzing the leaders' online communication behavior. The specific accounts examined are:

- Imran Khan (@ImranKhanPTI)
- Maryam Nawaz Sharif (@MaryamNSharif)

- Bilawal Bhutto Zardari (@BBhuttoZardari)
- **Dependent Variables:**
The dependent variables are the political activities exhibited by these leaders on Twitter, including:
 - The frequency of tweets
 - The tone of the messages (positive, neutral, or negative)
 - The content of the tweets (e.g., policy announcements, personal opinions, updates, etc.)
 - The level of engagement with followers (likes, retweets, and replies)
- **Operational Definitions:**
To clarify key terms in the study, the following operational definitions were established:
 - **Like:** Number of times a user "liked" a tweet.
 - **Replied:** Count of public replies to the leaders' tweets.
 - **Retweets:** The number of times other users shared a tweet from the leaders' accounts.
 - **Content:** Frequency with which a tweet that was posted by the leaders' accounts was retweeted by others.
 - **Statement:** Any official declaration or opinion expressed in a tweet.
 - **Update:** A brief message providing information on specific events.
 - **Information:** Tweets containing factual data or statistical details.
 - **News:** Tweets reporting on current events or incidents.
 - **Tone:** The emotional tone conveyed through language in the tweets, categorized as:
 - **Positive:** Optimistic or approving language.
 - **Neutral:** Factual, unbiased, or neutral language.
 - **Negative:** Disapproving or critical language.
 - **Sentiments:**
 - **Positive Sentiments:** Tweets with expressions of support or optimism.
 - **Negative Sentiments:** Tweets expressing criticism or disapproval.
 - **Neutral Sentiments:** Tweets that are neither strongly positive nor negative.
- **Data Collection Techniques:**
Data for this study was manually collected by reviewing the official Twitter accounts of the three political leaders. Key aspects recorded for each tweet included:
 - The content of the tweet (text, images, videos)
 - Engagement metrics (likes, retweets, replies)
 - Hashtags used
 - The tone of the tweet
 - References to the May 9 incident
 - Interactions with followers (e.g., replies or mentions)

A coding sheet was used to organize and categorize the data according to predefined themes, such as political statements, responses to the incident, or public engagement. This approach is particularly useful for small-scale, focused studies where specific aspects of the leaders' Twitter activity is the main interest.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

The research's focus was a thorough examination of the Twitter activity displayed by three important figures from Pakistan's three major political parties. This analytical project covers the period from May 9 to June 9, or a month.

Imran Khan was designated as Leader-I, Maryam Nawaz Sharif as Leader-II, and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari as Leader-III.

In-depth statistical analysis was used to examine the data gathered and uncover significant trends. These important findings were carefully arranged into a number of tables, which not only communicated the analysis's findings but also offered a formal framework for understanding the research's consequences.

The following Pie Chart show the percentage of every leader tweets. It shows that which leader was more engaged on the twitter.

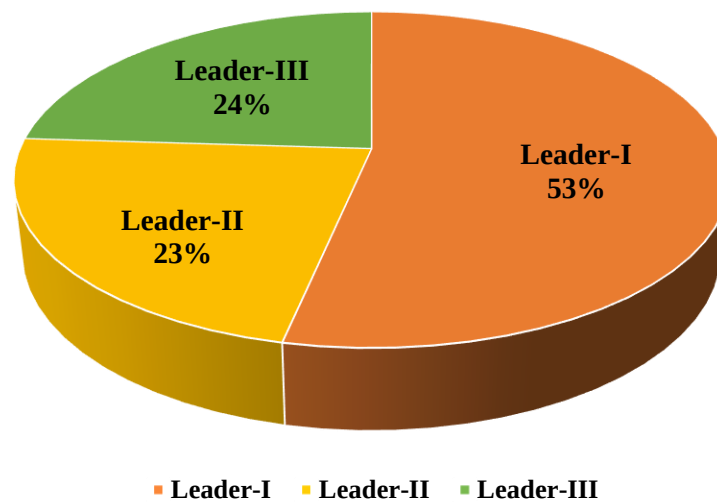
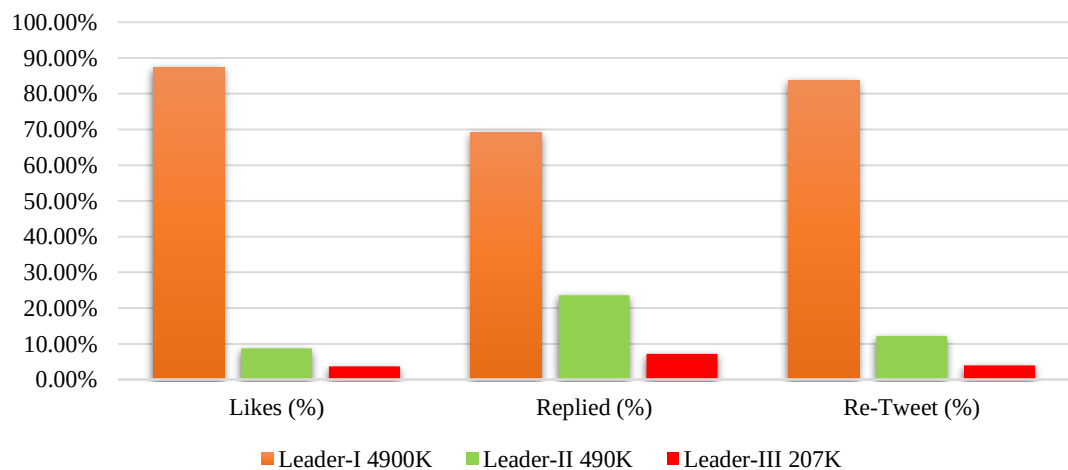
TOTAL TWEETS BY LEADERSHIP

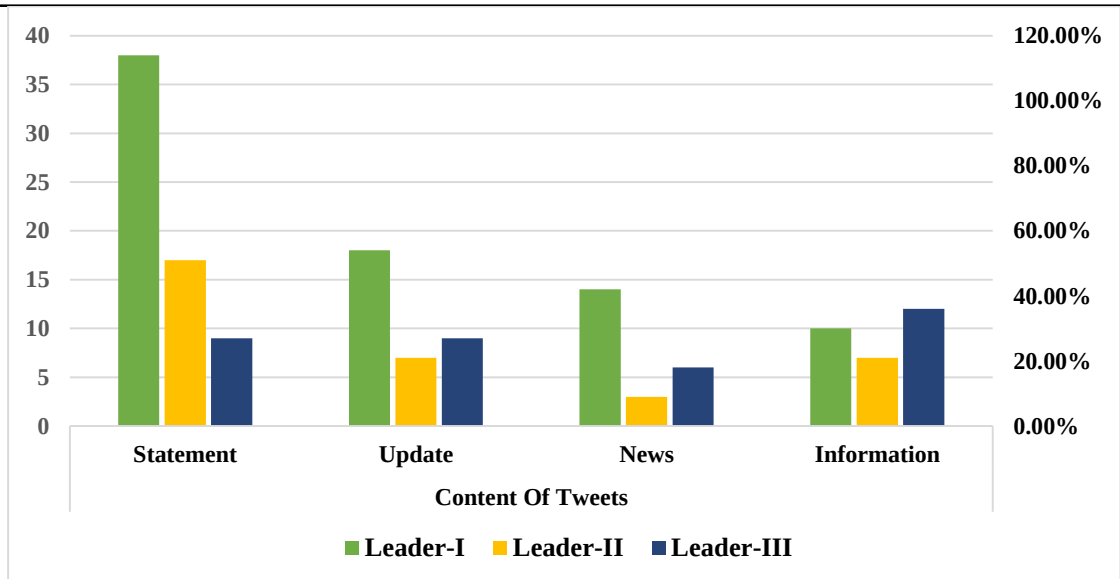
Figure 01:

RESPONSES TO THE PARTY LEADERS

This bar chart illustrates the engagement percentage (Likes, Replies and Re-Tweets) for three leaders with different follower's bases: Leader-I gained 4.5M likes, Leader-II gained 490K and Leader-III gained 207K within in

duration of one month. Leader-I exhibits much higher engagement across all metrics, emphasizing the impact of follower count on social media interactions.

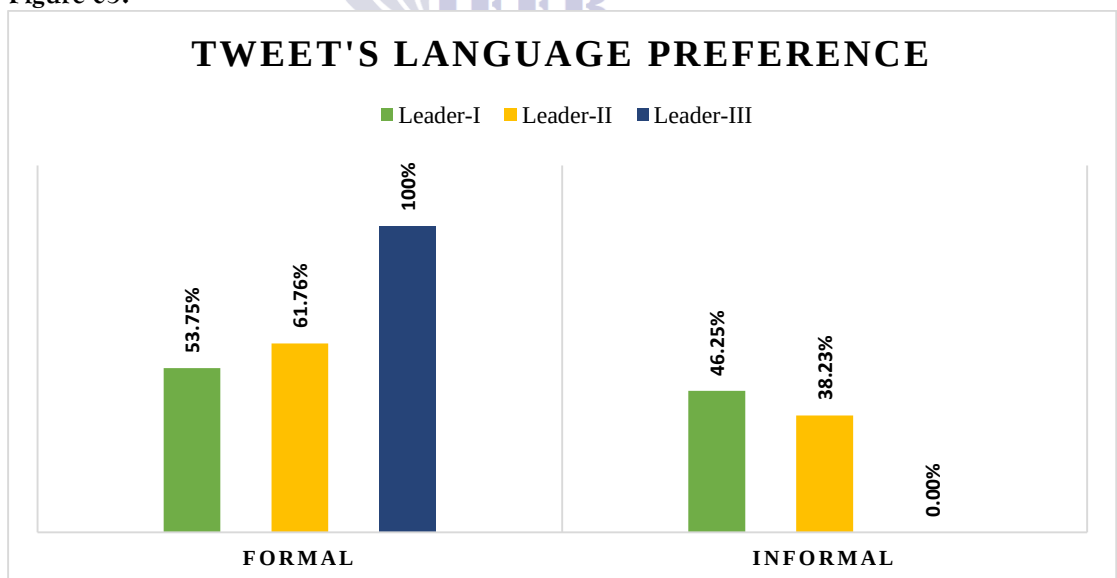
Figure 02:



The bar chart illustrates the distribution of tweet content types across these three leaders. The tweet categories in "Statement," "Update," "News," and "Information." Leader-I primarily focuses on "Statements," with a noticeably higher number of tweets in this category compared to the others. Leader-II shows a more balanced spread, with a significant focus on both

"Updates" and "News." Meanwhile, Leader-III exhibits a more even distribution of tweet content, with a slight preference for "Information." This chart highlights the varying communication strategies of each leader, demonstrating their distinct approaches to engaging with their audience through different types of tweets.

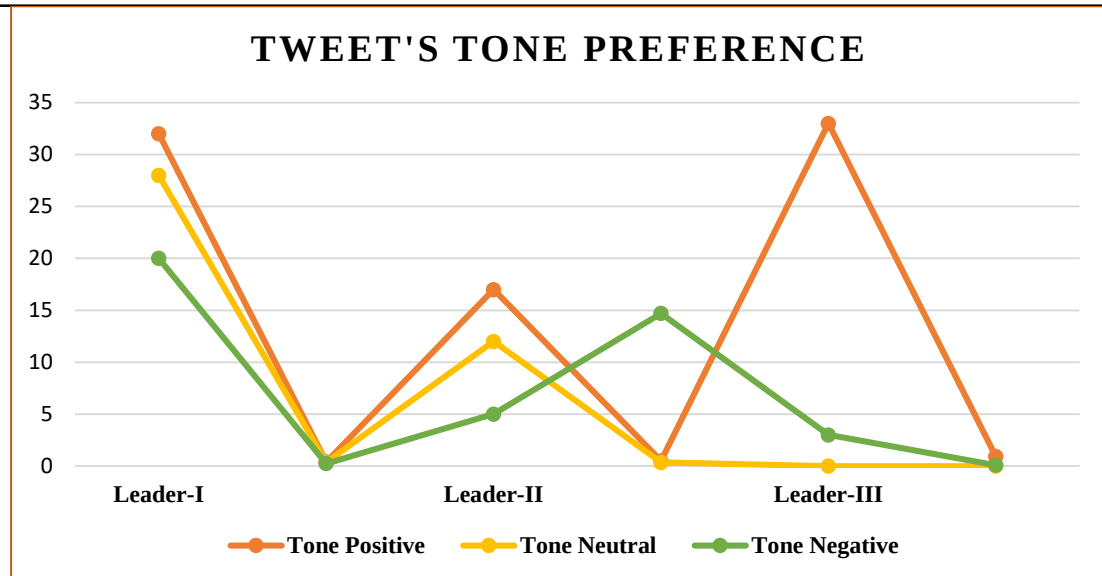
Figure 03:



The bar chart depicts the language preferences in tweets by three leaders: Leader-I, Leader-II, and Leader-III. It categorizes the language into formal and informal styles. Leader-I posts 53.75% of tweets in a formal tone, while

46.25% are informal. Leader-II shows a similar pattern, with 61.76% of tweets in a formal style and 38.23% informal. In contrast, Leader-III exclusively uses formal language, with 100% of their tweets in this category.

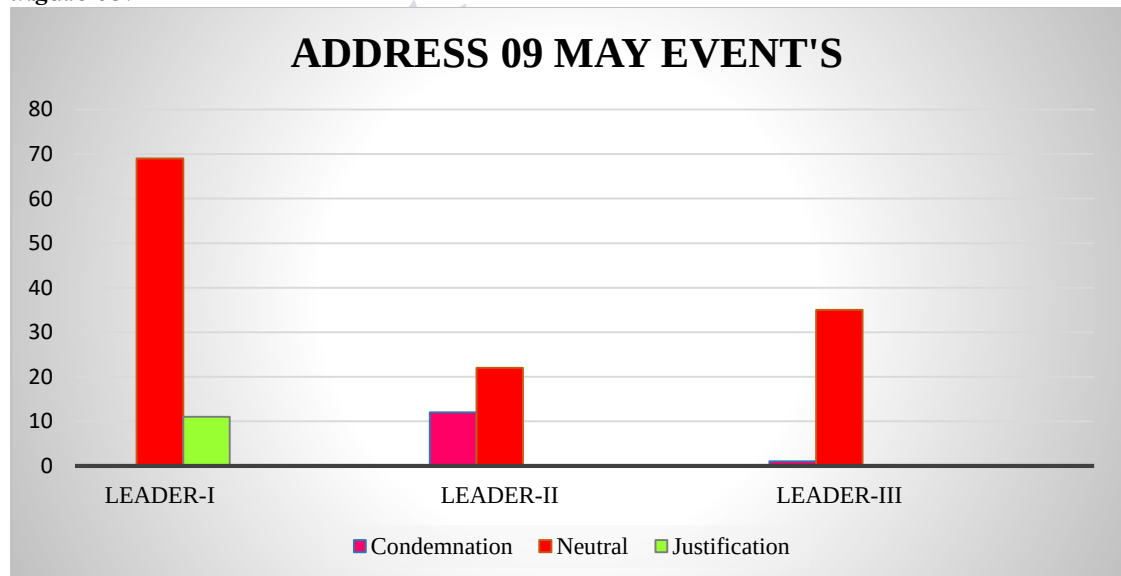
Figure 04:



The line graph shows the tone preferences in tweets from three leaders: Leader-I, Leader-II, and Leader-III, categorized into Positive, Neutral, and Negative tones. Leader-I primarily uses a Positive tone, while Leader-II favors a more Neutral tone. Leader-III exhibits

a strong preference for Positive tone tweets, with very few Negative or Neutral ones. This graph highlights the differing tonal approaches of each leader in their communication.

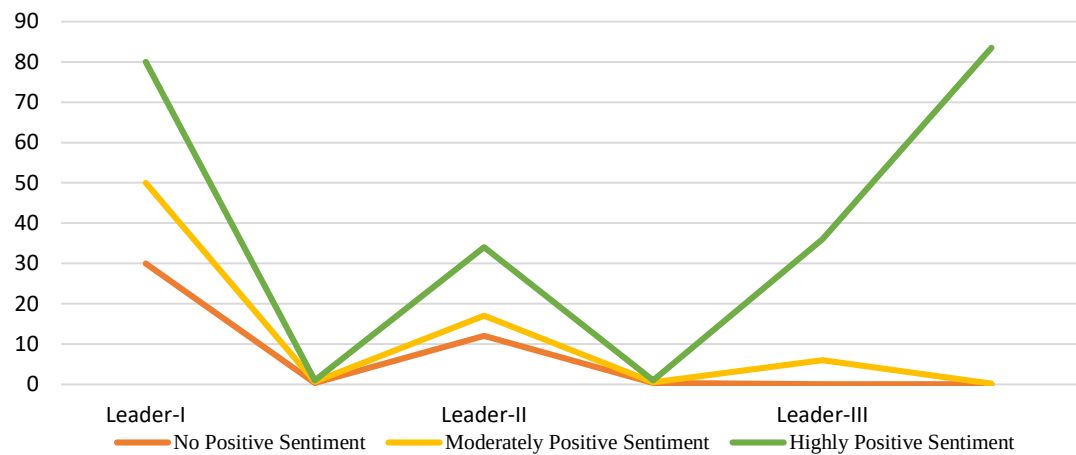
Figure 05:



The bar chart illustrates how three leaders—Leader-I, Leader-II, and Leader-III—addressed the 09 May incident, categorizing their responses into Condemnation, Neutral, and Justification. Leader-I predominantly takes a Neutral stance, with a very small proportion of Condemnation and Justification. Leader-II

shows a more balanced distribution, with a higher emphasis on Neutral responses, but also a notable amount of Condemnation, while Justification remains minimal. Leader-III, similar to Leader-I, focuses primarily on Neutral responses, with almost no Condemnation or Justification.

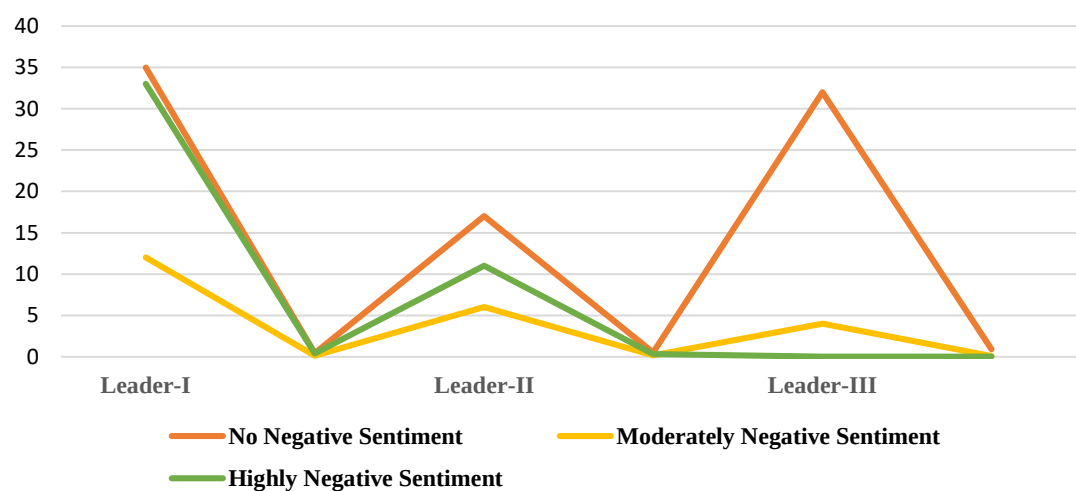
Figure 06:

LEADERSHIP POSITIVE SENTIMENT ANALYSIS

Leader-I tends to express Moderately Positive Sentiment, with some instances of No Positive Sentiment and a small amount of Highly Positive Sentiment. Leader-II blends Highly Positive Sentiment with a moderate

level of positive tone. Leader-III primarily communicates with Highly Positive Sentiment, showing very little use of other sentiments.

Figure 07:

LEADERSHIP NEGATIVE SENTIMENT ANALYSIS

The graph illustrates the negative sentiment across three leaders: Leader-I, Leader-II, and Leader-III. Leader-I predominantly exhibits No Negative Sentiment, with minimal presence of Moderately Negative and Highly Negative Sentiment. Leader-II has a more

even spread, with notable levels of Moderately Negative Sentiment, alongside No Negative Sentiment. Leader-III, like Leader-I, mostly shows No Negative Sentiment, with very little negative sentiment overall.

1. Leader-I received the highest response in 2. terms of likes, replies and retweets from the public, proving that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf remained the largest Leader after the May 9 incidents. After the events of May 9, Leader-I had the most tweets, mostly expressing their views. Leader-II also expressed most of the views in their tweets. The Chairman of Leader-III was foreign minister. So that's why he paid more attention to information sharing by avoiding

- informal and unnecessary discussions while paying the right to the responsible chair.
3. Most of the conversations and responses after the May 9 events took place between Leader-I and Leader-II. Where Leader-III stay away from it.
 4. Positive and negative language was used more by Leader-I and Leader-II, Leader-III did not use negative language in a single tweet.
 5. Harsh tone came from Leader-I and Leader-II because Leader-I was facing a very bad situation after May 9 so they resorted to very harsh tone. Since Leader-II was the ruling opposition Leader, they used a strong tone of condemnation after May 9. Leader-III only 8% tones we found harsh
 6. After the events of May 9, Leader-I justified these events in some places but mostly they continued to talk about the atrocities with themselves. Leader-II repeatedly condemned these incidents and Leader-I was heavily criticized. Leader-III condemned May 9 at one place and the foreign minister was found to be concentrating on his work.
 7. There were many tweets from Leader-I and Leader-II that tried to create a stir. But on the other hand Leader-III preferred to describe the positive side more.

CONCLUSIONS:

The research focused on the Twitter handles of prominent political parties in Pakistan and their activities surrounding the incident that occurred on May 9th. The study aimed to analyze the engagement patterns of these political parties, alongside the usage of tone and language by the leaders. The researcher employed the content analysis method for this purpose.

In this research, content analysis was used to examine the content posted by political parties on their Twitter accounts. The goal was to identify and categorize various aspects of the content, such as engagement patterns, tone, and language usage. By analyzing the content, the study aimed to uncover how political parties engaged with their audience, how they responded to the incident on May 9th, and whether there were any specific linguistic patterns or emotional tones employed in their communication.

The use of distinctive tones and techniques by political Leader leaders has played a crucial role in framing the narrative around the incident, it is clear from the detailed examination of the aftermath of the key events that occurred on May 9. The main goal of this study was to investigate the linguistic and communicative strategies used by various political parties after the tragedy through a thorough content analysis of tweets on Twitter.

The study's conclusions point to a subtle trend in how the various political parties reacted to the situation. Leader-I became a well-known character in the conversations and received a lot of attention on Twitter. The Leader skillfully used the incident to advance its goals, using it as an opportunity to gain a sizable amount of popular support.

In contrast, Leader-II attacked Leader-I with a bombardment of criticism in an effort to draw attention to perceived flaws and inconsistent responses. This antagonistic strategy exemplifies the degree of polarization that can develop in the wake of such tragedies and the ensuing political discourse.

Interestingly, Leader-III adopted a more subdued stance, notably avoiding explicitly confronting the situation. Their emphasis on the diplomatic efforts of their foreign minister served as a particularly clear example of how they appeared to be focusing on other continuing matters. This demonstrates the variety of tactics used by the various parties to handle delicate circumstances, choosing either confrontation or purposeful distance depending on their political goals.

Finally, the fallout from the May 9th events highlighted how fluid political discourse is in the digital age. The case study of tweets from different political parties on Twitter demonstrates the numerous approaches used by leaders to shape public perception and solidify their stances. Understanding these subtleties is increasingly important for comprehending the complexities of current politics as technology continues to change the terrain of political debate.

ANNEXURE-II

Sample of Tweets used for Analysis

Imran Khan

Leader-I



Maryam Nawaz Sharif

Leader-II



(27 May 2023)

Billawal Bhutto Zardari

Leader-III



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