



**Peace Journalism in Nonviolent Scenarios:
A Case Study of 'Asiya BiBi' and IMF Loan Issues on Facebook**

Arslan Habib,¹ Muhammad Junaid Ghauri,² & Muhammad Haseeb Sarwar³

Abstract:

This study investigates how Asiya Bibi and IMF loan-taking issues in Pakistan are projected in posts and comments on the selected Facebook pages in terms of conflict escalation and de-escalation. This study seeks to determine how and to what extent the practices of peace journalism are exercised on Facebook during nonviolent interactions regarding the selected issues. The posts and comments on the official Facebook pages of Pakistan Muslim League- Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) have been analyzed. This study presents a comparative analysis of 1107 posts and comments of PML-N and PTI on Facebook pages in the first hundred days of the PTI government regarding the two issues. The content was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. Three categories were developed in terms of conflict escalation and three in terms of de-escalation. Results show that both issues are not projected on Facebook pages according to the standards of peace journalism theory. Results also show that the content on PTI's official Facebook page is less conflict-oriented than that of PML-N official Facebook page.

Key Words: Facebook, peace journalism, conflict escalation, conflict de-escalation, polarization, confrontation, cooperation

INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on two nonviolent political conflicts by relying on the definition of peace as proffered by Norwegian scholar Johan Galtung which created a diversion from the traditional war media scholarship. He believed that mere absence of violence is negative peace, and that true real peace will ensure the achievement of social justice and democracy. It calls for a fairer distribution of power that will ultimately lead to greater harmony and tranquility in society (Hussain, 2015). Though many researchers have worked on the theory and practice of peace journalism in conflict times. But the theory of Peace Journalism has not extensively been studied by applying it in nonviolent conflicts. So, this study investigates how and to what extent the practices of peace journalism are exercised in nonviolent conflicts. This study also analyzes the level of war and peace frames in the nonviolent conflict scenarios of Asiya Bibi and loans from the IMF. Specifically, this study analyzes the key thematic strategies in the posts and comments regarding Asiya Bibi and

¹ Holds MS degree in Media and Communication Studies from International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan. Email:

² Lecturer, Department of Media and Communication Studies, International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan. Email: muhammad.junaid@iiu.edu.pk

³ Holds PhD in Mass Communication, and works as a Coordinator at the Department of Mass Communication and Media, University of Narowal, Punjab, Pakistan. Email

IMF-loan on Pakistan Muslim League- Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) Facebook official pages. PML-N and PTI are the two largest political parties in the country. Secondly, the researchers intend to explore how the selected issues are projected in terms of conflict escalation and de-escalation in the posts and comments on the selected pages.

This study is based on these basic research questions; How did 'Asiya Bibi' and IMF Loan issues were projected on PML-N and PTI official Facebook pages in terms of war and peace journalism? What are the key attributes of war and peace journalism in the comments of 'Asiya Bibi' and IMF loan issues on selected Facebook pages?

Asiya Noreen, also known as Asiya Bibi, was the second Christian sentenced to death under Pakistan's blasphemy laws. It was a high-profile case, that received international media attention from the beginning. The former minorities minister Shahbaz Bhatti (a Christian) and former Punjab governor Salman Taseer were murdered for speaking in support of Asiya Bibi. Mumtaz Qadri, the assassin of Salman Taseer, was sentenced to death in 2016 for murder of Salman Taseer. Asiya Bibi was convicted under Article 295-C of the Pakistani Code of Conduct for blasphemy against the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Asiya Bibi was accused in an argument with Muslim women of making "infamous and satirical statements" about the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in 2009. The prosecution produced seven witnesses to support the allegations of blasphemy. Two eyewitnesses, Mafia and Asma, said they heard Asiya Bibi made allegedly offensive statements during a "public meeting." Another witness, Qari Muhammad Salam, a local scholar, later filed a criminal complaint with the police. The court convicted Asiya Bibi and sentenced her to death in November 2010 for blasphemy. Supreme Court of Pakistan (SCP) suspended the death sentence in 2015, for appeal processes. A three-judge bench headed by Justice Mian Saqib Nisar, Justice Mazhar Alam Khan Miankhel, and Justice Asif Saeed Khosa put aside the death sentence of Asiya Bibi (Jamal, 2018).

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is a corporation of 190 countries, working to facilitate international trade, foster global monetary cooperation, promote high employment and sustainable economic processes, and reduce poverty around the world. The IMF, also referred to as the Fund, was conceived at a UN conference in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, U.S, in July 1944. The 44 countries at that conference sought to create a framework for economic cooperation to avoid a repetition of the competitive devaluations that had contributed to the huge Depression of the 1930s. Formed in 1945, the IMF with its near-global membership, is governed by and accountable to the 190. The fundamental goal of the IMF is to ensure the safety and stability of the international monetary system. It does so in three ways: giving practical help to members, lending to countries with balance of payments difficulties, and keeping track of the global economy and the economies of member countries (IMF, 2019).

Though Pakistan received its first structural adjustment package in 1982 by Zia ul Haq. Under Ayub Khan rule, Pakistan started its borrowing history with the IMF. Since then, 12 conditional loan packages from the Fund have been received by various governments, all of which have sung quite similar policy tunes: indirect taxation, subsidy cuts, and an almost singular focus on reducing budget deficits, privatization of state assets, and liberalization of the terms of trade. From 1988 to 2018, over the past three decades, the Fund's macroeconomic prescriptions have been so consistent that without a single document in hand, it seems one can fairly confidently predict the contents of any loan package (Ahmad, 2018). IMF Country Report on Pakistan in March 2018, the

Fund diagnosis of the country's economic woes sounds familiar: not enough "growth-supporting structural reforms," too many burdensome public-sector enterprises, insufficient exchange-rate flexibility (Fund, 2018).

PTI adopted an anti-IMF slogan to build its election campaign. Imran Khan, the current prime minister of Pakistan, often said in his speeches that in the first hundred days, he would restructure the whole economy, and choose suicide over going to IMF (Waheed, 2018). But after making the government, Imran Khan took a U-Turn and turned his back towards the pre-election promises (Hussain, 2019). Finally, Pakistan visiting IMF to haunt another bailout. The current government is facing massive criticism from mainstream and social media because of its anti-IMF slogans and hard statements regarding IMF in the past (Waheed, 2018).

The above mentioned issues are mostly discussed on Facebook during the first hundred days of the PTI government. By analyzing the facebook content regarding these issues, the escalation or de-escalation of conflicts can be concluded.

Scholars have defined the term "conflict" as a variance or interference between two or more people or interdependent parties. This clash includes the perceived or actual inconsistency of objectives, values, expectations, actions, or results. Conflicts can broadly be categorized as clash of two or more parties (overt conflicts), including everything from the first fight to wars, or perceived divergence of interests (Sadiq & Naeem, 2016). According to Blasi (2009), conflict is differentiated into three different stages: nonviolent conflict, violent conflict and aftermaths of the conflict. This study analyzes the first stage of conflict which is nonviolent. This stage is also named the initial prevention, indicating the disagreement between parties and confrontational verbal exchanges (Gilboa, 2009).

LITERATURE REVIEW

There was a time when people rely on the daily newspaper to get information about their nearby areas and worldwide. Now the new communication technologies provide an effortless and fast way to communicate with each other globally. It started with text messaging on mobile phones and directly moved to internet based applications. Facebook was launched in 2004 and now connects over 500 million users around the world. About 350 Facebook customers are outside the United States (US). Two hundred and fifty million users in sixty countries access Facebook on their mobile devices (Thompson, 2012). People having cell phones with messaging facility or smartphones with 24/7 web access and social media applications, finds it tough to windup. According to David Faris, there are three main elements that make growing social media applications unique: social media provides a chance for individuals to spread and share information with total control, its flexibility, (individuals can access social media by adopting multiple ways), and functionality for many people with basic computer literacy skills (Ndangam, 2011-2012).

Since its inception in the developed countries, Social media is used in Pakistan. According to global broadband report in 2009, Pakistan is ranked among the top 10 countries in terms of annual growth of broadband. From 2001 to 2007, there were only 45000 subscriptions in Pakistan but from the year 2007 to 2010, it reached up to 817000 (Shafiq, 2015). Facebook and Twitter are some significant platforms of social media. According to a survey carried out by Gallup Pakistan and

Giliani Research Foundation (2018) in February 2018, 48 percent of the internet users use social networking sites once a day to access the news.

The use of social media in Pakistan operates in five different ways; breaking the stories omitted by the mainstream media; platform of communication during protests and other social movements; encouraging the humanitarian efforts through advertising; campaigner for the social cause; and a medium of communication between the politicians and their publics (Kugelman, 2012). Social media, especially Facebook increases the interest of youth in political matters. Youth use social media to promote their political views by taking part in online held political discussions increasing the voters' turnout in the 2013 election in Pakistan (Karamat & Farooq, 2016).

In the public sphere, the dialogue about public security and violence has occupied a central stage in Pakistan. Social media and traditional media mediate, shape, and amplify this dialogue, at the larger level. Consequently, traditional media and social media can affect the public opinion and actions regarding public security and violence in Pakistan, from individual actions to private deals and legislation to politics. It follows that the social media can be used positively or negatively during conflict times. Social media can solve a problem in a positive way by becoming a part of the solution. On the other hand, social media results in harmful consequences and can escalate the problem, turning into violent conflicts. Zaller (1999) compares the old and new dynamics of politics. He writes, "In the old days, politicians made secret deals. But in modern times, secret deals are not an easy business for politicians and policymakers. Media plays its role in changing public opinion in favor or against the policymakers. So it has now become imperative for the policymakers to establish public opinion in favor before making any agreement.

In past researches, media and conflict have been connected in various ways. The first studies centered on the effects of propaganda. The latter focused on how the audience perceived war from television coverage. Later on, this phenomenon became a popular topic of research and was named the CNN effect. This phenomenon focused on the myth about how the US lost the Vietnam War due to protest which was created and started by the wars wide television coverage (Lindroos, 2011).

Manuel Castells has argued that socially networked media plays the same role in the information society that mass media was to the industrial society. The media is a mode of communication between the grass-root and the elites, which makes it a key source of power. Traditionally, this has been a one-way communication model. The media is considered the powerhouse and serves the purpose of political elites of being the arena of power (Lindroos, 2011). However, space previously occupied by mass media has been widened due to globalization and with the rise of peer-to-peer communication network-based identities (Castells, 2007).

Like the other powerful traditional mediums of communication, information flow on social media is not free from gatekeeping. Social media is now used as a propaganda tool where the information is controlled by the small group of activists to craft particular narratives in their favor and against the opponents (Lynch, Freelon, & Aday, 2014). In Ukraine, activists intended to use social media to spread information and for agenda-setting. But information can easily be converted into misinformation by the individuals hundreds of times, once it was tweeted or posted (Onuch, 2015). As explained by Morozov 2009, one can easily manipulate the information that is tweeted or Facebooked, which raises serious questions on the reliability of social media (Morozov, 2009).

Political discussions are held on social media (Rainie, Smith, Schlozman, Brady, & Verba, 2012), and it has become an instrument of political engagement (Bronstein & Aharony, 2015). Social media can affect the political ideas of the masses (Gionis, Terzi, & Tsaparas, 2013). Even voting behavior is shaped on social media (Biswas, Ingle, & Roy, 2014). This phenomenon is called mass self-communication, "which is self-generated in content, self-directed in emission, and self-selected in reception by many that communicate with many." Social networks are expanding their role in questioning traditional sources of power due to its spread and dynamic nature (Castells, 2007).

In their qualitative study about occupying Wall Street protestors, Penney and Dadas (2014) argued that the circulation of content through Twitter is crucial in the creation of ubiquitous opponents that could condemn the power structures on social media, which was not possible on mainstream media. Instigators, used social media to shape the public opinion into taking physical actions through psychological operations initiated via social media against the government (Niekerk & Maharaj, 2013).

According to the pew research report, 66 percent of social media users belong to the groups constructed on social media websites that used this platform to express their views on a political issue and follow politicians (Rainie, Smith, Schlozman, Brady, & Verba, 2012). It has been revealed that social media facilitates the activists during the protest activity and increases their capability to share information much quicker than before (Youmans & York, 2012). Social media is also responsible for the state repression and imprisonment of protestors as it facilitates the state in tracing and blocking them and be ready for the protest action. Thus, social media is also used by the state to expose the activists (Howard & Parks, 2012). It has also allowed the activists to communicate with individuals afar from the network dynamic, outside the social media networks (Segeberg & Bennett, 2011).

A study revealed that revolutionary political ideas are diffused through social networking sites, which directly affect voting behavior of the public. Intention for voting is increasingly dependent on social media (Butt & Awang, 2017). In the general elections 2008, the use of social media by different political parties was quite less. The political parties used social media such as YouTube channels and their official websites to accelerate communication with public to spread their manifesto (Riaz, 2010). However, in 2013 elections, to influence young voters, social media is used by all the leading political parties of the country. Also, youth support their favorite political parties and counter to the propaganda against them through social media (Zaheer, 2016). By talking against the things, they dislike, youth release their anger. The sentiments, feelings, and respect of others are fully overlooked while discussing any issue or giving the arguments against any controversy (Khan, 2015). Most sufferers of annoyance and anger are political leaders. Unethical insulting and vulgar language is used against the political leaders in the name of political communication and political involvement. Now it has become a routine among the communities to share the immature posts and dishonorable photo shopped pictures of the politicians (Zaheer, 2018).

The diversified role of social media in the protests in different Arab countries indicates that not the technology but its use in different local contexts is the key behind the protests. For example, in Gulf States level of protests is very low with high penetration of internet and social media (Wolfsfeld, Segev, & Sheaffer, 2013). In the past, Nigeria has witnessed various violent conflicts. In Nigeria,

social media as a popular culture used to debate on conflict-related issues, and participants share their poisoned perceptions which later became the narratives of the groups and promoted hostility and polarization. The discussants also use slang and abusive words while discussing any conflict-related issues and create a worrying situation (Dauda, Abubakar, & Lawan, 2017).

Shirky, (2011) argues that no doubt the main factor behind every revolution is political or economic reasons but modern information and communication technologies (ICT) also play an important role in many uprisings like the Syrian uprising. New media invites the violence in politics by reducing the arrangement cost of protests. New media also provides opportunities for individuals to participate in politics more effectively (Eickelman, 2004). For example, in the past women had a very low political engagement experience in real-world politics, but now they can participate in contentious politics (Otterman, 2007). Sometimes new media draws the public's attention away from constructive activities and real political action because people feel comfortable expressing aggression online (Moroziv, 2009). It has also been claimed that social, political, and economic injustice formulates in religious phrases, which further discuss that media are blameworthy for the violent conflicts (Alemika, 2013).

The communication style and environment have changed due to social media, which was once subjugated by mass media. Therefore, from grass root levels to campaigning politicians, social media has its implications on all levels. On the state level, it can have both positive and negative effects on governance. On the one hand, by creating new centres of power together with globalization it eschews state legitimacy, but on the other, it has now become very difficult to hide or manipulate information for the powerful elite. On the grass-root level, in the case of smart mobs, social media can also lead to mobilization in new surprising ways (Lindroos, 2011). On the political level, politicians are using social networks for campaigning and spreading any information they consider necessary. Social media has now become very popular among politicians due to its capability in diffusing a message instantly, but most of the time, the aim is to grab the attention of the traditional media (Castells, 2007).

Scholars have argued that social media neutrality is not a norm, even to consider it a norm is an abnormal thing because politics influenced all the technologies (Nahon, 2016). Latour (1999) argued that all the actions we might take or we might want to take are shaped by the technologies. Frames become very important during the times of conflict to know the causes and suitable reaction of a dispute (Hammond, 2007). Sometimes frames peacefully transform a conflict (Batic, 2008) and sometimes frames can derive the people towards more violence in the society (Hamelink, 2008). New media technologies and social networking by providing one-sided information to already polarized groups can just smartly be used to promote anger, polarization, and radicalization (Aday et al., 2010).

The absence of peace in a social system may also refer to a conflict (Auwal, 2015). Phenomenally, in Nigeria poisoned perceptions in a group set against one another mostly resulted in violent conflicts. Because we understand our relations, ourselves, and others through perception we build in our minds. The people's behaviour depends upon the perceptions of people discern something in a particular way by knowing that they perceived it incorrectly, generally mould their conduct according to that perception (Pate & Dauda, 2015). When people use disrespectful and abusive language on social media, this kind of conflict is perilous for society (Howard, 2003).

THEORY OF PEACE JOURNALISM

This study is guided through the theory of peace journalism. Jake Lynch (2008) defined Peace journalism as editor's and reporter's choice about what to report, and how to report it. It ultimately makes opportunities for society at large to contemplate and to value nonviolent responses to conflict. The theory of peace journalism focuses on structural and cultural causes of violence, as they impact the lives of individuals as part of the reason for violence. It aims to devise conflicts consisting of many parties and striving for different solutions which lead toward peace instead of a basic polarity (Ndonye, 2014).

The peace journalism model is based on the idea that the media has an inbuilt tendency to focus on violence and war. What Galtung calls the perverse fascination with war 'are due to the capital-based media systems based on profits' (Galtung, 1998). As Gadi Wolfsfeld puts it, the media thrive on drama, and war is the 'sine qua non' of news, which makes peace and news awkward bedfellows (Wolfsfeld, 2009). Therefore, Galtung and others have advocated for peace journalism 'as opposed to war/conflict journalism 'and journalism of attachment 'instead of bystander journalism (Gilboa, 2009). As a result, news should be seen as a representation of something other than itself, 'and therefore never fully objective' (Lynch, 2006). Because news is representation, they are by their very character flawed in being able to grasp the full reality of the thing being reported. There are inevitably more facts that can pragmatically be reported, and gatekeeping decisions are made 'by media producers' (Lynch, 2006).

Instead of partaking in war journalism, Galtung suggests taking the high road. The road of peace journalism leads to conflict transformation. It aims to depolarize the conflict by showing all the sides, and by de-escalating conflict resolution and peace over violence (Galtung, 1998). Peace journalism can therefore act as participants and catalysts in psychological adjustment, 'which can change the general mood and reduce feelings of paranoia' (Shinar, 2004). An important factor in peace journalism is analysing the conflict and educating the parties concerned, their goals, and the root causes of conflict. An important distinction here is between conflict and violence. These two are not synonyms and should be understood separately. The first refers to underlying issues causing tension, and the latter to the physical outbreak of war (Lindroos, 2011).

Galtung should be applauded for attempting to direct the eye of research from war to peace. However, there are several limitations to his model. Firstly, there is no way of predicting how the audience will read a given media text. Secondly, many of the arguments about the causality between war journalism and conflict are overly simplistic. Thirdly, it sees the audience as passive and deprives it of any agency (Lindroos, 2011).

So, the peace journalism model is grounded on the notion that the media has an intrinsic inclination to focus on violence and war. However, the literature reviewed in this study advocates that this theory is not media bound nor it focuses only on the violent/war related issues. Instead it is a model which provides theoretical underpinnings to study escalation and de-escalation themes in nonviolent scenarios also. The theory is also issue bound and the same has been established in the theory section of this article.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Content analysis design has been applied in this study. According to the objectives, the universe of this study is the conflicting content on Facebook in Pakistan in the nonviolent scenario. The population is all the posts and comments from PML-N and PTI official pages from 18th August 2018 to 25th November 2018. For this study, there are two levels of sampling i.e. census sampling and systematic sampling. On census sampling, all the posts and comments from the PTI and PMLN official pages of Facebook in the first hundred days of the PTI government are analysed (18th August of 2018 to 25th of November 2018). The second step is data cleansing which is accomplished by cleansing data according to the topic, objectives, and research questions. The data has been arranged in chronological order. After that, the study applied systematic sampling on posts and comments using the sampling fraction technique. The formula of sampling fraction ($k=N/n$) has been employed where N is the number of units in the target population, “n” is the number of the units of the sample, and sampling fraction is symbolized by “k”. By applying the sampling fraction technique, a sample of 235 and 245 posts and comments related to the Asiya Bibi issue from PMLN and PTI official Facebook pages, is formed respectively. Similarly, samples of 333 and 294 posts and comments were taken from PMLN and PTI official Facebook pages respectively, regarding the IMF loan issue. All the posts and comments have been qualitatively analysed into certain categories developed by the researcher.

Operationalization

The content has been categorized and operationalized as; the content is considered polarized if abusive, unethical, and name-calling words are there. Possibilities for agreement are taken as defeat. The content is considered non-polarized if it emphasizes on win-win orientation and provides an unbiased view and respect for other’s rights and show empathy with both sides. The content is categorized as confrontation if the content is based on a one-sided story, such as justification of one’s actions and condemnation of other actions or hinder the possibilities of common gain by denying other’s rightness continuously. Similarly, the content that contained an unbiased view condemned either sides or critically evaluate both sides’ actions being unbiased. It also discusses the benefits of peaceful resolution of conflict and denies the antagonistic and confrontationist behaviour. These categories were created and developed by Kemf. These are useful to analyse the texts on Facebook. These categories, which diversify the characteristics of Peace vs. War Journalism are established by Galtung (Biazoto, 2011).

RESEARCH FINDINGS & INTERPRETATION

The data is analysed by using SPSS software and presented through tables and charts. There are two main categories of data analysis. The first is escalation oriented aspects and the second is de-escalation oriented aspects. The escalation-oriented aspects are polarization and confrontation. The de-escalation oriented aspects are non-polarization and cooperation.

Asiya Bibi Issue from PMLN Official Facebook Page:

Table 1: Polarization and non-polarization

	Frequency	Percent
Non-polarized	17	7.2
Polarized	135	57.4
Total	235	

Table 2: *Confrontation and cooperation*

	Frequency	Percent
Cooperation	44	18.7
Confrontation	190	80.9
Total	235	

It can be seen that out of 235 total posts and comments, more than half of the content analysed on PMLN official Facebook page was polarized. While coding confrontation and cooperation, most of the content is found conflict oriented. Confrontation scored high as compared to cooperation.

Asiya Bibi Issue from PTI Official Facebook Page**Table 3:** *Polarization and non-polarization*

	Frequency	Percent
Non-polarized	51	20.8
Polarized	124	50.6
Total	245	

Table 4: *Confrontation and cooperation*

	Frequency	Percent
Cooperation	51	20.8
Confrontation	124	50.6
Total	245	

Table 3 and 4 shows that out of total 245 posts and comments, conflict oriented elements were found in half of the content in terms of polarization and confrontation. On the other hand, the elements of non-polarization and cooperation were found in few posts and comments. This means that conflict escalation dominates the conflict de-escalation while discussing Asiya Bibi issue on PTI official Facebook page.

IMF Loan Issue from PMLN Official Facebook Page**Table 5:** *Polarization and non-polarization*

	Frequency	Percent
Non-polarized	21	6.3
Polarized	228	68.5
Total	333	

Table 6: *Confrontation and cooperation*

	Frequency	Percent
Cooperation	20	6.0
Confrontation	222	66.7
Total	333	

Table 5 and 6, shows thematic categories of PMLN official Facebook page regarding IMF loan issue. The researchers found that out of total 333 posts and comments most of the content was escalation

towards conflict in terms of polarization and confrontation. On the other hand, very little elements of non-polarization and cooperation are found.

IMF Loan Issue PTI Official Facebook Page:

Table 7: Polarization and non-polarization

	Frequency	Percent
Non-polarized	195	66.3
Polarized	99	33.7
Total	294	

Table 8: Confrontation and cooperation

	Frequency	Percent
Cooperation	104	35.4
Confrontation	190	64.6
Total	294	

Table 7 and 8 shows thematic strategies found in the content regarding the IMF loan issue from PTI official page of Facebook. It can be seen that in table 7 most of the content is de-escalating towards conflict in terms of non-polarization and very less polarization was found. As far as confrontation and cooperation is concerned, large confrontationist elements were found in posts and comments.

DISCUSSION

The study examined conflict escalation on the above-mentioned issues. Conflict escalation is measured in terms of, polarization and confrontation. On the other hand, non-polarization belonged to the de-escalation of conflict. There is a background behind this conflict escalation regarding Asiya Bibi issue in Pakistan. In the previous government, there was an issue of constitution amendment in which the same PTI leaders and supporters who were in opposition at that time considered PMLN responsible for changing in affidavit form about Islamic clauses. A wave of conflict was already there, which needed a little fuel provided by Asiya Bibi case. Everyone was busy playing the blame game. People considered government, opposition, and institutions equally responsible for the Asiya Bibi release and thought that due to international pressure SCP favoured Asiya Bibi.

The difference between the Asiya Bibi and IMF loan issue is that the Asiya Bibi issue is the religious issue, but the IMF loan is an economic issue that directly relates to politics. In Asiya Bibi issue, Facebook users target the opposition, government, and the institutions for Asiya Bibi's acquittal. The IMF loan issue was an economic issue but Imran Khan and his party made it political by using anti-IMF slogans in the past.

Now the opposition targets the Prime Minister Imran Khan due to his past statement. They call him a "beggar" begging from IMF and other countries regarding his speeches. At the same time, government target the opposition by calling them "corrupt" and "thieves" who stole Pakistan's money and laundered it to foreign countries and made properties there. PTI government justifies that they have no other way except to go to the IMF for a bailout due to the miserable economic condition of the country. On the other hand, the opposition said that they had no chance in the past but to go to IMF but now the economic condition of Pakistan is much stable than 2013 when PMLN

was in power. The same behaviour was developed on social media by the supporters of both political parties. On both sides, people comment on the posts in favour of the political party they support or against the party they do not like.

Results show that on the Asiya Bibi issue the content on the PTI official Facebook page is more polarized than PMLN. If the PTI government post regarding any issue, users started commenting on that post about the Asiya Bibi issue using abusive and unethical language. They argued that the government, opposition, and national institutions like the judiciary are the main culprits behind the Asiya Bibi release. The same situation was developed on the PML-N official Facebook page. At the same time, people who defended the government or shared their views in favour of the government or judiciary, used the same polarized words against others. The people made their judgments against Asiya Bibi by saying that she must be hanged and those who favoured her should also be hanged with her. People commented on each other by using unethical, and abusive language which led to the polarization in society.

Content on both pages finds almost equally confrontationalist. People while using Facebook in Pakistan do not even want to hear other's argument. On the issue of Asiya Bibi, people promoted a one-sided view they favoured. People justified their actions and condemned others. Users in favour of religious groups think that they are right and the PTI government is responsible for the release of Asiya Bibi. While at the same time, people who favour government or oppose the agitators, appreciate the actions taken against the agitators.

On both political parties' pages, the same type of comments were made regarding the Asiya Bibi issue. A large portion of comments were rewritten by the social media users which led towards the conflict escalation in society.

The second one is the IMF loan issue that PTI faced during his government's early days. PTI government came to power with an anti-IMF slogan. The current prime minister of Pakistan Imran Khan often said in his speeches that he would prefer suicide over going to IMF for a bailout package. But after assuming power, the economic figures of Pakistan revealed him the truth after which a situation of conflict was built in Pakistani society. A debate that either the PTI government is going to IMF or not, generated on electronic and social media. Facebook is one of those platforms on which this issue became the focus of its users.

When it comes to the polarization regarding the IMF loan issue, PTI official Facebook page contains less "polarized" content as compared to the PM-LN official Facebook page. As in the Asiya Bibi issue, people use slang words not only against the politicians they dislike but also against people who support those politicians. This means that polarization is deeply injected into society. The question why there is less polarized content on the PTI official Facebook page as compared to the PMLN official Facebook page. The answer is that PTI emerged as a new political party in Pakistan. People voted for them for change. They built their hopes with PTI. People want to give them some time. That is why less polarized content is found on the PTI official Facebook page. On PML-N official Facebook page, every post is relevant to the IMF loan issue in which PML-N political leaders criticized the government and most of the people commented against PML-N by using abusive language and unethical words. When polarization starts it takes a long time to end. People invite others to strengthen their views by mentioning their names in the comments.

The study revealed that confrontationist content was found on both pages. But the content on the PMLN page is more confrontationist than the PTI. Facebook users criticized Imran Khan and his government for taking a U-Turn on his previous statements and going to IMF for a bailout package. At the same time, users also expressed their views against the opposition by saying that they ruined Pakistan's economy. People criticized the government and the opposition on this issue blaming that both favour the status quo and no one is the true representative of the people of Pakistan.

CONCLUSION

This study has analysed the content on Facebook pages of two main political parties of Pakistan related to Asiya Bibi and IMF Loan issues. Social media networks bring the politicians closer to the public, but they can also bring people closer to one another and people act as rehumanizing agents in transforming the other. Social media websites put more space between individuals, and they comment on each other shamelessly.

In Pakistan, the bitter reality is that almost all the main political parties have their social media wings and activists' groups. These social media activists by using the platforms of these political parties spread hate speech. They spread misinformation in public by taking the clips from electronic media and editing these clips according to their own choice or simply showing that part of the clip favouring the political party they support. People share and comment on these posts according to their political likes and dislikes. As a result, a debate is generated on social media. Individuals rarely realize before making any comments or sharing any information that it could be harmful to the struggle of the stakeholder to achieve social consolidation. Due to its immediacy, limited control, and lack of ethical code, if a post is made is simply rewritten. Therefore, due to its viral effects, rumours can spread quickly and impossible to trace which can be dangerous if people are spreading hate speech.

Social media operates in the virtual world and due to its anonymity, it is not easy to control its usage; one can only deal with the root causes. The root causes of conflict are economic injustices, historical injustices, and politics based on ethnic blocks, and lack of media objectivity in coverage. In times of crisis, some policies can also be employed to achieve control at the secondary level. For example, blocking up all accounts disseminating hate speech through social media can save a great deal. In the long run, to repress dangerous negative feelings, promotion of the state control over social media is fruitful.

Although a precautionary approach is preferable, politicians or social media activists who spread political disharmony by making false allegations against each other or committing hate speech crime should be targeted with legal action first. While at the same time, giving space to open issue-based discussions about politics is preferred. For this to happen, first a comprehensive definition must be developed of the term hate speech. What is needed is fairness, where there is no exemption for people guilty of instigating negative sentiments in society. First and foremost, Pakistan must flourish a political culture of tolerance and rational debate. There is a strong need to start an open debate on the country's future to reach authentic discourse on human rights and democracy. Extremist or violent ideas capturing ground in the public sphere must be rebuttal by transparent information and exhaustive opinion formation for the solutions to the country's various problems.

Social media conflict if not controlled, can boost and transform to physical violence in the future. It can also be used to fuel already ensue violence resulting in conflict escalation if not controlled.

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