

AGENDA SETTING EFFECTS IN THE AGE OF INTERNET: ANALYZING THE
TRANSFER OF POLITICAL CANDIDATES' ATTRIBUTES FROM NEWSPAPERS TO
TWITTER CONVERSATION DURING THE 2018 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN
PAKISTAN

by

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TO HADI AND SAKINA

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ABSTRACT

Studying the transfer of candidate salience and attributes from media agenda to public agenda has gained traction in the past few decades. However, most studies analyzing agenda setting effects with respect to candidates are conducted in countries with free and fair media. There are very few agenda setting studies in countries with censored media. Having three subsequent successful elections in the country with heavy restrictions imposed upon media, this study attempts to fill the gap by focusing on the candidates during the 2018 Pakistani General Elections. The relationship between their coverage in traditional media, and their portrayal in the political deliberation on Twitter is investigated.

The three major candidates in the 2018 elections were analyzed for this study – Imran Khan, Nawaz Sharif and Bilawal Bhutto. Their five substantive attributes – ideology and issue positions, culture, qualifications and experience, personality and image, and, integrity – were tested for their valence in newspapers and then compared to conversation on Twitter. Results showed that there was a skewed relationship between the narrative on newspapers and the Twitter conversation. Out of 14 variables, there was a relationship between the two media in only 8 of them, while the rest had significant differences, showing that agenda setting effects are not direct in countries with regulated media.

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Introduction

During elections, news media are often referred to as kingmakers that have the ability to make or break a candidate's campaign. They have the power to impact voter behavior directly by affecting the public's perception of candidates (Graber, 2010). Despite being important, agenda setting studies have mostly focused on the transfer of different issues from the media agenda to the public agenda during elections, and only a few have focused on the transfer of the attributes of candidates, and most of those are based in countries with free and fair media systems (Kiouisis, Bantimaroudis & Ban, 1999; Kiouisis, 2005). Given that the world we currently live in is globalized and the power of media to influence public opinion, it has become increasingly important to study democratization processes with respect to media in countries where the media is not entirely free.

87 percent of the world's population living in environments where the press is either partially or fully censored (Freedom House, 2017), despite that, political communication in these countries is understudied. Consequently, Pakistan, a country of over 200 million people, falls under this category. However, not only there is a dearth of literature about agenda setting studies regarding candidate salience in Pakistan, but there are a very few studies about agenda setting as a whole. While elections are not a common occurrence in the country, the past decade has seen three successful democratic elections, a first in its 70 year history, with a bustling private media sector. Given that Pakistan holds a strategic geo-political position in the world, has played a huge role in cold war and now is developing strong relations with China, it is important to study the political mechanism that surrounds election with respect to its media.

The 2018 elections of Pakistan presented a very unique case, with a newcomer, Imran Khan defeating the two dynastic powers, Sharifs and Bhuttos in the country and becoming Prime Minister. Imran Khan is not entirely a nobody in the country; a former cricketer turned philanthropist is a fan favorite who led Pakistan to win its first ever world cup in 1992, but he is relatively new to politics. Nawaz Sharif, on the other hand, is a three-time Prime Minister, who first entered politics in the 1980 when the then-president, General Zia, made him finance minister. Bilawal Bhutto, even though a 28 year old man himself, has a family legacy with both his mother and maternal grandfather being Prime Ministers of Pakistan in their lives. Thus, it brings to question how did Imran Khan manage to defeat two dynastic powers and what was the role of media in the elections.

Even though Imran Khan did manage to capture public attention through different campaign events such as voter mobilization and Azadi March, there has been speculation in the country and abroad that the military helped him gain power. With Khan's biggest competitor imprisoned on corruption charges and 500 members of his party detained days before the election, Khan's road to success is oft seen as a clear and easy one (Shackles, 2018). However, the most important strategy of this elections to have a favorable output was to control the media. Not only was it used to validate the disqualification of Sharif, but it was also used to influence public opinion about Khan and make him a strong contender in the race (Qasmi, 2018).

Given all these circumstances, this study aims to examine the transfer of candidate salience and attributes from newspapers to public opinion in the context of a highly censored media during the 2018 elections. Public opinion will be assessed through

Twitter, a growing social media platform in the country. While the use of Twitter is extremely low, scholars have used political deliberations on Twitter in Pakistan to predict the winner of elections (Kagan, Stevens & Subrahmanian, 2015). Comparing the coverage of candidate's five attributes (ideology, culture, qualifications, personality and integrity) in newspapers to the candidate's portrayal on Twitter, this study found that despite such strict measures, the military was not able to influence public opinion entirely.

Literature Review

Pakistani politics and media

Throughout Pakistan's history, there has never been an official mechanism to impose censorship; however, the government has always had an indirect influence over the news content produced and distributed. This indirect control includes economic and advertising control, intimidation by military, and installing government spies in news media organizations (Nadadur, 2007).

The constitution of Pakistan, which was promulgated in 1956, states that "freedom of speech could be exercised by any citizen subject to any reasonable restriction or imposed law in the interest of the security of Pakistan" (Ashraf, 2012, p. 89). Despite this, the press was almost always under indirect government control, especially so during the military regimes, which Pakistan has experienced on and off for over 30 years in its 73 years of independence from British rule. In the mid-80s, it was a norm for every news story to be filtered by government employees unofficially, which led the articles that were critical of the government and military to be completely

censored. Due to this, Pakistani media remained a very small industry until the start of twenty first century, with only one television network, PTV, which was state-owned (Pintak & Nazir, 2013).

This situation changed in 2002, when General Pervez Musharraf (President of Pakistan: 1999-2008) liberalized broadcasting laws. In the span of 10 years, the number of channels increased from one to 90. However, this move was short-lived, and the same general declared an emergency in 2007 in an attempt to quash dissent against his regime. Apart from suspending the constitution and dissolving the Supreme Court, this move included curbing press freedom, by banning news organizations to publish or broadcast any content that was critical of the head of state, military or any other organs of the state. Even after the ban was lifted, and there was a successful transfer of power to a democratic regime, the media remained repressed one way or the other (Ricchiardi, 2012).

During the government of President Asif Ali Zardari (2008-2013), the country faced economic and social unrest. There was constant criticism of the government on media, due to the formation of a “military-media-bureaucracy nexus” which further alienated and condemned civil institutions, leading people’s trust in democratic regimes to decline. Meanwhile, the military found reasonable space to flourish, and managed to gain the support from people (Jan, Raza, Siddiq & Saleem, 2013, p. 120). This led to a subtle, and sometimes a not-so-subtle form of media censorship.

Journalists in Pakistan have long been threatened with violence, but these threats turned to reality when there was an assassination attempt on a well-known journalist in 2014. Such an incident, which was unheard of even during authoritarian regimes in the

country, led journalists to “surrender without a fight,” especially so because the mastermind behind the assassination attempt was believed to be the then-chief of Inter-Service Intelligence of Pakistan (Qasmi, 2018). Since then, journalists have believed to practice self-censorship despite of the absence of any official mechanism in place (Waqas, 2018).

During the general elections in July 2018, there was a lot of speculation among journalists in the country and abroad about censorship in Pakistan. When the circulation of newspapers was cut-off in certain areas in the country, Chief Editor of Dawn Newspapers, one of the widely read English newspapers in the country, called it an “unprecedented assault” on the press by the military (Haroon, 2018). Geo News, one of the biggest broadcast news outlets, was also forced off-air in April 2018, following its critical reporting on the military (Masood, 2018). This “campaign of fear” pushed the journalists to give in to the pressure, and the practice of self-censorship continued (Chaudry, 2018).

Several non-governmental organizations have taken note of this trend of censorship in Pakistan and have published reports encouraging the government to take action against it. In its 2017/2018 report, Amnesty International emphasized the disappearance and disappearance of journalists in Pakistan (Amnesty International, 2018). According to a blog post published by Alia Iftikhar, Asia Research Associate for the Committee to Protect Journalists, some media houses are ordered by “certain forces” to not cover particular topics, which undermines “the [media] outlets’ credibility” (Iftikhar, 2018). Another report from a not-for-profit organization in Pakistan, Media Matters for Democracy, states that self-censorship is practiced by 88% of journalists in

Pakistan. According to the report, journalists are more likely to censor “sensitive information” such as news related to the military establishment or religion (Waqas, 2018).

Social Media in Pakistan

Due to the emergence of new media and micro-blogging websites such as Twitter, a lot of activity has moved online in Pakistan and abroad. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter let users discuss different topics with their ‘followers.’ This has led scholars to compare Twitter to Habermas’s public sphere due to its exponential growth and the public nature of the platform (Bruns & Highfield, 2015). Thus, a lot of scholars have used Twitter to examine public opinion (Williams & Gulati, 2013; Graham, Broersma, Hazelhoff & van Haar, 2013). However, there has been much criticism for this comparison. One of the major concerns is the fact that social media platforms make money off of the labor of its users (Fuchs, 2014), but another, that is more relevant to Pakistan is the disparity to the access and use of internet (van Deursen, van Dijk, 2019). Only a quarter of the population has access to the internet in the country, out of which only 2.77% has a Twitter account¹. Despite this, studies have shown that social media platforms have been a catalyst in increasing Pakistanis’ participation in politics (Jamil, 2018), and survey research confirms that university students from both rural and urban areas do not just rely on social media to get information about politics, but they also use these platforms to participate in real life politics (Ahmad, Alvi and Ittefaq, 2019).

¹ <https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/pakistan>

Other than catalysts for public opinion, social media platforms, specifically Twitter, has notably been studied as platform for political deliberations around the world. During the 2009 German Federal Elections, Tumsajan, Spregner, Sandner and Welpé (2010) found that messages on Twitter mirrored the offline political landscape. Not only were the mentions of political party in tandem with the election result, joint mentions of two parties reflected their coalitions and ties in the real world. Similarly, during the 2016 US elections, Yaqub, Chun, Atluri and Vaidiya (2017) conducted a sentiment analysis of tweets before the election and found that it was reflective of the then political climate of the country. Bruns & Burgess (2011) found that Twitter is used to criticize and comment on election coverage by mainstream media in Australia. Similarly, activity on Twitter spiked when there was a televised debate or a political rally during 2010 Swedish elections (Larsson & Moe, 2012). Vaccari et. al (2013) found that Twitter worked as a catalyst for political engagement during the Italian elections of 2013. Even in countries like Iran, where freedom of speech is questionable at best, citizens use Twitter during election times to voice their opinions (Burns & Eltham, 2009). Similarly, in Pakistan, using sentiment analysis on Twitter, scholars were able to predict the 2013 election results successfully (Kagan, Stevens & Subrahmanian, 2015). Due to such an impact of the conversation on Twitter, the military in Pakistan perceived it as a threat, and tried to censor content online.

Censorship on social media

Following attempts of censorship on traditional media, the military has also made attempts to censor news content on social media platforms, either through pressurizing journalists, or by asking platforms to take down certain content. Gul Bukhari, a left-wing

activist, was abducted on her way to a talk-show in early June, due to her constant of the military on Twitter (Gabol, 2018). Even though she returned to her house safely, Reuters reported on November 12, 2018 that she and other journalists were issued a warning from Twitter about their content being marked as “objectionable” when they criticized either the government or the military, an action believed to be taken due to pressure from the Pakistani government (Sayeed, 2018). The official transparency report provided by Twitter claims that the Pakistani government specified 23 accounts for information requests, and 2,349 for removal requests. However, according to the report, there was 0% compliance of either requests from Twitter². Another tactic used by the Pakistani military is to amplify hateful campaigns against journalists that are critical of the state. One such campaign called #ArrestAntiPakJournalists was launched by human bots – fake accounts run by humans – which sent over 4000 tweets per hour containing the aforementioned hashtag (DRM, 2019). Freedom House also rates Pakistan’s internet freedom score at 69/100 (Freedom on The Net, 2016).

These particular incidents lead to the question of how successful are such mechanisms of censorship when attempts are only focused on traditional media and not on social media. In contrast to countries like China and Iran, where censorship is practiced as strictly on the Internet as on other traditional media (Simon, 2010), Pakistan stands apart; the censorship of digital media is not as stringent as it is on traditional media. The censorship of broadcast media is so strong that the transmissions of three news channels were suspiciously cut-off without a warning for covering a press conference of the opposition party (Hashim, 2019), whereas, on digital media, while

² <https://transparency.twitter.com/en/countries/pk.html>

some websites are blocked for political purposes, social media platforms are still completely accessible to the public. However, in attempts to censor content that criticizes the current government or military, or that favors the opposition, the government often reports individuals' social media accounts or posts to the social media platforms and relies on the network to remove the content. Until now, these networks have rarely removed any content, and have mostly just sent warnings to the users (Jahangir, 2018). This thesis will explore the relationship between traditional media and social media in the context of censorship of media in Pakistan. It will explore whether the agenda of the traditional media was successfully transferred over to Twitter, a platform for public deliberation, in the climate of extreme censorship during the 2018 General Pakistani Elections. Studying these agenda setting effects will help understand more deeply the impact of media in countries with restricted media systems.

Agenda-setting theory

Ever since the advent of media, scholars have concerned themselves with its ability to shape public opinion. The Chapel Hill Study conducted by McCombs and Shaw (1975) was a major breakthrough in the field of mass communications where they proved that media can set the public agenda. The results of their study showed that the amount of importance given to different issues by the media was the same as the amount of importance given to the issues by the public. In other words, the hierarchy of the issues in the media's agenda is same as the hierarchy of the issues in the public's agenda. Agenda-setting theory works via the repetition of messages in news media. With a constant emphasis on certain issues over others, the media influences the public's agenda. Cohen (1963) aptly summarizes this theory: "the press may not be successful much of the time

in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about.” Mass communication research spanning the last three decades has supported this hypothesis (Behr & Iyengar, 1985; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; McCombs & Estrada, 1997; McCombs, Lopez-Escobar, & Llamas, 2000; Wanta & Ghanem, 2007; Weaver, 1991).

However, the wave of globalization has led many researchers to emphasize the need to rethink the traditional methods of agenda setting of the West (Du, 2013). Many scholars have studied agenda setting effects in countries where the press is not fully free, with mixed results. For example, Al-Haqeel and Melkote (1996) found that the public’s agenda was indeed influenced by the agenda of the state-controlled mass media in Saudi Arabia. Similarly, in Pakistan, the only two studies conducted for agenda setting effects find that there were significant effects of the media agenda on the public agenda (Riaz, 2008; Khan, 2019). On the other hand, Chaffee and Izcaray (1975) did not find any significant agenda setting effects from traditional media to public opinion in Venezuela. Anokwa & Salwen (1988) found only limited evidence that the media sets the public agenda in Ghana. While there are different reasons as to why in some countries media has not been able to set the agenda, ranging from socio-economic status to rate of newspapers delivered, in the past couple of decades, internet has become one of the most important ways for citizens to circumvent censorship in the country. Luo (2014) found that there were only some instances where the highly censored Chinese mainstream media were able to influence the public opinion on social media. Salman, Mustaffa, Salleh and Ali (2016) found that social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, plays a huge role in setting the agenda of the public in Malaysia. Even in highly authoritarian state like Singapore,

internet has allowed civil activists to have used agenda setting effects for their own benefits and influenced policy making in the country (Ortmann, 2012). This study will also analyze agenda setting effects of censored Pakistani traditional media on public opinions expressed on social media.

First level of Agenda Setting – Candidate Salience.

In order to examine the agenda setting effects in Pakistan, first, this study will focus on the first level of the agenda setting theory. Initially, when the theory of agenda setting was developed, it focused on the salience of issues transferred from the media agenda to public agenda (McCombs & Shaw, 1975). This is known as the first level of agenda setting theory. However, with time, this definition has evolved into analyzing the transfer of “object” which can mean a variety of things, such as political candidates, organizations, as well as issues (Lopez-Escobar, Llamas & McCombs, 1998). Ever since, study of candidate salience during elections has become increasingly popular among the scholars of political communication, given the politically charged climate during elections. Most studies have found that the candidate to receive most attention in media has been the one to be most popular amongst the public, automatically making them an important candidate in the race (Kiouisis, Mitrook, Wu & Seltzer 2006; Kiouisis & McCombs, 2004). Some studies have also focused on why an incumbent may receive more or less coverage, based on their position in the current political climate of the country (Baumann, Zheng & McCombs, 2014). Similarly, in order to understand the agenda setting effects in a restricted media system in the age of internet, this study will focus on the candidate salience during the 2018 General Elections of Pakistan. The first

part of this study will analyze the effects of candidate salience in newspapers on public opinion expressed on social media, thus the following research question is posed:

RQ1: What is the relationship between coverage patterns of newspapers and Twitter conversations with regards to candidate salience?

Second Level of Agenda Setting – Candidate Attributes

Next, this study will examine the second level of agenda setting effects in Pakistan during the elections. While the first level is concerned with highlighting the importance of objects such as candidates, issues, etc., the second level focuses on the attributes of these objects. These attributes are used to fill in the picture of a particular object. Similar to object, some attributes are excessively emphasized, while some are just mentioned in passing. This affects the public's opinions about a certain object with reference to the importance that it gives to the attributes of a particular object (McCombs et. al, 2000).

During election time, the distinction between first and second levels of agenda setting theory becomes clearer. The candidates are considered as objects, whose salience is being transferred, while their policies, issue stances, personality, integrity etc. which define their image become their attributes. Second level agenda setting in this case would occur when mass media influences the public opinion about candidates by covering certain attributes of candidates during election more extensively than others. This hypothesis has been tested numerous times in different countries yielding the same result. Scholars have found higher degrees of correspondence between the attribute agenda of media and that of the public during the 1996 General Elections of Spain (McCombs et. al,

2000; Lopez-Escobar et. al, 1998). Similarly, King (1997) conducted a study during the mayoral elections in Taipei and found significant correlations among portrayal of candidates in newspapers with that of voters' image of them. This study will also focus on the attributes of the three candidates who contested in the Pakistani General Elections of 2018 – Imran Khan, Nawaz Sharif and Bilawal Bhutto.

A common way of studying candidate attributes have been to divide them into *substantive* attributes – related to the candidate's character – and *affective* attributes – related to the tone of the media portrayals of candidates' substantive attributes. McCombs et. al (1997) tested the valence (positive, negative, and neutral) in three candidate attributes: political ideology and issue positions, qualifications and experience, and, personality and image, and, found a very strong correlation between the media agenda and the public agenda during the 1996 Spanish elections. Due to its generalizability and its ability to be replicated, this research design was later adopted in different studies that used the same three categories for substantive attributes and tested their valence (Baumann et. al, 2018; Kioussis et. al, 1999; Kioussis & Shields, 2008). However, Baumann et. al (2014), while testing the salience of candidate attributes in India, added two more categories to it: culture and integrity, to better suit the political climate of India. Since Pakistan is in the same region of South Asia, this study will test the valence of candidates' attributes for the five categories of substantive attributes used by Baumann et. al (2014) in print media and social media during the general elections in Pakistan. It will test each attribute one by one and examine its agenda setting effects from newspapers to public opinion expressed on social media. Thus, the following research questions were posed:

RQ2: With reference to candidates' issue positions and ideologies, what was the relationship between candidates' mention for this attribute in newspapers as compared to that on Twitter?

RQ3: With reference to candidates' religious political leanings (culture), what was the relationship between candidates' mention for this attribute in newspapers as compared to that on Twitter?

RQ4: With reference to candidates' qualifications and experience, what was the relationship between candidates' mention for this attribute in newspapers as compared to that on Twitter?

RQ5: With reference to candidates' personality and image, what was the relationship between candidates' mention for this attribute in newspapers as compared to that on Twitter?

RQ6: With reference to candidates' integrity, what was the relationship between candidates' mention for this attribute in newspapers as compared to that on Twitter?

Methodology

This study analyzes agenda-setting effects during the July 2018 Pakistani General Election with regards to candidates' attributes. The study by McCombs, Lopez-Escobar, Llamas & Rey (1997) is one of the first studies in the field of communication to measure the agenda setting effects of newspapers with reference to the attributes of candidates during elections. They relied on telephonic surveys during the 1995 Spanish local elections to gauge public opinion and compared it with coverage about the candidates in

mainstream newspapers. The aim and methodology of this study are similar to that of McCombs et. al (1997), however, in place of telephonic survey, public opinion is gauged through a random sample of tweets during the campaign period.

A content analysis of statements from the newspapers and tweets is performed to extract information about the portrayal of candidates. It is one of the most commonly used methods in quantitative methodology, because it helps “to systematically evaluate the symbolic content of all forms of recorded communication” (Kolbe & Burnett, 1991, p. 243). An independent T-test was also conducted to find out if there is a relationship between candidates’ image portrayal in newspaper and their image among voters as expressed by Twitter users. The unit of analysis for this study is an assertion about a particular attribute for any candidate. There were usually more than one assertions in one tweet, and sometimes even in one sentence from a news article. From this point forward, these assertions will be referred to as statements extracted from news articles and Twitter.

Rationale for sampling

In order to understand the relationship between mass media and public opinion on Twitter during the 2018 Pakistani General Elections, statements from two national newspapers – Dawn Newspaper and Express Tribune – are studied and compared to the sentiment of the public as perceived on Twitter to find out if a correlation exists between the two. The focus of this study is on the three main contenders of the election – Imran Khan, chief of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI); Nawaz Sharif, chief of Pakistan Muslim League N (PML-N) and; Bilawal Bhutto, chief of Pakistan People’s Party (PPP). The time period for the sampling of news articles as well as the tweets is the official campaign period of the elections – June 26, 2018 to July 23, 2018 (Raja, 2018). This time period

was selected because the coverage of electoral candidates is the highest during the time of the election campaign.

Newspapers. Data was collected from the top two English language newspapers in terms of revenue generated from advertisements: Dawn and Express News (Din, 2018). For both newspapers, articles were selected that mentioned at least one of the candidates in either the title or the byline. Out of the selected articles, as opposed to coding the entire article, their title and first two sentences in the body were coded, that mentioned either of the candidate. This was done in order to balance the number of characters with that of tweets. The number of articles extracted from both newspapers is 233. The title and first two sentences of these articles were then coded based on which candidate it mentioned and which attribute it referred to. This led to a total number of 832 statements that were then analyzed for this part of the study.

For Dawn Newspaper, data was collected from the online archives available on its website³, using the find option to search for articles containing keywords “Imran”, “Nawaz” and “Bilawal” in either the title or the byline. The total number of articles that were extracted between June 26, 2018 and July 24, 2018 from Dawn Newspaper were 145. Thus, 145 titles and 338 sentences from the body of the articles were coded. This resulted in a total number of 483 statements from Dawn Newspaper. Out of these 483 statements, 438 were from news stories, 39 from editorials and 6 from interviews.

As for Express Tribune, data was collected through the E-paper archive available on its website⁴. The author went through each E-paper published from June 26, 2018 to

³ <https://www.dawn.com/archive/>

⁴ <https://tribune.com.pk/epaper/>

July 24, 2018 and extracted articles that mentioned any of the candidates in either the headline or the by-line. The total number of articles extracted from Express Tribune was 88. Thus, the number of titles coded were 88 and the number of sentences extracted from the body of these articles were 261. The total number of statements coded from Express Tribune were 349. Out of these 349 statements 307 were from news stories, 42 from editorials and none from interviews.

Tweets. Data was extracted from Twitter using the Crimson Hexagon software. It enables users to extract data during a specific time period based on the keywords entered and limits it to the location specified. For the purpose of this study, the location of the data is limited to Pakistan and the keywords used to extract tweets are “Imran”, “Bilawal”, “Nawaz” and “Sharif.”⁵ The time period was limited to June 26, 2018 to July 23, 2018. The number of tweets that were returned from this search were 885,575, out of which the software extracted 10,000 randomly sampled tweets to an excel file. The first 1000 tweets of this random sample were then coded for this study. Removing tweets that either did not have any of the aforementioned keyword in them or had a keyword but were not about the candidate, and then coding those tweets more than once that mentioned more than one candidate resulted in sample size to be 864. It is also important to note here that this analysis did not focus on tweets from candidates themselves or their party accounts.

⁵ Khan was not used as one of the keywords because it is a relatively common name in Pakistan. Bhutto, on the other hand, was not used because multiple politicians (dead and alive) share the same last name due to the dynastic politics of the Bhutto family in Pakistan. However, all candidates had an equal chance of being in the sample since the keywords used are the main names used to refer to them.

Coding scheme

Newspaper articles and tweets were coded based on substantive and affective candidate attributes. The five substantive attributes this study focused on are based on the categories of political candidate attributes established by McCombs, Lopez-Escobar, Llamas & Rey (1997). According to them, political candidates are covered by the media with regards to five categories: political ideology and issue positions, qualifications and experience and personality and image. These three categories covered statements about their ideology of political candidates, such as right-wing or left-wing; their competency to hold a public office; and personal traits of candidates, respectively.

Baumann, Zheng & McCombs (2017) later adapted this research design to the Indian election, and added two more categories to it: culture and integrity. They classified statements about the highly politicized culture of religious sentiment in India under culture, and allegations of corruption and trustworthiness under integrity. Due to Pakistan being in the same region of South Asia, and having similar politics, these two attributes were also used in this study. However, all five attributes were localized to the Pakistani context. None of the attributes are mutually exclusive. The following variables were included in the study:

1. Political ideology and issue positions: This category includes all statements that include political ideology of candidates and those that highlight candidates' issue stances, or specific policy issues such as their plans to revitalize the economy, rectify the energy crisis, upgrade living standards of common people, implement pro-farmer policies, and manage public affairs and resources

2. Culture: This category includes statements about Pakistan-specific political orientation of candidates with regard to whether they promote secularism or a more religious society, and their stance on rights of minorities. Specifically, statements about the blasphemy law⁶, Khatm-e-Nabuwat law⁷, rights of Hindus, Christians, Ahmedis, Shias or any other minority in Pakistan.
3. Qualifications and experience: This category includes statements mentioning the competency or ability of a candidate for office, either positively or negatively. Statements referring to their performance in previous political postings or experience, their political skills, or their biographical details or background.
4. Personality and image: This category includes statements about personal traits and features of the character of a candidate, including assertions about a candidate's charisma, natural intelligence, courage, ambition, independence, leadership quality, popularity, and so on.
5. Integrity: This category includes statements that either portray the candidate as a corrupt politician or a non-corrupt politician and any statements about a candidate's trustworthiness. Statements with reference to any corruption cases against the leaders will be coded under this category.

If any statement had any of the aforementioned attributes, the coders also had to determine the tone of the statement: negative, positive or neutral. Two coders carried out

⁶ Blasphemy law: A criminal law in Pakistan that punishes blasphemy against any religion, providing penalties ranging from fines to a death sentence. This law is mainly misused against religious minorities, and has led to capital punishments despite there being less or sometimes no evidence. See Julius (2016) for more information.

⁷ Khatm-e-Nabuwat clause: A constitution amendment in 1974 that declared the Ahmadiyya community – a Muslim minority – as non-Muslims. Ahmedis can be jailed for 3 years for doing the most basic religious things such as using the Muslim greeting, having the Quran in their house etc. under this law.

the content analysis for this study. They are both Pakistanis and have spent more than 20 years of their life in the country, giving them enough knowledge about the political climate of Pakistan. None of them were in any way affiliated with any political party, or identify themselves as activists. Each coder was provided with a list of possible statements, and how to code them. Intercoder reliability was established during a pre-test of a randomly selected sample of 50 statements from newspaper articles as well as 50 statements from Twitter data. As determined by Krippendorff's alpha, the intercoder reliability was 0.87 for ideology, 0.8 for culture, 0.76 for qualifications, 0.78 for personality and 0.85 for integrity. Other than that, the *p* percentage agreement was also monitored, and the coders made sure that they had at least 80% agreement for each variable.

Results

Candidate Salience

The first research question examines the relationship of candidate salience in newspapers with that of the Twitter conversation through the number of times that they were mentioned in both media. This covers the first level of agenda setting. For this purpose, a total of 832 statements were coded and then analyzed from newspaper articles from the campaign time period – June 26, 2018 to July 23, 2018 – 483 from Dawn Newspaper and 349 from Express Tribune. A cross-tabulation analysis revealed that in newspapers, out of 832 statements, 387 mentioned Sharif, 282 were about Khan, and the remaining 159 were related to Bilawal (Table 1a). Meanwhile, a total of 864 tweets were also analyzed from the same time period. A cross-tabulation analysis revealed that 386 of

the tweets were about Khan, while 308 mentioned Sharif and only 194 were about mentioned Bilawal (Table 1b).

Apart from the cumulative statistics mentioned above, data from the newspapers was divided into titles and body to examine which candidate had most articles in his name, thus having more prominence in the newspapers. Following from the above data, the distribution was similar: Sharif had the highest number of news articles with his name mentioned in 100 titles of articles, and the least number of news articles were about Bilawal, with his name being in half of that of Sharif: 50 titles of the news articles analyzed. Khan was mentioned in 83 titles (Table 1).

As for the Twitter conversation, all of the data extracted was divided into tweets and retweets. In academic scholarship, retweets have received increased attention in the past decade, with some scholars labelling it as an “indicator [sic] of the public attention that drives electronic word-of-mouth” (Lee & Xu, 2018 p. 3). The sample of tweets used for this study showed that the number of retweets was much higher for each candidate than the number of tweets. Khan had 3 times the number of retweets (292) than tweets (94). Sharif, at the same time, had twice the number of retweets (211) than his tweets (97), while Bilawal had the smallest gap between his tweets (70) and retweets (124) (Table 1). It is interesting to note here that even though both Sharif and Khan had almost the same amount of tweets in their name, the number of retweets for each candidate differed significantly, in turn affecting their total number of statements. This shows how retweets play a huge role on Twitter in spreading message and highlighting one topic/issue over the other.

Table 1

Cross-tabulation for the number of times candidates were mentioned in news articles and in tweets – First level of agenda setting

Newspaper Articles			
	Khan	Sharif	Bilawal
Title	29.4% (83)	25.8% (100)	31.4% (50)
Body	70.6% (199)	74.2% (287)	68.6% (109)
Total	100% (282)	100% (387)	100% (159)
Twitter Conversation			
	Khan	Sharif	Bilawal
Tweets	24.4% (94)	31.5% (97)	36.1% (70)
Retweets	75.6% (292)	68.5% (211)	63.9% (124)
Total	100% (386)	100% (308)	100% (194)

Since the purpose of this paper is to compare the agenda of mainstream media with that of the common people, tweets were highlighted if they were sent out by a news organization. Table 2 shows the distribution of the current sample with regards to news organization and non-news organization. As seen from the table below, there was a very small number of tweets that were sent out by news organizations, and the Twitter conversation was mostly dominated by accounts not owned by news organizations. Chi-square tests for independence revealed that the difference among the distribution of news organization accounts and others was also not significant for any candidate ($p > 0.05$). This suggests that the amount of tweets posted by news organizations were too small to have effects on the study.

Table 2

Cross-tabulation and chi-square values for author type distribution of candidates on Twitter.

	Khan	Sharif	Bilawal
News Organizations	5.4% (21)	4.2% (13)	3.1% (6)
Personal Account	94.6% (365)	95.8% (295)	96.9% (188)
Total	100% (386)	100% (308)	100% (194)
Chi-Square	2.322	0.003	0.851

Continuing from the above analysis, the articles in the newspapers which mentioned the candidates were classified into three categories: news stories, editorials and interviews. Candidates were mostly mentioned in news stories, with a few editorials to their name and only a small number of interviews, with the latter only being about Khan. Sharif had the highest number of news stories (339), and Bilawal had a little more than half of news stories than that of Sharif (158). While Khan dominated the interviews (6), Sharif was more dominant in the editorial section (49), leaving Khan (31) and Bilawal (1) to lag behind (Table 3).

A chi-square test for independence was conducted to examine the relation between the three types of news articles for each candidate. Results revealed that the difference between news story, editorial and interview is significant for all three candidates [Khan: $X^2(2, N = 832) = 12.733, p < 0.05$; Sharif: $X^2(2, N = 832) = 11.878, p < 0.05$; Bilawal: $X^2(2, N = 832) = 20.282, p < 0.05$] (Table 3).

Table 3

Cross tabulation and Chi-square values for mention of candidates in different types of news articles.

	Candidate	Khan	Sharif	Bilawal
Story Type	News Story	86.9% (245)	87.4% (339)	99.4% (158)
	Editorial	11% (31)	12.6% (49)	0.6% (1)
	Interview	2.1% (6)	0% (0)	0% (0)
	Total	100% (282)	100% (388)	100% (159)
	Chi-Square	12.733*	11.878*	20.282*

* $p < 0.05$

In order to answer the first research question about the relationship between newspaper coverage and Twitter conversation with regards to candidate salience, a Pearson correlation test was conducted to see if there is a correlation between the mention of candidates in newspapers versus the mention of candidates on Twitter. Results revealed that the correlations for the coverage for each candidates between newspapers and their portrayal on Twitter was weakly negative, and it was not significant enough either [Khan $r_s = -0.018$, $p > 0.05$; Sharif $r_s = -0.056$, $p > 0.05$; Bilawal $r_s = -0.054$, $p > 0.05$]. This indicates that the mention of each candidate in both media is independent of each other.

Issue Position and Political Ideology

The second research question compares candidates' newspaper coverage with that of the public opinion on Twitter with regards to their issue position and political ideology. In both newspapers and tweets, Khan had more positive statements than negative about his ideology. Out of the 126 statements in the newspaper 53 were positive and only 14 were negative. Similarly, on Twitter, out of 78 statements about him, 36 were positive and 19 were negative. This can be attributed to his very popular campaign of *Naya Pakistan* (New Pakistan), the premise of which laid on an egalitarian society which guarantees transparency and meritocracy (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf, 2018). Due to the greater difference between tonality in newspapers, chi-square test for independence revealed that the difference in tonality was significant only for newspapers [$X^2(3, N = 832) = 12.373, p < 0.05$], not for Twitter ($p > 0.05$) (Table 4). In order to answer the second research question, an independent T-test was conducted. According to the results, Khan's ideology was portrayed more positively in newspapers ($M = 2.31, SD = 0.663$) than on Twitter ($M = 2.22, SD = 0.816$), however the difference was not statistically significant $t(202) = -0.877, p > 0.05$.

Table 4

Cross-tabulation and chi-square values for Khan's mention in newspapers and tweets with regards to ideology

Platform		Newspaper	Twitter
Tonality	Negative	11.1% (14)	24.4% (19)
	Neutral	46.8% (59)	29.5% (23)

	Positive	42.1% (53)	46.2% (36)
	Total	100% (126)	100% (78)
	Chi-square	12.373*	1.722

* $p < 0.05$

Sharif, on the other hand, had a small number of statements about his ideology in newspapers (27) and on Twitter (12). This was due to the fact that most of the narrative around him was focused on the corruption case going on against him in court at the time. Yet, these statements were more positive in both newspapers (18) and tweets (6) than negative on both platforms respectively (8 and 2) (Table 5). Again, there was a greater difference in tonality in newspapers, which was confirmed by the results of chi-square test [$X^2 (3, N = 832) = 24.604, p < 0.05$]. In order to understand if there was a relationship between Sharif's ideology in newspapers and Twitter, an independent T-test was conducted. According to the results, Sharif's ideology was portrayed more positively in newspapers ($M = 2.37, SD = 0.926$) than on Twitter ($M = 2.33, SD = 0.778$), however the difference was not statistically significant $t(37) = -0.121, p > 0.05$.

Table 5

Cross-tabulation and chi-square values for Sharif's mention in newspapers and tweets with regards to ideology

Platform	Newspaper	Twitter
Tonality	Negative	29.6% (8)
	Neutral	3.7% (1)
	Positive	66.7% (18)

	Total	100% (27)	100% (12)
	Chi-square	24.604*	0.316

* $p < 0.05$

Lastly, Bilawal received a decent amount of attention in this category in newspapers (89), but not so much on Twitter (30). Still, most of the statements attributed to him on both platforms were positive (57 in newspapers, 18 on Twitter), insofar that there were not any negative statements about him in newspapers, and only 6 on Twitter (Table 6). Since his campaign was mainly based on fulfilling the promise of his mother, a two-time Prime Minister of Pakistan in the 90s, he was able to gain goodwill by journalists and Twitter users who discussed his ideology mainly in a positive manner, reminiscing his mother's determination. As can be observed from the data, the difference in tonality of newspapers was significant according to chi-square test [Bilawal: $X^2(3, N = 832) = 16.265, p < 0.05$]. However, the results for the independent t-test showed that Bilawal's ideology was portrayed more positively in newspapers ($M = 2.64, SD = 0.483$) than on Twitter ($M = 2.40, SD = 0.814$), but the difference was not statistically significant $t(117) = -1.955, p > 0.05$.

Table 6

Cross-tabulation and chi-square values for Bilawal's mention in newspapers and tweets with regards to ideology

Platform		Newspaper	Twitter
Tonality	Negative	0% (0)	20% (6)
	Neutral	36% (32)	20% (6)

Positive	64% (57)	60% (18)
Total	100% (89)	100% (30)
Chi-square	16.265*	1.657

* $p < 0.05$

Culture

The third research question of this paper focused on whether there is a relationship between candidates' portrayal in newspapers versus their portrayal on Twitter in terms of culture. The category of culture includes statements about the political orientations of candidates with respect to religion and religious minorities, such as their leaning towards a religious society or a more secular one, or their stance on blasphemy laws and treatment of religious minorities etc. The total number of statements about all the candidates in this category were low in newspapers (13), as well as in tweets (21), implying that much of the discourse of this election was not focused on minority rights, blasphemy laws or any other religious topic in Pakistan. In spite of that, Khan again dominated the category in both (12 statements in newspapers and 16 statements on Twitter). However, he had equal amount of negative and positive statements on both platforms (3 in newspapers and 4 on Twitter) (Table 7). Chi-square test revealed that the difference in tonality was not significant on either of the platforms ($p > 0.05$). According to the results of the independent T-test, Khan's culture was portrayed in a similar way in both newspapers ($M = 2.00$, $SD = 0.739$) than on Twitter ($M = 2.00$, $SD = 0.730$), however the difference was not statistically significant $t(26) = 0$, $p = 1$.

Table 7

Cross-tabulation and chi-square values for Khan's mention in newspapers and tweets with regards to culture

Platform		Newspaper	Twitter
Tonality	Negative	25% (3)	25% (4)
	Neutral	50% (6)	50% (8)
	Positive	25% (3)	25% (4)
	Total	100% (12)	100% (16)
	Chi-square	0.929	1.623

Sharif had no statements in this category in newspapers, and only 1 statement on Twitter to his name in this category (Table 8). Bilawal also contributed a very small amount in both newspapers (1) and tweets (4) (Tables 9). The tonality was not significant for either of the candidate on either platform. The results of the independent T-test showed that Bilawal's culture was portrayed more positively in newspapers ($M = 1.75$, $SD = 0.500$) than on Twitter ($M = 2$, $SD = 0$, $N = 1$), and the difference was not statistically significant $t(3) = -.447$, $p = 0.685$.

Table 8

Cross-tabulation and chi-square values for Sharif's mention in newspapers and tweets with regards to culture

Platform		Newspaper	Twitter
Tonality	Negative	0% (0)	100% (1)

Neutral	0% (0)	0% (0)
Positive	0% (0)	0% (0)
Total	0% (0)	100% (1)
Chi-square	N/A	2.625

Table 9

Cross-tabulation and chi-square values for Bilawal's mention in newspapers and tweets with regards to culture

Platform		Newspaper	Twitter
Tonality	Negative	0% (0)	25% (1)
	Neutral	100% (1)	75% (3)
	Positive	0% (0)	0% (0)
	Total	100% (1)	100% (4)
	Chi-square	0.929	1.446

The low amount of statements in this category can be attributed to the controversial stand on blasphemy and other religious laws candidates are expected to take. While human rights organizations have openly opposed such laws, politicians do not openly speak against them due to death threats, instead they endorse them in passing to gain support of the religious right, while simultaneously not bringing it too much attention that they lose the liberal voters.

Qualifications and Experience

The fourth research question of this study dealt with the comparison of candidates' coverage by newspapers with that of the public opinion on Twitter about their qualification and past experience. This category had a decent turnout, Khan had 56 statements in newspapers and 74 statements on Twitter. In a change of patterns, statements about Khan were more negative (41) than positive (7) in newspapers, while on Twitter, there were more positive (44) than negative (11) statements about him. The difference in tonality was significant for Twitter [$X^2(3, N = 865) = 8.957, p < 0.05$] but not for newspapers ($p > 0.05$) (Table 10).

Since Khan had not held any public office prior to the elections, newspapers were quick to point out his lack of experience and understanding of the government. However, fans of Khan on Twitter were swept away by his charisma and his promises to bring back the looted million dollars that they believed he was more than capable to run the country. In order to find out the nature of the relationship between Khan's qualifications in newspapers and on Twitter, an independent T-test was conducted. According to the results Khan's qualifications were portrayed more negatively in newspapers ($M = 1.39$, $SD = 0.705$) than on Twitter ($M = 2.45$, $SD = 0.743$), and the difference was statistically significant $t(128) = 8.179, p = 0.00$.

Table 10

Cross-tabulation and chi-square values for Khan's mention in newspapers and tweets with regards to qualifications and experience

Platform		Newspaper	Twitter
Tonality	Negative	73.2% (41)	14.9% (11)
	Neutral	14.3% (8)	25.7% (19)
	Positive	12.5% (7)	59.5% (44)
	Total	100% (56)	100% (74)
	Chi-square	1.594	8.957*

* $p < 0.05$

Sharif, on the other hand, attracted negative attention overall. Out of the 46 statements about him in newspapers and 24 statements on Twitter, more than half of them were negative (36 in newspapers and 14 on Twitter) while only a small amount were positive (6 in newspapers and 7 on Twitter). Chi-square test results revealed that the difference in tonality was significant only for Twitter [$X^2(3, N = 865) = 18.924, p < 0.05$] but not for newspapers ($p > 0.05$) (Table 11).

According to the results of the independent T-test, Sharif's qualifications were portrayed more negatively in newspapers ($M = 1.35, SD = 0.706$) than on Twitter ($M = 1.71, SD = 0.908$), however the difference was not statistically significant $t(68) = 1.835, p = 0.071$. He has been the prime minister of Pakistan three times since the 90s, but have never been able to complete his term. His government has either been overthrown by a dictator, or he has been disqualified on charges of corruption. However, the negative statements in this category were mostly focused on his failures during his previous positions in the government. He had been disqualified as a Prime Minister a year prior, and during the time he was in the office, he did not fulfill his campaign promises.

Table 11

Cross-tabulation and chi-square values for Sharif's mention in newspapers and tweets with regards to qualifications and experience

Platform		Newspaper	Twitter
Tonality	Negative	78.3% (36)	58.3% (14)
	Neutral	8.7% (4)	12.5% (3)
	Positive	13% (6)	29.2% (7)
	Total	100% (46)	100% (24)
	Chi-square	1.396	18.924*

* $p < 0.05$

Bilawal was not as controversial as his other two counterparts. His presence in this category was low with only 10 statements in newspapers and 30 statements on Twitter. While he received mixed attention in newspapers, 5 positive statements and 4 negative statements, there were far more positive statements (14) than negative (6) about him on Twitter. Chi-square test was performed to find out if the difference in tonality was significant on either platform. Results revealed that it was significant only in newspapers [$X^2 (3, N = 832) = 18.924, p < 0.05$] but not on Twitter ($p > 0.05$) (Table 12).

An independent T-test was conducted to inquire if there is a relationship between Bilawal's qualifications in newspapers and on Twitter. Results showed that his qualifications were portrayed more negatively in newspapers ($M = 2.10, SD = 0.994$) than on Twitter ($M = 2.27, SD = 0.785$), however the difference was not statistically significant $t(38) = 0.544, p = 0.590$. Bilawal is a product of a nepotistic political system

in Pakistan. He is only 29 years old and this was his first time running for a public office, therefore he was not an important player in the elections and journalists did not spend too much time debating his (lack of) qualifications and experience. However, his family has been loved by people for generations and people still see his grandfather and mother in him, thus the positive attention for him on Twitter.

Table 12

Cross-tabulation and chi-square values for Bilawal's mention in newspapers and tweets with regards to qualifications and experience

Platform		Newspaper	Twitter
Tonality	Negative	40% (4)	20% (6)
	Neutral	10% (1)	33.3% (10)
	Positive	50% (5)	46.7% (14)
	Total	100% (10)	100% (30)
	Chi-square	9.475*	1.842

* $p < 0.05$

Personality and Image

The fifth research question analyzes the association of candidates' mention in newspapers with that on Twitter about their personality and image. This category had the most number of statements on both platforms, owing to the fact that democratic elections are based a lot on the candidate's personality such as their charisma, ambition or courage (Landtsheer, Vries & Vertessen, 2008).

Due to Khan's charming and charismatic personality, out of 229 statements in Twitter, he received a lot of positive attention in this category (178), and only a small amount of negative statements (34). However in newspapers, he received mixed attention in the 51 statements that were about him (20 positive and 27 negative). According to the results of a chi-square test, the difference in tonality was significant only in newspapers [$X^2 (3, N = 832) = 26.124, p < 0.05$] but not on Twitter ($p > 0.05$) (Table 13). The results of independent T-test, Khan's personality were portrayed more negatively in newspapers ($M = 1.86, SD = 0.960$) than on Twitter ($M = 2.63, SD = 0.730$), and the difference was statistically significant $t(278) = 6.374, p = 0.00$.

Table 13

Cross-tabulation and chi-square values for Khan's mention in newspapers and tweets with regards to personality and image

Platform		Newspaper	Twitter
Tonality	Negative	52.9% (27)	14.8% (34)
	Neutral	7.8% (4)	7.4% (17)
	Positive	39.2% (20)	77.7% (178)
	Total	100% (51)	100% (229)
	Chi-square	26.124*	3.109

* $p < 0.05$

Sharif, on the other hand, mostly received positive attention on both platforms. Out of the 97 statements in newspapers 72 were positive, and only 16 were negative. Similarly, on Twitter, out of the 92 statements about him, 49 were positive while 32 were

negative. Results of chi-square tests revealed that the difference in tonality was significant for Sharif on both platforms [Newspapers $X^2(3, N = 832) = 13.158, p < 0.05$; Twitter $X^2(3, N = 865) = 28.264, p < 0.05$] (Table 14).

An independent T-test was conducted to understand the nature of the relationship of Sharif's personality in newspapers and on Twitter. According to the results, Sharif's personality were portrayed more positively in newspapers ($M = 2.58, SD = 0.762$) than on Twitter ($M = 2.18, SD = 0.925$), and the difference was statistically significant $t(187) = -3.192, p = 0.002$. The increase in positive attention in this category can be attributed to Sharif's "courageous" decision to return to Pakistan after being convicted. While talking to news reporters, he lauded himself for facing the evils of the country by going back, knowing that he will be arrested at the airport and sent to prison immediately. This action, however, did not have much of an impact on Twitter users.

Table 14

Cross-tabulation and chi-square values for Sharif's mention in newspapers and tweets with regards to personality and image

Platform		Newspaper	Twitter
Tonality	Negative	16.5% (16)	34.8% (32)
	Neutral	9.3% (9)	12% (11)
	Positive	74.2% (72)	53.3% (49)
	Total	100% (97)	100% (92)
	Chi-square	13.158*	28.264*

* $p < 0.05$

Similar to Sharif, Bilawal also received more positive attention than negative in this category. Out of 57 statements in newspapers, 38 were positive while only 11 were negative. Parallel to Twitter, where out of 128 statements about him 105 were positive and only 14 were negative. The difference in tonality was significant for Twitter [$X^2(3, N = 865) = 6.291, p < 0.05$] according to results of chi-square tests (Table 15).

The results of the independent T-test showed that Bilawal's personality were portrayed more negatively in newspapers ($M = 2.47, SD = 0.804$) than on Twitter ($M = 2.71, SD = 0.654$), and the difference was statistically significant $t(183) = 2.119, p = 0.035$. While the elections of 2018 were Bilawal's first interaction with politics, he already had a group of followers waiting to cheer him on due to his lineage. Moreover, in the endeavor to fix the image of the party, Bilawal made a constant effort to stay out of dirty politics and instead called out his competitors on such instances, impressing his fans on Twitter.

Table 15

Cross-tabulation and chi-square values for Bilawal's mention in newspapers and tweets with regards to personality and image

Platform		Newspaper	Twitter
Tonality	Negative	19.3% (11)	10.9% (14)
	Neutral	14% (8)	7% (9)
	Positive	66.7% (38)	82% (105)
	Total	100% (57)	100% (128)

Chi-square	2.515	6.291*
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* $p < 0.05$

Integrity

The final research question of this study examines the link between the coverage of candidates in newspapers with their portrayal on Twitter in terms of their integrity. Integrity was a popular topic during the 2018 elections because of Sharif's ongoing corruption trial and Khan's anti-corruption campaign. While Khan was adamant on removing the political elite who have allegedly looted the country, Sharif stood firm in his claim that the military has orchestrated the entire debacle to remove him from office.

According to the data collected for this study, despite being a fag-bearer of anti-corruption, Khan received mixed attention at best. Out of 56 statements about his integrity in newspapers, 21 were positive and 11 were negative. While on Twitter, out of the 102 statements about him in this category, 41 were positive and 40 were negative. According to the results of chi-square tests, the difference in tonality was significant on both platforms [Newspapers $X^2(3, N = 832) = 20.452, p < 0.05$; Twitter $X^2(3, N = 865) = 37.212, p < 0.05$] (Table 16).

The independent T-test's results showed that Khan's integrity was portrayed more positively in newspapers ($M = 2.18, SD = 0.741$) than on Twitter ($M = 2.01, SD = 0.895$), however the difference was not statistically significant $t(156) = -1.202, p = 0.231$. This can be attributed to the fact that Khan's collusion with the military was not as opaque as he had thought. Critics were quick to point out how the military groomed Khan to

become the next Prime Minister, so they could indirectly run the country through him – something that Sharif was resistant to.

Table 16

Cross-tabulation and chi-square values for Khan's mention in newspapers and tweets with regards to integrity

Platform		Newspaper	Twitter
Tonality	Negative	19.6% (11)	39.2% (40)
	Neutral	42.9% (24)	20.6% (21)
	Positive	37.5% (21)	40.2% (41)
	Total	100% (56)	100% (102)
	Chi-square	20.452*	37.212*

* $p < 0.05$

In this category, Sharif had the worst luck of all. While the amount of statement about him were highest when compared to his competitors, they were mostly because of the negative attention he drew to himself during the campaign. In newspapers, there were 279 statements about his integrity, out of which only 40 were positive while 128 were negative. Similarly, on Twitter, his integrity was mentioned 186 times, yet only 20 of those statements were positive and 139 were negative. Chi-square tests revealed that the difference in tonality was significant on both platforms [Newspapers $X^2 (3, N = 832) = 13.158, p < 0.05$; Twitter $X^2 (3, N = 865) = 28.264, p < 0.05$] (Table 17).

An independent T-test was conducted to gauge the relationship between Sharif's integrity in newspapers and on Twitter. According to the results, Sharif's integrity was

portrayed more positively in newspapers ($M = 1.68$, $SD = 0.710$) than on Twitter ($M = 1.36$, $SD = 0.669$), and the difference was statistically significant $t(463) = -4.936$, $p = 0.00$. Most of the negative statements recorded for this category were about the results of his ongoing corruption trial and his impending arrest on arrival to Pakistan. Both platforms were quick to report his arrest, his transfer to prison and his stay there in great detail, however newspapers tended to be more neutral in their coverage.

Table 17

Cross-tabulation and chi-square values for Sharif's mention in newspapers and tweets with regards to integrity

Platform		Newspaper	Twitter
Tonality	Negative	45.9% (128)	74.7% (139)
	Neutral	39.8% (111)	14.5% (27)
	Positive	14.3% (40)	10.8% (20)
	Total	100% (279)	100% (186)
	Chi-square	24.996*	42.675*

* $p < 0.05$

As compared to the other two, Bilawal had a very small amount of statements about him in this category. Newspapers were very cordial to him with no negative statements and 3 positive statements out of the 12 times they mentioned him in this regard. Twitter, on the other hand, was not as polite, and out of the 32 statements that were about his integrity, only 6 were positive and 15 were negative (Table 18). Results of

chi-square tests showed that the difference in tonality was significant for only newspapers [$X^2(3, N = 832) = 8.522, p < 0.05$] not Twitter.

The results of the independent T-test showed that Bilawal's integrity were portrayed more positively in newspapers ($M = 2.25, SD = 0.452$) than on Twitter ($M = 1.72, SD = 0.772$), and the difference was statistically significant $t(42) = -2.235, p = 0.031$. While newspapers mostly only focus on the present, Twitter users were quick to point out how he was a product of a nepotistic system, and enjoys the perks of a luxurious living due to the corruption of his family.

Table 18

Cross-tabulation and chi-square values for Bilawal's mention in newspapers and tweets with regards to integrity

Platform		Newspaper	Twitter
Tonality	Negative	0% (0)	46.9% (15)
	Neutral	75% (9)	34.4% (11)
	Positive	25% (3)	18.8% (6)
	Total	100% (12)	100% (32)
	Chi-square	8.522*	5.905

* $p < 0.05$

Discussion & Conclusion

With the 2018 elections being the second time for a peaceful democratic transition in the 71 years of Pakistani history, there was a lot of focus on the political

mechanization surrounding it. However, due to the increased censorship of media and intimidation of the military, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan labelled it the “dirtiest and most micromanaged” elections in the history of Pakistan (Junaidi, 2018). Many attempts to control public opinion were made such as cutting off circulation of different newspapers and financially pressuring certain news channels (Shah & Sareen, 2018). This study set out to examine the agenda setting effects between newspapers and tweets in this highly censored environment. Results of independent T-tests showed that due to these measures, the conversation surrounding candidates’ attributes on Twitter was not always similar to their coverage in newspapers, but not always different, either.

Agenda setting studies in the past have shown strong relationships between traditional media and public opinion, especially during the time of elections (Kiousis & McCombs, 2004). However, as opposed to the studies performed earlier comparing the coverage of newspapers and public opinion with regards to candidates, this study suggests that the relationship may be skewed if there is the media is not entirely free. For example, when Kiousis et. al (2006) tested the relationship between media portrayal and public opinion of candidates during Gubernatorial elections in Florida, they found significant correlations, albeit mostly weak. Similarly, when McCombs et. al (2000) compared the coverage of newspapers with public opinion in Spain, there was a significant correlation in 19 out of 21 variables, proving that public opinion is highly influenced by the media. However, in this study, there is a relationship between candidates’ portrayal in only 8 out of 14 variables. This is mostly due to the fact the media in both Spain and the United States are free, while the media in Pakistan are not.

This study stands as an addition to literature in agenda setting with respect to candidate salience in developing countries where media faces censorship issues.

Agenda setting works with people's trust in news media. Issues can only be transferred from the media agenda to the public agenda if the public feels confident in the importance news channels and newspapers give to a certain issue. When media in a particular country is free, and censorship is not a common concern, public is less skeptic of the issues it emphasizes upon, and subconsciously end up giving importance to the same issues. However, this is not the case when media censorship is a norm in a country. Citizens take to the internet and social media to look for information through diverse sources (Behrouzin, Nisbet, Dal & Çarkoğlu, 2016). This is why the agenda of the media is not directly transferred in countries like Pakistan.

Moreover, with the spread of internet, there has been a shift from mass communication to media communication (Chaffee & Metzger, 2001). With internet giving power to all its users to create content while simultaneously letting them choose what they want to consume, the gate keeping power of institutionalized media has weakened (Bowman & Willis, 2003). People now have numerous sources to get their news from, resulting in a public opinion less influenced by the agenda of traditional media (Shehata & Strömbäck, 2013). Thus, in countries with the strictest censorship mechanisms, the agenda of the media and the public is not very similar (Luo, 2014). Moreover, with the power of the internet, not only is the public getting news from diverse sources, but is also now being able to influence the agenda of the media (Ortmann, 2012). As seen in the study, even though the military's involvement in the elections is never discussed in the newspapers, it is common knowledge amongst people on Twitter.

While Pakistani media is far from free, this study shows that it has mostly been able to report a balanced image of all three candidates during the elections. On the other hand, since internet is a luxury in Pakistan and the penetration is limited, the middle-class population is the largest group that has access to it, whose opinions and narratives are mostly on display on Twitter. However, each candidate has a unique background, which is why the portrayal for the candidates for some attributes was similar on both media, but different for other attributes.

#AbSirfImranKhan (This time Imran Khan)

On July 22, 2018, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) rose as the victorious party, and its chairman, Khan, became Prime Minister of the country on August 18, 2018. In the sample analyzed for this study, he had a considerable amount of statements in his name in both newspapers and tweets. He was the most dominant candidate in almost all categories. This was a result of his strategy of mass-mobilization of voters prior to the 2013 elections, and then his infamous *Azadi March* (Protest for independence) for 126 days following the previous elections alleging poll-rigging and demanding reelection.

With his manifesto named “The road to *Naya* [new] Pakistan,” Khan based his entire campaign on ending corruption in the country, and making elusive claims of bringing back the looted million dollars back. The middle class of Pakistan were immediately hooked to these new promises, especially after the Panama Papers were released and led to the disqualification of Nawaz Sharif as Prime Minister in 2017, and later his conviction on corruption charges in 2018, a month before the elections. Khan cashed in on this opportunity, and joined the campaign that allegedly the military started against Sharif to derail his support. This was also the trend observed in this study –

newspapers covered his rallies and press conferences where he promised to double the revenue of the country through increased taxation, and eliminate corruption, while bragging about his honesty and statesmanship; similarly, hashtags such as *#NayaPakistan* and *#VoteforBetterPakistan* trended on Twitter further idolizing his charismatic personality and his idealistic promises. Thus, the portrayal of Khan's ideology was similar in newspapers and on Twitter.

With his charisma, his crass language goes hand in hand. When huge crowds went to receive Sharif at the airport after his conviction, Khan called his supporters donkeys, which was not received well at all. The newspapers were quick to report on his inappropriate behavior and its condemnation from several leaders, but Twitter did not see much discussion about it. Similarly, while the fans on Twitter were nostalgic about him from his cricket days and constantly emphasized his philanthropy, newspapers were more adamant to present a balanced image about his past and his future. This is why Khan's personality and qualifications were portrayed more negatively in newspapers than on Twitter, rather significantly.

Conversely, his presentation of himself as a savior from the dynastic and corrupt politicians of the country was well represented in newspapers, while Twitter focused on his collusion with the military to win the elections. However, most of the discussion regarding integrity was focused on Sharif, thus the coverage was more or less the same about Khan's identity in newspapers and on Twitter.

The reason why all negative aspects of Khan do not make it to twitter is because most supporters of Khan belong to the emerging middle class of Pakistan – the largest group that has access to the Internet. This group prospered under the Musharraf regime

and are therefore sympathetic to military regimes because they enjoyed the perks of an economic boom in the late 90s and early 2000s. This is why they don't seem to mind the allegations of him colluding with the military. Thus, when Khan claims that the 30 year rule of dynastic politics is over and chants "*Naya Pakistan*", these people experience selective historical amnesia and go along with his rhetoric, in hopes to bring back their old days. When he says "*Ghabrana nahe hai*" (You don't need to worry), people trust him to be their savior and save them from the corrupt leaders. Another reason for his social media popularity is that Khan's party is the first political party in Pakistan to have established a social media wing (Ahmed & Skoric, 2014). His party has always been one step ahead of the public to downplay any negative events and emphasize on the good sides of their leader, resulting in an overall positive discourse of Khan on Twitter.

Vote Ko Izzat Dou (Respect the Vote)

Sharif has had a very tumultuous relationship with the military ever since he entered politics. He was a mere businessman, who was made finance minister by the then-president General Zia-ul-Haq in the 80s, but then eventually made his way to become the Prime Minister twice during the 90s. He was the only civilian leader to have a cordial relationship with the military, before he was deposed by General Musharraf in 1999 and was forced to live in exile.

Sharif managed to once again become Prime Minister after the 2013 elections, but was again disqualified by a judicial court in 2017, on a weak case of corruption. The military was allegedly behind this, since it felt uncomfortable with Sharif not towing the military on security issues and resisting them at every step of the way. However, after the

disqualification, Sharif turned more defiant, with openly questioning the military's strategies of harboring militants and letting convicted terrorists go.

This tussle between Sharif and the military was felt strongly by the media. Whenever Sharif was extensively covered, their circulation was threatened because of which they had to eventually give up. Nonetheless, in this study, it can be seen that Sharif was covered more extensively in newspapers than any other two candidates, and his coverage was also mostly positive except for his qualifications. With his chants of respecting the vote since the beginning of his corruption trial, he managed to bag sympathy from the masses upon the principle of democracy. However, in terms of his qualifications and previous performance, both newspapers and Twitter portrayed him poorly, stressing more upon his failure to revitalize the economy and using taxpayers' money for his own benefit.

While Sharif's portrayal was similar in both media with regards to ideology and qualifications, it was significantly more different for the portrayal of his personality and integrity. For both these attributes, coverage regarding him was more positive in newspapers than his representation on Twitter. Even though the media was pressurized by the military to not interview Sharif in order to prevent him from presenting his side of the story, he made emotional statements in his press conferences which made headlines. He made self-sacrificial statements about returning to Pakistan despite being convicted. He used words such as brave and courageous and claimed that he is coming back to his homeland despite seeing prison in front of his eyes.

Similarly, for his integrity, even though the newspapers had a lot of negative statements in that category, they tried to remain neutral to maintain journalistic integrity.

On the other hand, Twitter was mostly focused on his corruption. His conviction did not help matters, and the fact that his wife was moved to London for treatment when she fell ill also raised questions from the Twitter users. Despite all this, it can be seen that in trying to tarnish his image and quash any publicity for Sharif, the military's plan produced the opposite result. His party still managed to win the second highest number of seats and create a sizable opposition to Khan's PTI.

Bhutto zinda hai (Bhutto is alive)

Bilawal Bhutto is the newest heir to the Bhutto dynasty, whose maternal grandfather and mother both served as Prime Ministers of Pakistan. This 29-year old Oxford educated man was the youngest candidate in this race, and it was his first time contesting for any seat in the elections. When Benazir Bhutto, his mother and the chairwoman of the party, died in 2007, in her will she wanted Bilawal to be the next person to lead the party. However, since Bilawal was still in college, his father, Asif Ali Zardari, decided to take over the reins until he graduated. Zardari, who was known as Mr. 10% due to his increased corrupt practices in the 80s and 90s, plundered the economy after he became president in 2008. This brought down people's trust in the party which led to its loss in the 2013 elections. Following this, Zardari decided to step back, and brought Bilawal back to lead the party prior to the elections of 2018.

While the Bhutto family has been a very strong political family in the past, their rule in 2008 made them a weak player in this race. Both Twitter and Facebook had only a quarter of their space dedicated to Bilawal. Most of the statements that mentioned him were about his family. The party itself knew that Bilawal does not have a strong standing, and thus their slogan this year was "*Pakistan bachana hai, Bibi ka waada nibahana hai*"

(We have to save Pakistan by fulfilling Benazir's promise). Thus, by clinging on to his family's goodwill and his mother's policies, he was able to attract positive attention in both newspapers and on Twitter and have similar coverage for his ideology, stance on religious minorities and his qualifications.

The only time he received some negative attention was when Twitter users talked about the perks he is privy to because of his family and the wealth they have accumulated over the years. This led to significant difference of portrayal of his integrity in newspapers than on Twitter.

Overall, the agenda setting effects were not as strong or direct as seen in previous studies. This was not only due to the media regulations, but also because of the different way the political landscape in Pakistan is as opposed to its western counterparts. Unlike the majority of countries in the world, there is no clear distinction of hard left or right, instead, all parties are mostly on the same side of the spectrum. However, their experiences and their narratives differentiate them from one another, making Pakistan an interesting case study for the study of political communication.

Limitations

This study was not able to get rid of bots in the data collected from Twitter, since the bots commonly used by the military to sway opinion are run by humans, they could

not be caught by softwares used for computerized bots. Moreover, instead of correlations, independent t-tests were conducted due to the data not being organized according to day.

Contribution and Future Research

Conducted in a unique case, this study adds to the existing literature of agenda setting studies that either consist of countries with a free and fair media, or those which have strict censorship measures. Pakistan stands somewhere in the middle with a partially free traditional media, and a relatively free social media. Even though journalists and media organizations are threatened on a daily basis if they report about the military's involvement in civil affairs, it is a commonly discussed topic on Twitter and in everyday lives by people.

This unique case shows that agenda setting effects are not unidimensional anymore. With more and more countries regulating the media, the relationship between the press and the public opinion has become skewed. Future studies could use survey research to determine the agenda setting effects of media in the country where the access to internet is limited, and traditional media is the only source of information. Apart from that, more research should focus on developing countries with partially free media structures to examine how agenda setting influences public opinion and the politics of the country as a whole.

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