Analyzing problematic information in the political discourse in Pakistan: The case of Twitter

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Abstract: *This study investigates the prevalence and forms of hate speech and disinformation in the posts of Pakistani populist leaders on Twitter. A total of ten populist leaders' Twitter accounts were examined through quantitative content analysis. The variables for the hate speech and disinformation were derived from available literature. The results showed that the selected populist leaders tweets contained a sizable amount of disinformation and hate speech. This phenomenon has serious implications for democracy and social cohesion in Pakistan. We emphasize a viable legal frameworks and critical media literacy education to deal with this malaise.*

Key Words: Twitter, Hate Speech, Disinformation, Populism, Pakistan

Introduction

Like in many other countries, populism in Pakistan is a growing problem. It is condemned for fostering cynicism social discord and polarization (Hussain et al, 2022). Common people are drawn to populism because of their affirms that it will significantly alter society and enhance the lives of regular people. Individuals For example the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party led by current Prime Minister during his campaign Prime Minister Imran Khan advocated against corruption social justice vowing to eradicate political patronage and corruption. consider to be the main cause of the issues facing their nation. But still. In Pakistan populism has not been confined to any one political party or figurehead. been present throughout the history of the nation in a variety of ways. As an illustration Populist leaders like Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and others in the 1970s and 1980s. Benazir Bhutto his daughter pledged to lead social and economic transformation reforms all the while presenting themselves as protectors of the working class and needy ones.

Populism in Pakistan has mostly been linked with struggle and call for radical change and overall reforms in the country , it has also came under fire for manipulating public opinion and for fostering division and conflict. Critics are of the opinion that populist leaders in Pakistan often make unrealistic promises and engage in divisive rhetoric thereby undermining the stability of the country (Hussain et al, 2022; Li et al, 2023; Yilmaz et al, 2023).

Populism is frequently attacked for its strong ties to hate speech disinformation. Populist leaders disseminate their messages via digital platforms. by disseminating hate speech and false

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information for political purposes. The relationship between disinformation and hate speech with online populism is already proven by social science researchers. The objective of this study is to investigate how the populist traits have the capacity and strength to promote/ Encourage disinformation and hate speech in the context of Pakistan. This Research is important to look into the various dimensions of problematic information prevailing on social media relating to political discourse in Pakistan. More specifically, we intend to inspect whether populist discourses on twitter contain tendencies of hate speech and disinformation and in what forms these problematics are available in Pakistan.

Literature Review: Populism, Hate Speech and Disinformation

Populism, hate speech, and disinformation have become more widespread recent years in media space and on the internet.. These three

concepts have been shown to have a significant impact on public opinion and political discourse, with their effects ranging from influencing the way people think to damaging relationships between different groups. In this literature review, it is necessary to describe what populism, hate speech, and disinformation are and the impact they have on people's opinions and political processes. This review then goes ahead and discusses the interventions to these effects, and possible ways of eliminating these effects in the near future.

Populism is defined as, an ideology or political perspective that seeks the representation of the masses, people who are not usually have access to the political and or economic processes of their respective nations (Yilmaz et al, 2023; Waseem, and Hovy, 2016). This is because populism is well known for its appeal to the "people" in the broad sense of the term or to the "man on the street" and aversion to the "expert" or the "insider". Recently, the phenomenon of populism has emerged and rapidly developed, many politicians, and political parties use populist discourses and policies. A number of studies have pointed out that populism has influenced the attitude and the perception of the audience towards certain political movements and leaders, as the partisan styles and the ideas supported are viewed more favorably by the targeted public

resulting in greater votes (Lemke, 2020; Watanabe et al, 2018).

Hate speech is speech that attacks, threatens, or insults a person or group on the basis of characteristics such as race, color, religion, ethnic or national origin, sexual orientation, gender, disability, or other relevant characteristics (Bahador, 2021; Wolfson, 1997). Cyber bullying and hate speech has become rampant in today over the past several years and many people with hatred speeches and messages. Lastly, Goldman (2021) states that disinformation means 'false or misleading content which is intended and used to manipulate people' (Goldman, 2021; Miranda et al, 2022). In fact, over the course of the past few years, it has befalls normal for people to post fake news and fabricated stories on the Internet and from social networking sites. What has been evident from the studies done on disinformation is that it has a strong effect on the population where those who have been exposed to it are usually more skeptical of what they read and hear in the media and other information outlets (Goldman, 2021; Konikoff, 2021).

Populis, hate speech, and disinformation cause considerable effects in different societies and affect people's opinions on certain political issues. As research have demonstrated populism increases support for populist politicians/ politics and policies, and heighten the level of distrust of the elite and the establishment (Mudde, 2007; Lemke, 2020).

The negative effects of hate speech include; a rise in levels of prejudice and intolerance towards these groups, the holder of this theory being Khan from the year 2019 while the effects of disinformation include; decrease in trust in media and other sources of information, the holder of this theory being Gillespie from the year 2020. Moreover, three of these processes have been found to affect interactions between different groups and people's capacity to have civil political discussions (Peres, 2021; Philips, 2020; Goldman, 2021). Measures of dealing with Populism, Hate Speech and Disinformation To address populism, hate speech and disinformation, the following measures can be adopted.

Methods include fact-checking websites and initiatives, which aim to provide accurate and reliable information to counter the spread of disinformation (Goldman, 2021). Moreover, there is a range of activities and actions that is aimed at

increasing peoples' concern about the risks of hate speech as well as at the tendencies observed in the media and internet Bahador, 2021; Banesch, 2014). In conclusion, there are of course measures taken in order to address the issues related to populism, the given is the political education campaigns that are intended to let people know what populism is and how it is dangerous (Lemke, 2020; Arcila-Calderón et al, 2021).

Therefore, it can be said that populism, hate speech and disinformation have grown to be more evident in the media and the internet lately.

These phenomena have been shown to significantly impact public opinion and political discourse, with their effects ranging from influencing the way people think to damaging relationships between different groups. In order to counter the effects of these phenomena, there are a number of methods that can be used, such as fact-checking websites and initiatives, as well as initiatives to raise awareness of the dangers of hate speech and populism. Ultimately, it is vital that these issues are addressed in order to reduce the prevalence of these problems.

Research Method

It therefore makes sense to use quantitative content analysis as a method in completing this study. Quantitative content analysis is an approach of research that entails evaluating textual data in large number of texts and counting the frequency and occurrence of some topic in the data being collected from the social media, newspapers technological blogs among others. In the context of this research on hate

speech and disinformation tendencies on Twitter by populist leaders in Pakistan, the quantitative content analysis has helped systematically identify and analyze the prevalence and types of hate speech and disinformation in their tweets.

For this study, we selected the Twitter Accounts of Imran Khan, Shehbaz Gill, Azam khan, Shereen Mizari, Azhar Mashwani, Ali Amin, Fayaz ul Hasan, Qasim Suri, and PTI Official account. The was collected by using the Nvivo 12plus and Ncapture an extension with google chrome. In the first phase from the twitter account the twitter handles of the populist leaders has been selected and one by one their tweets extracted through the Ncaptute. The files

extracted via Ncapture can be opened in only Nvivo. In the second phase the extracted tweets import into Nvivo and researcher was abled to see all the tweets. In the third page the only tweets selected for the decided dates and in the last phase only concerned tweets has been selected for the coding process.

The tweets from the selected accounts of the populists' leaders has been taken after the passing the no confidence motion against the Imran Khan from 10 April 2022 to 10 June 2022.

Variables of this Research

The main purpose of this research is to examine how populist leaders are using Twitter as a tool by using disinformation and hate speech for propagating their political agenda in General and during political crisis /Uncertainty in particular. However, the independent variable of this research is the usage of Twitter, and the dependent variable is disinformation and hate speech of populist leaders.

- Hate speech Variables: Defaming
- Abusive Language
- Ethnic Hatred
- Objectification of a certain Group.
- Disinformation variables
- Lying about the evidence
- Fabricated Facts / Rumors
- False information Deliberate
- Populism variables
- Anti-Elite
- Anti-Media
- Anti-Establishment
- Create Division among the society
- Coding Process
- Variable Populist Leaders
- Coding process done from the SPSS and statistical values has been assigned to every leader.
- Imran Khan=1, Shehbaz Gill=2 Azam khan =3 Shereen Mizari =4 Azhar
- Mashwani=5 Ali Amin=6 Fayaz ul Hasan=7, Qasim Suri =8 PTI=9
- Variable Disinformation
- Fabricated Facts=1, False information=2 Without Evidence=3, False Claim=4,
- Unavailability of Facts=5. Others=6

- ▪ Variable Hate Speech
- ▪ Hatred=1, Defaming=2, Abusive Language=3. Ethnic Hatred=4,
- ▪ Objectification of a certain Group=5, Name Calling=6,

Findings

The table shows 1 the descriptive analysis of the tweets made by different populists' leaders. The data collected clearly shows that out of total 518 tweets 70 were made by Imran Khan, 69 made by Senator Azam Sawati, 64 by Ali Amin Khan, 61 by Azhar Mashwani. Qasim Khan Suri, Fayaz ul Hassan Chohan, Shireen Mizari and Dr, Shahbaz Gill made 58, 55, 49 and 43 tweets. The tweets made by the official twitter account of PTI (Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf) constituted a total number of 49 out of 518.

Table 1

Populists Leaders

	Frequency	Percent
Imran Khan	70	13.5
Shireen Mazari	49	9.5
Azhar Mashwani	61	11.8
Dr. Shahbaz GiLL	43	8.3
Fayaz ul Hassan Chohan	55	10.6
Qasim Khan Suri	58	11.2
Senator Azam Khan Swati	69	13.3
Ali Amin Khan Gandapur	64	12.4
PTI Official Twitter Account	49	9.5
Total	518	100.0

Table 2

Frequency Distribution of Disinformation by Tweets

	Frequency	Percent
Fabricated Facts	82	15.8
False information	130	25.1
Without Evidence	124	23.9
False Claim	84	16.2
Unavailability of Facts	85	16.4
Others	13	2.5
Total	518	100.0

Table 4.3 shows the frequency distribution calculated to identify the disinformation spread by tweets. The different forms of disinformation are identified as fabricated facts, false information, false claims, news without evidence, unavailability of facts and other. Out of 518 analyzed 124 tweets were made without any evidence and 130 were based on False Information. 85 tweets come under the umbrella of disinformation because of unavailability of facts.

84 tweets were of False Claims and 82 tweets are based on Fabricated Facts.

The remaining 13 tweets were not identified amongst the categories of Disinformation and hence come under the Others column.

Table 3

Frequency Distribution for Hate Speech in Tweets

	Frequency	Percent
Hatred	39	7.5
Defaming	76	14.7
Abusive Language	108	20.8
Ethnic Hatred	58	11.2
Objectification of a certain Group	116	22.4
Name Calling	121	23.4
Total	518	100.0

Hate speech has also been observed from the tweets of Populists Leaders. Dissimilar categories of Hate Speech have been identified. Out of 518 tweets 121 tweets were Name Calling with a cumulative percent of 23.4. 116 tweets were objectification of certain groups and 108 tweets were using Abusive Language with a cumulative percent of 22.4 and 20.8. Hatred, Ethnic Hatred and Defaming was observed in 39, 58, and 76 tweets.   The cumulative percent for the three categories was calculated as 7.5, 11.2 and 14.7 respectively. This means all 518 tweets were depicting and propagating Hate speech. Abuse and name calling being the prominent of others

Table 7

Correlation

		Disinformati on	Hate Speech
Disinformatio n	Pearson Correlation	1	-.055
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.212
	N	518	518
Hate Speech	Pearson Correlation	-.055	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.212	
	N	518	518

Based on the correlation table provided, the correlation coefficient between Disinformation and Hate Speech is 0.055. This indicates a very weak positive correlation between the two variables. The significance value (Sig.) of 0.212 for both correlations indicates that this weak correlation is not statistically significant at the 0.05 level (i.e., there is a high probability that this correlation occurred by chance).

The table also shows that there were 518 observations for both Disinformation and Hate Speech variables. The diagonal cells show the correlation of each variable with itself, which is always 1. The correlation between Disinformation and Disinformation is 1, while the correlation between Hate Speech and Hate Speech is also 1.

Overall, this correlation table suggests that there is no meaningful relationship between Disinformation and Hate Speech. However,

further analysis may be needed to confirm this finding, and other factors not included in this analysis may also influence the relationship between the two variables.

Conclusion

The research on populism through disinformation and hate speech on Twitter in Pakistan has highlighted the concerning prevalence of these tendencies in the tweets of populist leaders. Misinformation and hate speech violate human rights, causes emotional anguish, amplify social tensions leading to division and discrimination of targeted vulnerable groups.

The conclusions of the research indicate the necessity of increasing the protection of social networking sites, since they remain one of the primary sources of fake news and hatred. This can contain polices like; disinformation verification and contextualization, punishment for people who participate in Hate speech or any other forms of toxic speech online. Furthermore, encouraging people's media literacy and critical thinking ability may assist them in managing the social media account and distinguish fake news and hate speech. Support programs aimed at developing critical thinking as to the reliability of the material found in the Internet, as well as at facilitating the understanding of the potential outcomes of posting fake information and hatredstirring statements.

Additionally, fostering communication and mutual understanding across various groups could be helpful in easing the tensions that give rise to populism, the dissemination of false information, and hate speech. Social cohesiveness and the prevention of certain groups' marginalization can both be enhanced by fostering more accepting and tolerant cultures..

In conclusion, the study on hate speech and misinformation on Twitter in Pakistan that promotes populism emphasizes the need for increased awareness and action to combat these negative tendencies. It is crucial that we take steps to promote responsible use of social media and to combat the spread of disinformation and hate speech, in order to build a more inclusive and tolerant society. In light of the rapidly evolving digital information domain, critical media literacy has to be integrated across the educational institution. There should be more independent fact-checking organizations created because there are currently so few in Pakistan..

The laws that have been passed in Pakistan are now being weakly implemented; they should be enforced more strictly overall, without sacrificing people's right to free speech and expression.

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