Unveiling the Politics of Resistance: Analysis of Imran Khan's Post 9 May Twitter Space Sessions

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Abstract

In the realm of politics, social media has emerged as a powerful tool for influencing public opinion and engaging with the masses directly. Pakistani politics has witnessed this trend immensely during the last decade when political parties turned to different social networking sites to present their respective ideologies as a public opinion. This study aims to examine the evolving role of social media in political communication, specifically focusing on former Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan's use of Twitter Space Sessions as an alternative means of interacting with his followers after his speeches were banned from the mainstream media following the incidents of 9 May 2023. The analysis will explore how Twitter Space Sessions facilitated direct engagement with the audience and allowed him to convey messages without traditional filter of mainstream media. The research will also investigate the implications and ethical considerations of restricting public interaction in the era of social media.

Keywords: *Politics, resistance, ideologies, ethical consideration, social media.*

Introduction

In the realm of contemporary politics, Imran Khan, the former Prime Minister of Pakistan, has been a figure of significant interest and debate. Known for his excellent communication skills and interaction with public, Khan's speeches have often served as a platform for expressing his vision for a new Pakistan. He built an intense political narrative after he was deseated as the Prime Minister of Pakistan through a no confidence motion by the opposition alliance. After some direct and indirect confrontations with the existing government throughout the year of 2022, the chaos came to its peak in the political spheres of Pakistan with the starting of year 2023. He got arrested on 9th of May of the same year by law enforcement institutions resulting in the agitation and public protests in the country. His supporters confronted the law enforcing personnels demanding the release of Imran Khan. Although he was released on bail the following day but the protests and confrontations caused huge losses to the already fragile economy of the country. In the subsequent days, the government and opposition accused each other and declared responsible for the events of 9 May.

Despite facing a huge backlash from government institutions and judicial trials against Imran Khan and his party members, he did not back down from his political stance infuriating the ruling coalition. In a desperate attempt to stop him from interacting with public, the government banned him from mainstream media. In the days of elections campaign of 2018, Imran Khan used social media networking sites to gain support and influence the public opinion in the favor of his party. So he decided to use the same method he used earlier but with a different perspective. With other social media sites like facebook, youtube and instagram, Imran Khan adopted the use of Twitter Space Sessions to interact with the public in general and with his followers in specific. In this way, the denial of access to traditional digital media could not stop him from spreading his vision and political narrative to the public in the face of allegations from the government.

This study aims to analyze the Twitter Space Sessions of former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan and his method of interaction with his followers through this. It will also highlight the content, major themes, tone, and persuasive language, an effort to resist against the political rivals and influence the public opinion through these sessions. The present research also aims to analyze the probability of banning any person from public interaction in this age of social networking and its implications. The study will also find out the overall impact of social media and especially the Twitter Space Sessions to influence the political public opinion.

Research Objectives

To analyze the utilization of Twitter Space Sessions by Imran Khan after his speeches were banned from mainstream media.

To develop a broader understanding of the role of social media in political discourse and potential lessons drawn from the case study of Imran

Khan in this respect.

To explore the ethical considerations and consequences of restricting public interaction in the era of social media questioning the feasibility and impact of denying access to communication platforms.

Research Questions

How did the banning of Imran Khan's speeches from mainstream media influence his communication strategy (main themes, policy positions and rhetorical strategies), leading to the adoption of Twitter Spaces as an alternative platform for public interaction?

How does Imran Khan's case study contribute to the broader understanding of evolving role of social media in political communication and what lessons can be drawn from this experience for other political leaders?

What ethical considerations arise from restricting public interaction and freedom of speech especially in the age of social media where information dissemination has become more decentralized and accessible?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in a number of ways. Firstly, it will delve into the role of social media platforms like Twitter Spaces in reshaping political communication strategies. Secondly, the research aims to provide an insight on how political activists can interact with public after being denied the access of mainstream media. Thirdly, this study's findings can contribute to discussions on the impact restricting public interaction and its potential consequences in a digital age.

Delimitation of the Study

The proposed research will primarily focus on analyzing Imran Khan's use of Twitter Spaces as the main social media platform for direct interaction with his followers. While other social media platforms may also play a role in his communication strategy, this study will concentrate solely on Twitter Spaces. The present research will be delimited to the analysis of Imran Khan's speeches made in the Twitter Spaces after the incidents of 9 May 2023.

Literature Review

Ideologies are significantly shaped by language. It has been believed that language serves only to transmit and portray what is happening in a community. It is a neutral, passive phenomenon (Ashraf & Tahir, 2022). Hymes (1972), who called attention to another crucial feature of language known as "communicative competence", questioned this value free view of language. The "social aspect" of language was stressed, negating its value free nature. Thus, language is not inert; rather the words or their combinations always play a significant influence in politics, social interactions, economics and racial dynamics (Khalil et al., 2017).

Politics, it is widely accepted, is mostly about power. Politics is linked

to the capacity for decision making, the potential for resource control, the notion of regulating other people's behavior and even the power to govern their values. Politics and political leaders unquestionably play a key part in the development of both domestic and foreign politics in almost every form of political system. Politicians frequently utilize "spoken words" to convince and reassure their target audience of the benefits they can bring from their leadership in order to achieve this key task because their authority typically stems from their position (ALO, 2012). Politicians assure the deliberate use of language to highlight particular ideas and messages, establish promises, reflect convictions and exhibit their political ideologies (Tarigan, 2017). There can be no doubt that political leaders frequently use language to spread views. Politicians succeed because of their "ability to use rhetoric" (Jones & Peccei, 2004). By using appropriate, compelling language, they achieve their goal of persuading their audience of the veracity of their viewpoints (Bayram, 2010).

Political Discourse

The word "political discourse" is arbitrary in nature and has numerous interpretations; the term is often described with a specific reference to ideology and context (Bourdieu, 1991, Van Dijk, 1993, Fairclough, 1995 & Chilton, 2004). Theorists held a view that as politics primarily serves to persuade and argue differences between various groups and parties, communication is essential to the political process. Political processes including political participation, political representation and political cognition are all essential to politics. In addition, these activities depend on the widespread acceptance of certain shared perceptions in a larger social and cultural framework (Chilton, 2004). According to Chilton (2004), politics is a discursive, communicative and linguistic entity. Politics also shows collaboration because there are many institutions in a society framework that work together to address concerns like money, power and freedom. As a result, it began as a fight for power in which the power is either asserted or opposed. The societal structures deal with the struggle for power on two levels, namely the micro and macro levels. While the micro level deals with conflicts that are settled at the individual level, the macro level deals with larger structures like institutions in a state that support important interests like dominance, the formation of pressure groups (Chilton, 2004).

Moving forward to political discourse analysis, the theoretical presumptions openly indicate the constructive approach of political discourse which deals with the creation of ideological representations in a society (Fairclough, 1992). Analyzing political discourse critically is referred to as political discourse analysis. It primarily addresses the perpetuation of political power, its misuse or its hegemony at different scales; it also addresses resistance or occasionally counter power in the context of discursive power (Fairclough, 1992). Political discourse analysis specifically addresses the

power dynamics within discourse, political inequality and other socioeconomic institutions. According to Van Dijk (1998c), political discourse is a discourse practice that engages political actors typically politicians and other political leaders like presidents and prime ministers critically. Political discourse also refers to the writing and speaking of professional politicians or political leaders who consciously pick a certain local or global organization to foster political debate.

Use of Social Media to Construct and Reconstruct/Deconstruct Political Ideologies

Facebook, Twitter, Yahoo messenger, LinkedIn, blogs and other social media platforms are used for a variety of activities including entertainment, communication and advertising. Nowadays, both public and private life on social media has become normal. According to Bimber (2012), the implications of social media for citizenship and political communication gained momentum during the first generation of social media, or web 1.0, between 1990 and 2000. In 1990, the United States and many other developed democracies saw a significant indulgence of the internet into politics. Social media specifically in web 2.0 (the second generation of the internet dated from 2000 to the present) changed political campaigns, political activism and political contact.

The significance of social media for the rise of online political debate was emphasized by Kushin and Kitchener (2009). They discovered how diverse political ideologies' participation in social media ultimately led to the construction and contestation of these ideologies via social networking sites (Kushin and Kitchener, 2009).

With particular reference to the political sector, Stieglitz, Dang-Xuan, and Brockmann (2012) illustrated the function of social media as an enabler that gives people the ability to share their information, opinions, and ideas among a group. Social media has evolved into a venue for political activism, which aids in advancing the political communication process. Their primary sources of inspiration for their work included Barack Obama's usage of social media during the 2008 presidential race and other political campaigns. It can also be said that the US presidential elections sparked scholarly researchers' interest in social media, particularly in the context of politics. Moreover, in comparison to electronic and print media, social media had a greater impact on young voters and had a moderately positive effect on their political activity. (Stieglitz, Dang-Xuan, & Brockmann, 2012)

Apart from the US presidential elections in 2008, the Arab Spring is another global problem that highlighted the function of social media as quickly activating triggers. According to Lindsay (2013), the Arab Spring is regarded as the first coordinated actions of its sort in the Middle East and the Muslim world, bringing about the greatest revolution in recorded history. The Arab Spring revolution is closely associated with the significant contribution of the internet, particularly social networking sites, which inspired the

protesters against oppression and injustice and enabled them to speak up for democracy and their fundamental rights. Aday et al. (2013) examined social media's role in the Arab Spring from a variety of angles. To focus on the consumption of protest-related text materials, they gathered a special set of data, namely twitter archives with metadata taken from URL shortening service Bit.ly (Aday, Farrell, Freelon, Sides, & Dewar, 2013). According to their findings, Twitter served as the primary information source during the Arab Spring. Storck (2011) stressed the importance of social media as a catalyst for political rebellion in the socio-political environment of Egypt during the Arab Spring, not just as an oppressor or a liberator. It is inevitable to evaluate the internet, particularly social networking sites, as a potent weapon of mobilization, revolt, resistance, transformation, and activation in the political context.

Bardici (2012) looked into how social media was used to portray ideologies, social representations, and political revolt during the Arab Spring, with a focus on Egypt. The study demonstrated how social connections are created within societal frameworks, while also highlighting criticisms of the literature on the use of social media during the Arab Spring. In addition to showing how social media sparked the political uprising and political revolution in terms of its production and deconstruction, the discourse analytical technique also explicitly demonstrated the relationship between media discourse, subjects, and ideology (Bardici, 2012).

Previous Studies

Bayram (2010) studied how politicians spoke about leadership. The study asserted that politicians effectively employ language to assert their authority and influence their audience. The researcher analyzed the speech of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and proved the use of language by the president as a potent tool to convey his views. In a research conducted by Carlo (2020), an analysis was carried out on the political speeches of US President Donald Trump and former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. The study aimed to examine the similarities and differences between these two prominent public figures hailing from distinct countries and cultures. By scrutinizing their speech patterns, the researcher sought to gain insights into their shared names and their relevance within the realm of political discourse. Moreover, the research highlighted how ideology, culture, history, language, and individual disparities accounted for the observed distinctions between these two politicians.

Al-Majali (2015) conducted a research focusing on the political speeches of three Arab Presidents during the period from 2010 to 2012: Zain Al-Aberdeen Bin Ali of Tunisia, Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, and Muammar Al-Gaddafi of Libya. The study aimed to compare the speeches made during the Arab Spring with their usual discourse. The findings revealed that the political speeches during the Arab Spring differed significantly from their

regular speeches, using symbolic elements like repetition, harmony, and enchantment. Moreover, the presidents' language in these speeches seemed to distance itself from specific political ideologies, relying more on intimidation tactics against opponents.

Zhu & Wang (2020) analyzed the political speeches of US President Donald Trump and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi. The study focused on the linguistic aspects of their speeches and how they expressed their attitudes. The findings showed that both leaders predominantly used judgment in their language, rather than other positive resources. However, there were notable differences in their opinions on governance stability and resources. Additionally, their speeches exhibited contrasting approaches, indicating that they employed different resources and strategies to convey their messages.

Liu & Zhang (2018) explored the themes and patterns of development in President Trump's victory speech after a long and challenging election process. The speech focused on the joyous results, the end of new political ideologies, and the start of a new presidential era. Trump's speech employed simple and unmarked winning themes, making it easily understandable for the audience. He used "we" and "I" extensively, emphasizing unity and his direct connection with the American people. Trump conveyed the idea that together, as one group, they would rebuild America. His speech highlighted a new identity and attitude as the President.

Duran (2008) conducted an analysis of the speeches made by President George W. Bush and Senator John Kerry before the 2004 US presidential election. Bush's speech highlighted positive experiences from the past four years and positioned himself as a candidate addressing national and global concerns. Meanwhile, Kerry criticized Bush's administration and presented himself as a spokesperson for change, emphasizing his moral values. The analysis aimed to contrast the two candidates' approaches and their strategies to appeal to the American public during the election.

Studies in the Pakistani Context

An analysis of the language used by Imran Khan in his inaugural speech as Prime Minister revealed the strategic use of linguistic verbs to attract and persuade listeners, providing valuable insights into the politician's ideology and future goals. The study further highlighted the importance of political discourse analysis, emphasizing the significance of understanding the language and communication techniques used by politicians to influence public opinion and shape their agenda (Hussain & Yousafzi, 2021). Rubbani, Awan & Shamsi (2021) analyzed the speech delivered by Imran Khan at United Nations General Assembly on Sep 27, 2019. This research investigated the language and its connections with social and political contexts.

According to Ashraf & Tahir (2022), like other politicians, Mr. Imran Khan employed carefully chosen words and phrases to assert power and influence. His international speeches and interviews portrayed a positive

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image of Pakistan on the global stage. He demonstrated strong leadership qualities and effectively conveyed his ideology for the betterment of the nation. The research highlighted Khan's effective use of language to influence and inspire others, emphasizing a "New Era" of economic growth and fostering strong international relationships.

Methodology

The nature of this study is qualitative as the researchers have performed the textual analysis of Imran Khan's Twitter space session. As the purpose of this study is to analyze Imran Khan's post 9 May 2023 Twitter space sessions, so the researchers have carefully selected the sample. By using the strategy of purposive sampling, the researchers have selected a space session conducted on 23 June 2023 and downloaded it from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0TvStTQifZA, the official youtube channel of Imran Khan. The collected data was in audio form, so the researchers have transcribed it manually. For the purposive of analysis of the transcribed text, the study has used 3D model by Norman Fairclough (1995, 2003). This research model deals with three dimensions of text, discursive and social practices but the present research has only used the first level i.e. text level which involves the themes, ideas, vocabulary, narrative building disseminating information through words.

Analysis and Discussion

While interacting with his followers and the Twitter users, Imran Khan has tried to convey his side of story to the public. As he and his party gets no media coverage, the general public has access to only the narrative built by the government. He describes the plight of his party workers and their families under severe attack by government institutions.

Even the families are not safe, all the ticket holders of my party are in hiding, their houses get broken, the staff gets beaten up, they get vandalized, they get robbed, the young boys have been picked up when the ticket holders not been there.

Imran Khan explains the difficulties faced by his ticket holders. Not only the political activists but their families and servants are also on the radar of law enforcement institutions. The use of words like "beaten up", "vandalized" and "robbed" express his anger against this crackdown. It seems that he is extremely frustrated at the situation.

The vote bank is rising.

Here he challenges the government that these measures of oppressing him and his party is doing the opposite as he believes that more people are following his narrative and increasing his vote bank.

Whether I am in jail or I am disqualified, the party will win elections.

By following the same method Imran Khan is challenging his opponents by saying that in case of any extreme action against him in the shape of imprisonment or disqualification, the situation will not be in favor of his opponents as his party will win the elections surely.

Right now because of turmoil politically, the economy is going down the trail.

He believes that the major cause of economic downfall of the country is political instability. Without political stability, the country will never be able to come out of economic crisis.

I don't want anyone's help from outside. Either the people of Pakistan will elect me or if they don't elect me then its fine.

He has tried to reject the notion presented by his opponents that he is seeking help from other countries. He stresses on the point that he will accept the decision of the public in the election. By saying this, he is trying to convince his opponents to fight in the battlefield of election and not adopting the traditional political tactics to suppress the opponents.

I have never experienced the fascist draconian measures, happening right now. This is unprecedented.

The term "fascist draconian measures" describes his extreme anger and unhappiness regarding the ongoing political situation in the country. By using these words, Imran Khan aims to instill the image of his party as a victim in the eyes of public.

They don't realize that the world has changed because of social media. I am completely out of the mainstream media. But because of social media, I can still get my messages through. All these tactics don't work anymore. They used to work at one time… you actually couldn't get away with it because we had no other source of information. We would believe what the government controlled censored papers and television would say. But now everything is changed.

In the above mentioned lines, Imran Khan talks about the importance of social media and its effectiveness especially when he is facing complete black down from the traditional media. He states that social media is a powerful tool for him in the face of denied access of mainstream media. The phrase "All these tactics don't work anymore" suggests that traditional methods of controlling narratives or information dissemination are becoming less effective in the context of social media. He also refers to the era of dictatorial rule in the country when people depended on the state controlled media to interact with the public. At present, the situation is not the same and nobody can be denied the access to share information.

My name cannot be mentioned on media.

Here, Imran Khan is referring to the decision of the government to ban his name on the media channels. Media houses have received the clear instructions not to mention his name on-air in any case.

The economic stability can come only through free and fair elections.

Imran Khan has also expressed his willingness for dialogue as this can be the only way to move towards the elections which will in turn bring economic stability in the country.

If the establishment feels that I, Imran Khan is somehow bad for this country, explain to me then what is your idea of what is good for the country.

This is again a direct call for negotiations with the institutions of the

country. There is another meaning in this text which is not so obvious. Imran Khan is trying to make his people believe that his first priority is the betterment of his country and not his own self.

All the agencies of the government and the institutions of the government, their one aim is somehow to destroy and crush PTI party.

He is trying to disseminate the information to the public which he believes the masses are not aware of. According to him, the opponents are using every way possible to end his political career and the popularity of his party.

10,000 people in this heat stuffed into jails, for peaceful protests women have been put into jails.

Imran Khan has tried his utmost to convince people to raise voice against the political victimization he and his party is facing. He describes the plight of his party workers in prisons and especially the condition of female political activists.

They (the westerners) thought that the Muslims were against freedom of expression but they couldn't understand the love, respect and reverence Muslims have for our holy prophet (PBUH). We, the heads of Muslim states never tried to explain to them.

Imran Khan has always been vocal about the issue of Islamophobia and even raised the issue on different world forums. By describing the events of Iranian Revolution 1979 and the reaction of Muslim world on the book *Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie, he explains that the Western world have always misunderstood the Muslims' reaction against such events and they feel that Muslims do not promote or believe the right of freedom of expression. He feels that the westerners do not understand the emotions of Muslims for the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the Muslim leaders themselves are responsible for this situation as they have never tried to mitigate the misunderstandings.

I arrived in Russia at night and the next morning was my meeting with president Putin. Just before the meeting, we heard that the Russians had attacked the Ukraine. It was a bad timing. No one would have taken a visit to Russia knowing what's happening.

Imran Khan has tried to distance himself completely from the crisis of Russia-Ukraine conflict. He attempts to clear his position that at the time of the planning of his visit to Russia, his government was not aware of any such intention on the Russian side to attack Ukraine. He came to know only just before the meeting with the Russian president. He also accepts that his timing was not good and if he knew the situation before hand, he must have avoided the visit. In this way, he presents his stance about the event as he has been criticized for putting the country in a situation where the country had to face a lot of pressure from the European world.

Twitter is now a main way of my communicating. I am completely banned on all mainstream media. So if not for Twitter, I would not have been able to get my

messages through. We are grateful for this ability to get our messages through.

In these lines, Imran Khan is highlighting the importance of social networking site Twitter which is the major source of communication for him in the wake of ban from the traditional media. He believes that if there had not been the availability of Twitter spaces, he would not have been able to share his political narrative to his followers.

The worst thing happens to a country when you stop freedom of speech. When you stop criticism in a society, the society must go down.

He severely criticizes his opponents for denying the access to mainstream media and considers it a clear denial from one's basic right i.e. freedom of expression.

The better the democracy the more the country prosper. The more freedom you give to a country the more it goes up. The more you clamp down on expression and fundamental rights in a country; you destroy its future because you destroy its freedom.

Imran Khan presents his strong advocacy for democratic norms and values believing that it is the only way to ensure the progress of any country.

If you look at the British history, it was Magna Carta which started putting curbs on the power of the executive and then gradually democracy evolved. We, in Islamic history started with very democratic society where we had the executive firmly under the rule of law. That's how we move ahead and at one occasion our freedom disappeared.

He has presented a comparison of democratic values between Islam and the western world by claiming that the journey of freedom and rights in the west started from Magna Carta and the western world followed the path of democracy. While the journey of Islam was the opposite where once the rulers were under the rule of law but gradually the system decayed.

Freedom of expression has to be preserved.

At the end of Twitter Space session, Imran Khan stresses the need of preservation of freedom of speech as it is one the most fundamental human rights.

In recent years, the emergence of digital platforms has revolutionized the way political leaders communicate with their constituents. Social media, in particular, has provided a direct and instantaneous channel for leaders to share their thoughts, rally support and engage in discussions. Imran Khan's post 9 May Twitter Space Sessions exemplify this shift in political engagement. These sessions have allowed him to connect with a global audience in real time, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers and engaging directly with his supporters.

One of the striking features of Imran Khan's Twitter Space sessions is the personal and unfiltered nature of his communication. By engaging in these sessions, Khan offers his audience a sense of authenticity and direct access to his thoughts, presenting himself as a relatable figure who understands the concerns of the common people. This personalized approach

aligns with the broader trend of populist leaders who position themselves as "outsiders" challenging established political elites. Khan's ability to address his followers directly fosters a sense of connection and solidarity reinforcing his image as a champion of the people's grievances.

In this very Twitter Space Session, Imran Khan discusses some important topics like freedom of expression, denial of access to digital media, the role of political instability in economic turmoil, his take on global issues like Islamophobia and above all the importance of social media platforms especially Twitter spaces in facilitating the people to communicate with the community. His tone seems to be aggressive and somewhat frustrating for the events occurring to him and his party. The words used by him against his political opponents seem not to be the part of normal discussions rather he has used them for a specific purpose. The underlying motive is to present his opponents as villains in the eyes of public who are trying to curb the individual freedom and right to information. The most important thing is that at the time of such political crisis faced by him and his party, he is not only talking about domestic issues but also international problems like Islamophobia. He has also tried to clear his stance over Russia-Ukraine conflict by explaining that his visit to Russia was not his personal move but a diplomatic decision made by the foreign office of Pakistan.

Imran Khan has also explained the importance of Twitter spaces and even mocked the decision of depriving him from the mainstream media. According to him, this move could have been of any worth in the dictatorial rule of past. In the present era, nobody can be denied public interaction as social media provides the equal chance to every individual to present his point of view on any topic of interest. In fact, he is resisting the pressure put on him by his opponents by clearing that he will not move an inch from his stance how hard the circumstances may prove. He also challenges the government that this tactic of banning him from mainstream media will do no good and his party will win the general elections. He also discusses the plight of his party workers including women activists who are facing trials and hardships in prisons.

Conclusion

The present research has analyzed the use of Twitter spaces by former prime minister of Pakistan Imran Khan after his ban from the traditional media. It seems that twitter spaces have facilitated him much and he has been able to communicate with his followers without any hurdle. The study also found that social media has a larger role than traditional media in shaping political discourses as is claimed by Imran Khan that the number of his followers is increasing after this ban. The analysis sheds light on the intricate politics of resistance that have come to define his leadership. These sessions have provided a platform for Khan to engage directly with his followers, presenting his views, responding to questions, and rallying support for his

political agenda. The careful examination of these sessions has unraveled the dynamics of his approach to resistance, showcasing a blend of populism, nationalism, and charismatic rhetoric. Throughout these sessions, Khan has artfully tapped into the frustrations and aspirations of his audience, utilizing social media as a tool for fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose.

Also, the undue censorship cannot be tolerated as every person has the right to communicate and disseminate information and suppression on freedom of speech must not be tolerated. In this century of technological and digital revolution, it is not possible to deprive any person to interact with his fellow beings and it is also against the ethical considerations and democratic norms.

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