

## **The Role of Social Media in Sustaining Popularity for Political Success in Pakistan**

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### **Abstract**

Political parties are well known the potential of social media tools in harnessing and sustaining political popularity. Imran Khan the founder of Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf is a prominent political figure who is using the social media platforms efficiently to influence and shape the public opinion, to run political campaigns and to gain public support. Through Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, candidates have been build relationships with people that has made them want to be part of their campaign. The study identifies the strategies to follow social media for frequent and timely communication, use of visual content, addressing public concerns and leveraging user-generated content by Imran Khan. The findings may reveal that the effectively utilize of social media tools to maintain and strengthen his popularity among the electorate is an effective approach. The implications of

this research demonstrate the significance of social media tools in contemporary political campaigns, as they provide a powerful platform for politicians to engage with the public, sustain popularity, and mobilize support. The research methodology involves a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. Additionally, interviews and surveys are conducted to gauge public perceptions and attitudes towards Imran Khan's social media presence.

**Keywords:** Social media tools, Political popularity, Public support, Imran Khan, Election, Digital political communication, Social media campaigns, Engagement metrics

### **Data collection Method**

The research is based on theoretically and descriptive, analytical, comparative and qualitative methods. Researcher collaboratively collected primary data for this paper through interviews. The research data is derived from a qualitative approach and primarily relying on in-depth interviews. Through engaging in direct conversations with participants, researchers aim to gather rich and contextually nuanced insights. This interview-based methodology allows exploring of perspectives, experiences and opinions, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the research.

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### **Introduction**

In recent years, social media has emerged as powerful tool for political leaders and parties to connect with their constituents disseminate information and mobilize

public support. The widespread use of social media has revolutionized political communication, enabling politicians to directly engage with the masses and shape public opinion. The internet was created to help different groups communicate faster. It replaced slow mail with quick email and social media. The Department of Defense made the internet for this purpose. After it became available to everyone and information could travel faster. A whole generation grew up with instant connection and communication (Tedesco, 2004, p. 509). Social media like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube lets millions share news about their lives and stories from around the world. The Supreme Court decided that internet information is protected by the First Amendment. This means there can be a continuous conversation and updates about news, especially political news on thousands of websites (Aclu, March, 1997).

Pakistani political parties used to rely on TV and newspapers but now they are using social media to connect with people. Social media has become a powerful tool for them to share their ideas and communicate with the public. Politicians often argue online and their supporters get involved too (Fatima, March 10, 2023). Even though Pakistan is not as advanced in using social media for democracy as other countries, it's changing. Imran Khan's party, PTI, started this social media revolution. When there was political chaos and Imran Khan was removed from power, people turned to social media for quick, unfiltered news. PTI's strong presence on social media helped change people's opinions about Imran Khan. The potential of social media tools in sustaining the popularity of Imran Khan who is a prominent political figure and analyzing their impact on his ability to gather massive public support in the upcoming election (Shehzad, October 20, 2023).

Imran Khan, a former cricketer turned politician, rose to prominence as the leader of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party. With a strong social media

presence and a charismatic persona, Imran Khan successfully utilized social media platforms to connect with the electorate during previous elections. However, with the next election approaching, it is essential to examine the sustainability of his popularity and the role of social media in maintaining and expanding his support base. The primary objective of this study is to assess Imran Khan's social media strategy and its effectiveness in engaging and mobilizing the public. By examining various social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube, we aim to analyze the content, frequency and reach of his posts, as well as the level of engagement generated by his online presence. Additionally, we will investigate the sentiment analysis of user responses to Imran Khan's social media content, which will provide insights into the overall public perception and support for his political agenda (Dawn, February 19, 2020).

The research article advances into the impact of social media on electoral outcomes, specifically focusing on how Imran Khan's social media presence and strategy can influence voter's decision-making processes. By employing quantitative and qualitative research methods, including surveys, interviews and data analysis it also explores the correlation between social media engagement and the likelihood of individuals supporting Imran Khan in the upcoming election. The article investigates the potential role of social media algorithms, online communities, and influencers in amplifying his message and expanding his reach.

### **The Role of Social Media in Political Campaigns**

Social media platforms have become an integral part of modern political campaigns, providing politicians with unprecedented opportunities to engage with

the public, shape public opinion and mobilize support. Political campaigns still travel around the country to meet and talk with people. The value of talking in person has not gone away. Campaigns will also use TV, radio, phone calls and signs in yards and bumper stickers on cars to connect with people. But social media is a cheap way for campaigns to share their message with people. It's now a must-have for any political campaign. Candidates and campaign managers need to use social media to organize volunteers and raise money (Bleier, Lietz, & Srohmaier, 2018, p. online).

Social media is a useful tool for campaigning, but sometimes it's not used well. It can be filled with ads and requests that don't matter. However, when it's used to share important information and connect people with politicians, it makes the campaign more successful and helps make a stronger democracy. In 2018, social media was a big success for many politicians. But some jumped online without a plan, and it didn't go well. This made others stay away from social media, missing out on useful tools for campaigning and an easy way for people to contact them. Campaigns need to learn the rules for social media in the 2024 election. All candidates will be online and each needs a plan for social media to reach voters. Every election year brings a lot of TV ads, debates on TV and commentary from the media and entertainers. Candidates in national and state campaigns start their run for office. This needs a well-thought-out campaign, called Americanization or Professionalization of communication in political campaigns (Lilleker, 2006, p. 32). These models are planned nationally and focus on using market intelligence and consultants. They use narrowcasting to reach specific groups of people while focusing on the media. This results in a campaign that repeats carefully planned messages to a certain group of people over and over again, making the candidate look good. This leads to campaigns that are like fast

food, focusing on short messages and efficiency rather than giving good information (Lilleker, 2006, p. 33). They produce messages that sound nice to people without talking about political issues. Social media is becoming more professional in politics. Advertisers are creating companies to help with the increasing demand for ads during campaigns. Campaigns are now using branding to control every part of the candidate and their message. They are also studying their own candidate and doing an analysis to find strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

In recent years, political leaders around the world have recognized the potential of social media tools to amplify their message and connect with a vast audience. One such leader who has effectively utilized social media is Imran Khan, the former cricketer turned politician and the 22nd Prime Minister of Pakistan. Imran Khan's political journey began in 1996 when he founded the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, with a vision to create a "New Pakistan" based on principles of justice, accountability and transparency (PTI Manifesto, 2018, p. 06). Over the years, Khan's charismatic personality, combined with his relentless pursuit of change, propelled him to the forefront of Pakistani politics (Khan, August 03, 2023). As social media platforms gained prominence and popularity, Imran Khan recognized their potential to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and directly connect with the masses. He embraced various social media tools, such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, as powerful instruments to disseminate his political message, mobilize supporters, and counter opposition narratives. Imran Khan's effective use of social media played a pivotal role in his party's victory in the 2018 general elections, which marked a historic moment for PTI as it formed the government for the first time (Alvi, July 16, 2023).

PTI harnesses the power of social media to assess their potential to sustain popularity and garner massive public support in the next election cycle. The PTI's social media posts, the engagement and interaction patterns observed on different platforms, the use of visual media and storytelling techniques and the impact of social media campaigns on public sentiment and perception.

### **Social Media and Imran Khan's Political Rise**

In the contemporary politics, the role of social media has become significant and reshaping how political leaders connect with their constituents. Imran Khan, the charismatic leader who harnessed the power of social media to forge a unique path in Pakistani politics, leveraging digital platforms to engage, mobilize and build a substantial following. People believe that Imran Khan and his party Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, used Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and WhatsApp. They utilized almost all famous social media platforms to gain popularity among the people of the Islamic Republic Pakistan. Khan and his associates have a significant following on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social media platforms. They use these tools to gain popularity, connect to people and increase their vote banks. They use these platforms to share their views and announce their policies with their followers. Others in the group said that Imran Khan and his party have recently made accounts on social media platforms and are actively using them to engage with followers. Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and Instagram are primary social media tools. Khan has recently appeared on TikTok and has gained a big fan following there, too. It is the age of digital media, and it has become much more important for politicians to make appearances on social media sites and engage with the public. They said that Imran Khan has utilized various social media platforms to connect with the public and gain popularity. Key platforms include Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and WhatsApp. Khan

and his party have a significant following on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. People also look to these social media platforms for updates from Khan and his co-workers. Students believed that Imran Khan and his party got all this fame and popularity because of social media (Baloch, May 24, 2023). He connected to people and got their confidence while replying and commenting on social media posts. He contacted the public through Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube. These apps helped a lot, getting his party stronger with time.

Imran Khan and his party show a good active appearance on almost every social media site working in Pakistan. Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter and YouTube are among them. They connect to their followers through these apps when mainstream media does not allow them on screen. When censor boards censor his speeches on TV screens, he does his job with mobile screens (Dawn., August 23, 2022). Accessing people and changing mode of political campaigns on social media has reached a new level in PTI government. People look forward to seeing their posts and videos to get up to date. Khan and the party efficiently used social media platforms to engage with supporters, disseminate their political agenda and mobilize political support. They have used direct communication, real-time updates, visual storytelling, engagement and feedback, online campaigns; live streaming and data-driven targeting to build a sense of community. Youth believes that, by using social media platforms, they are getting a sense of being heard and valued. Party workers get connected to people via likes, comments and shares. People retweet Khan's tweets. They come forward to participate in discussions. PTI, as a party, has its own official Twitter account. Similarly, it made sure of its presence on Facebook and Instagram. Both Khan and his party have official accounts over there. The purpose revolves around sharing pictures and videos to



catch up with youth. Imran Khan made live-streaming videos on Facebook as well when he got censored by mainstream media. The live streaming of Khan's videos significantly impacts the public. The stuff is regularly uploaded on YouTube to keep the reach high. All his speeches are made available for audiences. Along with these, PTI has WhatsApp groups to disseminate information to its workers and to mobilize supporters (Meer, Mitts, & Staniland, 2022, p. online).

### **Strategies for Success in the Digital Age**

In the ever-evolving environment of the digital age, success hinges on effective strategies that leverage the power of technology and connectivity. This is especially true in the realm of politics where the emergence of social media has transformed the way leaders engage with the public. Imran Khan's journey in the digital space offers valuable insights into the strategies for success in this dynamic era. Imran Khan also used virtual events and live streaming during the COVID-19 pandemic to connect with a larger mass and keep them engaged even during worse times. He used different tactics to gain popularity among people and sustain it. Khan and his team actively respond to comments, messages and mentions from supporters, creating a sense of personal connection and engagement. Imran Khan frequently conducted live streams on Facebook. He also manages to get to mainstream TV media for telepathy, to answer people's questions directly. He allowed his followers to question him directly and respond to them in real-time (Jarral, October 15, 2018). PTI shares real-time updates during rallies, events, and political developments for its workers and supporters. The team works on appealing visual content that gets the attention of maximum audiences. Content mainly includes videos, images, infographics, etc. to spread the message more attractively. PTI initiates and promotes hashtag campaigns to generate momentum and engage supporters in focused discussion around specific issues or events (Haq,

May 10, 2022). People said Imran Khan and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) have utilized various social media strategies to maintain a strong presence and gain public support. These include authenticity, transparency, engaging content, policy communication, crisis management, hashtag campaigns, influencer collaborations, volunteer engagement and data analysis. Khan emphasizes trust and reliability, shares personal moments and shares behind-the-scenes footage to create trust and reliability. PTI also uses Twitter to address public concerns and maintain public trust (Imran, March 31, 2023).

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The positive impact of social media engagement for PTI is noticeable. Social media platforms play a vital role in Khan's image. By communicating with the audience, he became a great leader. Social media has allowed him to portray himself as an authentic and relatable figure. By allowing him to communicate directly with the public, he has presented himself as an accessible and transparent

leader. Social media has also allowed him to portray himself as an authentic and relatable figure, mobilizing support for his political party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). Social media helps to counter traditional media bias, amplify positive messages, receive immediate feedback and engagement and facilitate grassroots activism. Various factors, including the media landscape, political context, individual perceptions, and traditional media, influenced Imran Khan's image (Han, Xu, & Pan, April 2022, p. online). In addition, personal experiences, offline interactions and traditional media also contribute to how the general public perceives Imran Khan. It has allowed him to project himself as a dynamic and relatable leader, leading to increased credibility and visibility that eventually resonated with many voters. Imran Khan has positioned himself as a leader who is accessible, responsive, and in touch with the public's concerns. These have contributed to building his image as a transparent, accountable, and tech-savvy politician (Hook & Verdeja, July 7, 2022).

Imran Khan's popularity on social media stems from direct communication, authenticity, rapid information sharing, amplification through sharing, interactive features, virility and targeted communication, which was not to be seen in previous traditional political engagement. Social media allows him to connect with supporters personally, promoting a relatable and humanized image. Traditional political engagement often involves intermediaries, while social media allows for many-to-many and targeted communication. Traditional and social media channels complement each other, making effective political strategies often combining both approaches (Ahmad, November 04, 2023). The main factors contributing to Imran Khan's popularity on social media include direct communication with followers, appeal to the youth demographic, real-time updates on events, and amplification of his messages by supporters. Pakistan has seen only one practice for ages:

politicians come to speak with voters in large gatherings near election campaigns to share agendas with them. But this was always a one-sided communication in which audiences were passive participants (Anwar, November 01, 2023). There was no way introduced for a longer time to come in direct contact with politicians via any forum. It started happening during the political campaign of Imran Khan when social media was used as a direct tool to engage with voters. People take it as a positive gesture and participate in communication as active participants. It made it easier for Khan to disseminate his message to youth in their language (Asim, October 02, 2023).

### **Analysis of the Imran Khan's Social Media Struggle**

The multifaceted aspects of Imran Khan's social media struggle and the tactics employed the impact on public perception, and the broader implications for modern political discourse. With all the benefits, Imran Khan faces many challenges and risks because of their association with social media for public support. Khan has also emphasized privacy and data security. Imran Khan has addressed the challenges and risks of relying heavily on social media for public support. Some of these risks include the spread of disinformation, the manipulation of citizens and the undermining of democratic institutions. He has embraced inclusive dialogue, fact-checking, and promoting online civility to counter misinformation and fake news. He has also adapted to algorithm changes and platform policies by diversifying his presence and exploring multiple platforms (Abas, October 02, 2023). Khan has also emphasized privacy and data security, urging supporters to be cautious and familiar with privacy settings. His approach to mitigating these challenges is an ongoing process and the effectiveness of strategies may vary over time. Social media can also facilitate political manipulation by distorting information, promoting false stories and facilitating

political manipulation. Relying heavily on social media for popularity may lead to challenges such as misinformation, echo chambers and the spread of polarizing views. It also requires constant management and monitoring to address any negative sentiment. Many potential challenges and risks are associated with relying heavily on social media to sustain popularity and garner public support. Social media can also facilitate political manipulation by distorting information, promoting false stories and facilitating political manipulation (Raza, October 02, 2023).

Imran Khan's social media presence is effective in reaching and mobilizing supporters. To understand the point, a comprehensive analysis of social media strategies, reach and engagement is needed. Imran Khan's social media presence effectively reaches and mobilizes supporters with a substantial reach across various platforms. However, his reach and impact may vary depending on country size, digital literacy, internet penetration rates, and platform popularity. Khan's engagement with the public is also noteworthy, but this level may vary among political leaders (Asim, October 02, 2023). A comprehensive analysis of social media strategies, reach and engagement is needed to understand the impact of political context, target audience demographics and social media landscape. Imran Khan's use of social media has been quite effective in reach and engagement, allowing him to connect directly with the public. However, political leader's effectiveness and reach may vary depending on their social media strategies and target audience. Imran Khan's use of social media allowed him to connect directly with the public. Political leader's effectiveness and reach may vary depending on their social media strategies and target audience (Ahmad, Nvember 04, 2023).

### **The Impact of Social Media on Shaping Electoral Prospect**

Social media campaigns and online activism significantly impacted Imran Khan's electoral prospect is increasing its reach and mobilizing supporters. Social media campaigns and online activism significantly impact Imran Khan's electoral prospects by increasing reach, mobilizing supporters and enhancing grassroots fundraising. These efforts can boost voter turnout and grassroots support, shape public perception and generate momentum (Batool, November 23, 2023). However, their effectiveness must be considered in the broader electoral landscape, including traditional media coverage, ground-level campaign activities, socioeconomic factors, and voter sentiment. Social media campaigns and online activism can substantially impact Imran Khan's electoral prospects by mobilizing support, increasing voter awareness and organizing grassroots movements. Social media campaigns and online activism can substantially impact mobilizing support during elections, especially among younger and urban populations. Social media campaigns and online activism can substantially impact Imran Khan's electoral prospects by increasing voter awareness and organizing grassroots movements (Haider, November 13, 2023).

Khan's social media presence affects the youth by engaging younger demographic groups influencing gender dynamics. Imran Khan's social media presence can impact his electoral success by engaging younger demographic groups, influencing gender dynamics and addressing geographic location (Latif, November 15, 2023). The cultural factors and access to online platforms influence gender engagement. Tailoring social media strategies to address gender concerns and geographic locations is crucial for maximizing electoral success. Understanding demographic responses and implementing a holistic campaign strategy can enhance Khan's chances of success. Different demographic groups may respond differently to Imran Khan's social media presence (Khan M. ,

November 14, 2023). Younger audiences and urban populations are generally more active on social media and maybe more influenced by his online campaigns. Different demographic groups may respond differently to Imran Khan's social media presence, with younger and urban audiences being more active and engaged. Different demographic groups may respond differently to Imran Khan's social media presence. Younger audiences and urban populations are generally more active on social media and maybe more influenced by his online campaigns (Manzoor, November 10, 2023).

The endorsements and engagement through social media increase visibility and expose Khan to new audiences and expanding his support base. The leadership establishes trust and credibility with their followers, enhancing their reputation and generating positive sentiment (Sarwar, November 11, 2023). Leaders mobilize followers to support and engage with Imran Khan's campaign, fostering grassroots mobilization and persuasive communication. Influencers leader also drive social media trends and virility, creating a ripple effect and attracting broader attention (Ishtiaq, November 12, 2023). The impact should be considered alongside other factors that shape public opinion and electoral success. Online opinion of leaders can play a vital role in amplifying his message and mobilizing public support. Their endorsements can help reach broader audiences and bolster his sustained popularity. Online commentary played crucial in amplifying Imran Khan's message and mobilizing support, especially among niche communities and specific interest groups (Akmal, November 17, 2023). By sharing positive messages about Imran Khan and his political campaign, a large number of followers encouraged them to support his campaign. Their endorsements can help to bolster and sustained popularity (Asim, October 02, 2023).

## **Conclusion**

It is evident that Imran Khan and his party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), have harnessed the power of social media to establish a strong presence and gain substantial public support in the Islamic Republic. By strategically utilizing platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and WhatsApp, Khan and his associates have successfully connected with the people, amplified their political message and mobilized a dedicated following. Their adept use of social media tools, from direct communication and live streaming to real-time updates and engaging visual content, has allowed them to create an image of authenticity, transparency and accessibility. While it has allowed him to effectively connect with the public, mobilize supporters and shape public perception, it is not without risks. The spread of disinformation, echo chambers and the potential for political manipulation are constant threats. To counter these risks, Khan has embraced inclusive dialogue, fact-checking and promoting online civility. He has also diversified his presence across multiple platforms and emphasized the importance of privacy and data security. The effectiveness of these strategies may evolve over time. Furthermore, social media has proven to be a vital tool in engaging younger demographics and influencing gender dynamics. Imran Khan's ability to adapt his social media strategies to cater to these various demographic groups has contributed to his continued popularity. Additionally, influencer leaders have played a significant role in amplifying his messages and mobilizing public support. While challenges persist, it is clear that Imran Khan's strategic use of social media has significantly impacted his electoral prospects and political success.

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