# Poverty Alleviation & Human Development: Comparative Analysis of Facebook pages of top three political parties of Pakistan during 2018 Election Campaign

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## Abstract

*This research focuses on the coverage of poverty alleviation on Facebook pages of top three political parties of Pakistan i.e. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) and Pakistan People's Party. This research employs quantitative content analysis to determine the importance given to poverty alleviation and human development by Pakistani political parties on their Facebook pages. Results concluded that poverty alleviation or human development has not been the priority of top three political parties of Pakistan, but if we compare the selected three political parties, PTI took lead in discussing the poverty alleviation and human development on their official Facebook page during 2018 election campaign, whereas PMLN was neck to neck with PTI. On the contrary, PPP gave least priority to poverty alleviation or human development.*

***Key Words:*** *Poverty Alleviation, Facebook, Elections 2018, Human Development, Media ecology*

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**Introduction**

Slogans of poverty alleviation have remained at the forefront of Pakistani politics. Being a third world country, nothing can attract Pakistanis more than the economic prosperity. First general elections of Pakistan which took place during 1970 were marked by one of the most popular movements in the history of the country. Pakistan People's Party in the leadership of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto decimated the status quo politicians with his popular slogan of "*Roti, Kapra & Makaan*" (food, cloth and shelter). Since then, poverty alleviation has remained one of the most striking slogans in Pakistan.

Now in 2018 when Pakistan faced multi facet challenges including regional security issues like threats from India, terrorism, energy crises and financial meltdown. Still, poverty alleviation which may not be the permanent part of the newspaper's headlines, in fact remains the core issue of Pakistanis. According to United Nations Development Programme (2019), Pakistan's Human Development Index ranking is 152, well behind Bangladesh and India who are at 135 and 129 respectively. As per Asian Development Bank 24.3 percent people of Pakistan were below the poverty line in 2015.

Above mentioned ranking by UNDP and ADB shows that Pakistani political parties failed to materialize their promises and Pakistani people were deceived by the empty slogans.

Considering the state of financial condition of Pakistanis, poverty alleviation should have been at the forefront of mainstream political parties. This research effort looks into the Facebook pages of these parties during their 2018 election campaigning.

According to AlphaPro (2018), there are more than 3.5 million active Facebook users in Pakistan, and 92 percent of internet users in Pakistan use Facebook. Therefore, this research focuses on

the coverage of poverty alleviation on Facebook pages of top three political parties of Pakistan i.e. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) and Pakistan People's Party.

As the concept of poverty alleviation has become very broad, issues related to poverty alleviation during election campaigning were divided into two parts, one is direct measures to eradicate poverty and the second is indirect measure. As Azeem (2016), in his doctoral thesis holds that "vulnerability to monetary poverty cannot serve as a proxy for vulnerability to nutrition poverty, and vice versa. Households facing the risk of nutrition poverty will miss the benefits of anti-poverty policies based solely on the monetary measure of poverty". Today, human development index has become a benchmark to check the quality of living, in order to ensure transparency into the research, range of poverty improvement indicators (e.g. education, infrastructure development and health etc.) were added into indirect measures of gauging poverty alleviation programme of the three political parties.

### Statement of the Problem

There is no or very little work done to explore the social media accounts of Pakistani Political Parties. This research exercise intends to understand that whether the mainstream political parties of Pakistan give proper attention to the poverty alleviation or not.

### Research Questions

1. Is direct poverty alleviation or social protection schemes are the most discussed issue on the FB pages of mainstream Pakistani political parties during 2018 election campaign.
2. Did Pakistani political parties focus more on eradicating poverty through indirect measures during 2018 election campaign?
3. Which political party prioritized human development issues on its Facebook pages during 2018 election campaign?

**Theoretical Framework**

Social Media in general and Facebook has become a powerful influencing agent in Pakistan. As mentioned above, there are more than 3.5 million active Facebook users, and 92 percent of internet users in Pakistan use Facebook. In other words, technology is shaping the opinions around the world, therefore expressions of social media have its worth, and rather it has been expanding with every passing day. (AlphaPro, 2018)

There has been range of studies done on media priming effects in politics for example, (Domke, 2001; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Krosnick & Brannon, 1993;)

This study takes priming into consideration to comprehend the relationships between social media platforms of Pakistani political parties and selection of certain issues for facebook feed. Scheufele & Tewksbury (2007) argued that "The temporal sequence of agenda setting and priming assumes that media can make certain issues or aspects of issues more accessible (i.e., easily recalled) for people and thereby influence the standards they use when forming attitudes about candidates and political issues."

This study has examined the priming by the political parties on Facebook, unlike the earlier studies, as most of the studies on priming are related to media. Social media merely provides platforms and the content selection is done by the administrators themselves. This study examines the content selection by the top three political parties of Pakistan during 2018 election campaign.

Today in 2020, the model of media is changing rapidly, assumptions of Marshal Mcluhan in 1964 proving to be extremely relevant even today. McLuhan (1964) was of the opinion that our society, has been habituated to excruciating and isolating all things as a means of control, and at times, in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message.

Neil Postman was inspired by Marshal McLuhan and founded the program in media ecology at New York University in 1971. Neil Postman in 2000 delivered a Keynote address on

humanism of media ecology. He argued that media ecology subsists to further our understandings into how we stand as human beings, and what is our moral standing. For him moral aspect of technological advancement is crucial for us, otherwise technological development may be ruining our prior media advancements too. Postman although inspired by Mcluhan, disagrees with the later, by arguing that, there might be a significant merit in McLuhan's opinion about evading questions of good and bad regarding media roles, but Postman contends that there is no point in studying media unless one studies it with moral or ethical context. As this study primarily deals with the direct and indirect issues related to the poverty alleviation and its coverage on the modern medium i.e. Facebook, so this assumption of moral obligation of media is taken for theoretical underpinning of this study.

Theoretical references have been taken from two different theories. Assumptions from Media Ecology and priming theory were taken to understand media priming aspect under the light of humanist angle of media ecology. Media ecology mostly studies the technologies and medium being used to disseminate the message, whereas scholars while studying priming examine the agendas of media house. In this study, priming of political messages is observed which are spread by the political parties on Facebook.

**Methodology**

This research employed quantitative content analysis to determine the importance given to poverty alleviation and human development by Pakistani political parties on their official Facebook pages. Following of the three official Facebook pages of top three political parties of Pakistan were selected.

- Pakistan Muslim League N (2.9 million likes, as on 13th January 2020)
- Pakistan People's Party (0.34 million likes, as on 13th January 2020)

- Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (6.9 million likes, as on 13th January 2020)

Samples of the above mentioned all three Facebook pages were taken from 26th May 2018 to 25th July 2020, as general elections were announced on 26h May 2018 by the election commission of Pakistan.

Facebook posts were divided into following categories.

- Direct discussion about poverty alleviation
- Indirect discussion about poverty alleviation
- No discussion about poverty alleviation.

Operationalization of categories was done in such a way that the category "direct discussion about poverty alleviation" meant that the programs which unswervingly addressed poverty alleviation such as talking about the programmes which directly benefit the poor people like '*Panagahs*', '*Langar Khanas',* social protection schemes or Benazir Income Support Program, loans or if the words in the posts contained poor/ poverty alleviation or its synonyms. The category "indirect discussion about poverty alleviation" meant that the posts which indirectly talked about the poverty alleviation like steps to improve economy, health, education, clean water, rule of law, industry or agriculture. Although the issues picked for indirect discussion regarding poverty alleviation does not fall into the category of poverty alleviation, but they do fall in the category of human development. According to United Nations Development Program:

The human development approach, developed by the economist Mahbub Ul Haq, is anchored in the Nobel laureate Amartya Sen's work on human capabilities, often framed in terms of whether people are able to "be" and "do" desirable things in life. Examples include

*Beings:* well fed, sheltered, healthy

*Doings:* work, education, voting, participating in community life.

Freedom of choice is central to the approach: someone choosing to be hungry (during a religious fast say) is quite different to someone

who is hungry because they cannot afford to buy food. Ideas on the links between economic growth and development during the second half of the 20th Century also had a formative influence. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and economic growth emerged as leading indicator of national progress in many countries, yet GDP was never intended to be used as a measure of wellbeing. In the 1970s and 80s development debate considered using alternative focuses to go beyond GDP, including putting greater emphasis on employment, followed by redistribution with growth, and then whether people had their basic needs met. These ideas helped pave the way for the human development (both the approach and its measurement).

Considering the modern definition of human development, sum of the frequency of the two categories (direct and indirect poverty alleviation) is analyzed to comprehend the focus on the human development on part of the selected political parties on their official Facebook pages. This was done because sum of the frequency of the two categories (direct and indirect poverty alleviation) encompasses all the issues related to the modern definition of human development by UNDP.

Any other discussed issue will fall under the category of "No discussion about poverty alleviation". During pilot study, it had been observed that many Facebook posts were about political mudslinging on opponents, election preparation, self-projection and internal party matters. All these discussions were included in "No discussion about poverty alleviation".

Only those Facebook posts were taken as unit of analysis, which were regarded as "top posts" by Facebook, which includes all sorts of content including videos, news article, text or image. Posts with most comments, expressions, views and engagement are the ones regarded as the "top posts" by Facebook. In order to ensure neutrality and objectivity topmost posts were taken from Facebook search feature.

Two coders were employed to code the data. In order to ensure the reliability of coding, Holisti's (1969) formula," was used, which is "Agreement = 2N/ N1+N2 "

Where N is the total number of coding decisions the two coders agreed upon, and N1 and N2 are the numbers of coding decisions by the 1st and the 2nd coder, respectively. When two coders are coding the same pieces of content, this formula remains the same as percent agreement.

Agreement=2(261)/283+283=92.22%, so after applying formula 92.22% reliability was achieved.

Table 1

*Percentage Wise Direct and Indirect Discussion about Poverty Alleviation on Official Facebook Pages of Pakistani Political Parties*

| Parties | Direct discussion about Poverty alleviation | Indirect discussion about Poverty alleviation | No discussion about poverty alleviation. | Total |
|---------|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|-------|
| PML (N) | 5 (5.74%) | 32 (36.78%) | 50 (57.4%) | 87 |
| PTI | 8 (7.9%) | 40 (39.6%) | 53 (52.48) | 101 |
| PPP | 9 (9.47%) | 14 (14.74%) | 72 (75.79%) | 95 |
| Total | 22 (7.77) | 86 (30.39) | 175 (61.83) | 283 |

**Analysis**

**Research question 1**: Is direct poverty alleviation or social protection schemes are the most discussed issue on the FB pages of mainstream Pakistani political parties during 2018 election campaign?

It is quite clear from table 1 that political parties on their Facebook pages never prioritized issues related to poverty alleviation. Interestingly, it is evident from table 1 that all selected political parties did not even touch 10 percent of their top posts for addressing poverty alleviation directly.

**Research question 2**: Did Pakistani political parties focused more on eradicating poverty through indirect measures during 2018 election campaign?

It is evident from table 1 that Pakistan Muslim League (N) and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf discussed poverty alleviation indirectly, as top posts from their Facebook pages posted 36.78 % and 39 % posts respectively. On the other Pakistan People's Party posted only 14.74 percent of its posts regarding indirect poverty alleviation issues on its Facebook pages.

The discussed above hypotheses show that although parties did not discuss the poverty alleviation explicitly, but substantial content was posted on development and rule of law. There are multiple takeaways from these results. First, is the top two political parties' sense that the people of Facebook are literate enough to understand that these human developmental aspects will ultimately lift the poor people out of poverty. On the other hand, Pakistan People's Party mostly discussed the party activities, election preparations and unconstructive criticism on opponents. It is evident from the last two elections that PPP mostly wins in rural areas where internet access is not easily available. Secondly, PTI and PMLN have 6.9 million and 2.9 million likes on their Facebook pages, whereas PPP is far behind these parties and have just 0.34 million likes. It can be assumed that due to the said reason PTI and PMLN focus more on the content of their pages than the PPP. Even though PPP has always raised the slogan of "*Roti, Kapra Aur Makan*" (food, cloth & shelter), but still their Facebook pages failed to deliver a powerful message to its voters. Thirdly, table 1 also shows that there is a considerable balance in Facebook posts of PTI and PMLN, which may have reflected good election results for them during 2018 elections campaign.

As discussed in the theoretical framework, from table 1 it can be assumed that not only media, social media teams of top political parties of Pakistan can themselves build narratives and consequently build narratives according to the party demands. After the emergence

of social media, narrative is not only built by the media but parties themselves play a crucial role in it through their social media. Table 1 also shows how media frames being used to ignore the significant issues of Pakistan.

Table 2

*Percentage Wise Discussion about Poverty Alleviation on Official Facebook Pages of Pakistani   Political Parties*

| Parties | Human Development | No discussion about poverty alleviation | Total |
|---------|-------------------|------------------------------------------|-------|
| PML (N) | 37 (42.52) | 50 (57.4%) | 87 |
| PTI | 48 (47.52) | 53 (52.48) | 101 |
| PPP | 23 (24.21) | 72 (75.79) | 95 |
| Total | 108 (38.16) | 175 (61.83) | 283 |

**Research Question 3**

Which political party prioritized human development issues on its Facebook pages during 2018 election campaign?

To answer this research question, two categories direct and indirect discussion on poverty alleviation were combined and named as human development. PTI's official Facebook page lead in posting issues related to human development with 47.52% posts, PML (N) with 42.52 % stood second, whereas Pakistan People's Party was far behind in this race as their official page posted only 24.21 posts on their Facebook page.

Postman (2000) applied humanist angle into media ecology theory by advocating moral and ethical role of media, but in this study this moral angle is tested with the political parties. As far as humanist angle of media ecology is concerned, it is evident from table 1 that it was only PPP which evaded human development issues.

**Conclusion**

As discussed in the introduction of the study, human development is the core issue of Pakistan, and therefore it was need of the hour to examine the importance given to poverty alleviation and human development by the top three political parties of Pakistan during 2018 elections. Although direct discussion about poverty alleviation was less than 10 percent by all the three parties, but when we combined direct and indirect poverty alleviation issues, this study revealed that PTI and PMLN discussed the human development almost in half of the posts. Contrariwise PPP was far behind in discussing the human development.

This study has examined the assumptions regarding priming and media ecology theory. The very angle of self-priming by all the selected parties was noticed in the study by highlighting and choosing specific issues. Most of the Facebook posts by political parties focused on non-developmental issues like mudslinging of opponents, party activities and election campaign organization. As the social media teams of the Facebook pages of political parties enjoy total control over the content posted by the officially designated teams, show that that these parties still prefer self-projection, especially PPP followed by PMLN and PTI as well. (See Table 1 and Table 2). In future, issue of self-priming by individuals or interest groups should be studied to minimize blaming mainstream media for every evil.

Whereas humanist angle of media ecology theory was also tested, which showed that PTI and PMLN discussed the issues related to poverty alleviation and human development much more than PPP. Today, Marshal McLuhan's words in 1964 "medium is the message" have proven to be more relevant, as this social media has shifted the whole information dissemination paradigm. The emergence of social media has given much power to individuals and interest groups and they are no more dependent on traditional media, and these groups are to be blamed for their media projection on

social media, as they themselves choose what would be shared and discussed. So, the humanist angle of media ecology theory is compromised as far as the coverage of human development on Facebook pages of top three political parties is concerned.

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