

DIGITAL AUTOCRATIZATION OF PAKISTAN

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Introduction

The recent digital revolution has brought a new form of social organization which has been referred to as the Network Society. In the network society technological, social and media networks define linkages of individuals, groups and organizations. Pakistan is no exception to this development. The growth spurt in Pakistani social media use over the past decade indicates a shift from traditional mass society to a (digital) network society, though the volume of network society in Pakistan is quite low compared to the total population. But the transition is there, and the digital space allows faster and more information transfer along with provisions of opportunities to develop larger networks to earn more social capital. However, it is important to see how this digital world is being governed by the State and what sort of treatment is being offered to its “citizens”, especially the religious minorities. This chapter explores key laws related to cyberspace in Pakistan, and how religious minorities and dissident voices are being treated in the online space.

Laws regarding cyber space in Pakistan

This section encompasses main laws related to regulation of cyber space in Pakistan. It shows that the promulgation of cyber laws followed the technological advancements in the country regardless of type or form of government.

The Government of Pakistan has promulgated various laws since 2002 to monitor digital data. The first of its kind was the “Electronic Transactions Ordinance 2002”. Under its section 36, any unauthorized access to any user’s data was criminalized. This law also asked for the establishment of a Certification Council under the Ministry of Information Technology and Telecom (MOITT) within 60 days of the promulgation of Ordinance 2002. Key functions of the Certification Council included granting and renewing accreditation certificates, conducting research in cryptography and preparing legislative recommendations for the protection of data and privacy of electronic subscribers.

In 2010, the “Monitoring and Reconciliation of Telephony Traffic Regulation” was passed (Pakistan Telecommunication Authority, 2010). According to new legislation every long-distance and international service provider was bound to have real-time monitoring of the

origin and destination of the call along with the duration of the call. The service providers were bound to keep a record of the traffic for a certain period of time.

In 2013, “The Investigation for Fair Trial Act” was promulgated, allowing officials with a judicial warrant to access electronic data of any citizen. This law was intended to protect citizens against State oppression. Any officer of the relevant law-enforcement agency has to seek a judicial warrant to arrest an alleged culprit of cybercrime. However, the Act authorizes an Investigation Officer to request a warrant even on the basis of suspicion that any citizen is ‘in the process of beginning to plan’ a crime under Pakistani law.

In 2014, a massive terrorist attack took place in Peshawar where hundreds of students of the Army Public School were martyred by the terrorists. In response to this heinous attack, the State prepared a 20-point National Action Plan (NAP) to fight extremism and terrorism in the country. Point 14 of the NAP directly addressed the social media. It stated that measures should be taken against abuse of the internet and social media for terrorism (Ahmed, 2016). In pursuance of this plan, the parliament passed the Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) 2016, which addresses cybercrimes including online hate speech and violent extremism. PECA 2016 was a sincere attempt to make digital spaces safer. However, this law has three problems. First, the reason quoted by the State to promulgate the law is to ensure national security, not the digital users’ online safety. Second, the law gives powers to the State to monitor the online activities of any digital user in real time. This aspect becomes crucial for the digital rights of the users because there is not any law in the country that provides data protection and privacy rights to digital users. In the absence of any such constitutional protection, exploitation of personal data by the State institutions cannot be overlooked. In addition, the lack of privacy and data protection makes the users vulnerable and susceptible to data theft and misuse. Third, there is ambiguity in the definition of certain terms in the law. For instance, Section 10A of the PECA states, “Whoever prepares or disseminates information. through any information system or device that advances or is likely to advance inter-faith, sectarian or racial hatred, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to seven years or with fine or with both.” This section mentions the groups against which hate speech may be used, but it does not define what constitutes “hate speech”? This is the case with other terms like “public order” and “national security” used in the law. This ambiguity may put digital users at greater risk of State oppression, especially for the users who are human rights defenders and criticize State actions.

The control over citizens’ online activities became stringent with the introduction of the “Removal and Blocking of Unlawful Online Content (Procedure, Oversight and Safeguards) Rules 2020”. Again the focus of these rules was to control social media and increase the State’s surveillance.

These rules were passed without consultation of relevant stakeholders. Moreover, these rules asked social media companies to share the data of any user, and to block and remove any content that the government of Pakistan asks to be removed. Under these rules the definition of “extremism” is vague and so broad that it could easily be misused by the State to suppress anyone’s voice. The definition of extremism reads: “‘extremism’ means the violent, vocal or active opposition to fundamental values of the State of Pakistan including the security, integrity or defence of Pakistan, public order, decency or morality, the rule of law, individual liberty and the mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs” (Shahzad, 2020).

The presence of a nationwide monitoring system and vague definitions of national security, extremism and hate speech, coupled with the absence of public data and privacy protection laws, means the digital crimes regulatory laws are a tool in the hands of the government to silence dissenting voices and human rights defenders. Under the existing laws, the Federal Investigation

Agency has a dedicated cell to investigate electronic crimes and present a report to the parliament biannually. However, no report has been submitted to the parliament so far. Meanwhile many citizens have been arrested, vaguely accused of threatening national security and for acts described as “hate speech” (Jahangir, 2019). On the other hand, there are organized campaigns in online spaces against religious minorities, journalists and women’s rights activists but no significant actions are taken against these organized troll groups. This selective implementation of the law (although the law itself is authoritarian in the absence of privacy protection to citizens) has given a message to social media users that anyone can get away with whatever he/she shares on social media as long as that user is in favour of the government.

Digital freedoms and restrictions in practice

In this section I will talk about the persecution of minorities, especially Ahmadis, in online space. Religious minorities, including Sikhs and Hindus, also faced abuse in online space, but Ahmadis are the ones who face the most abuse, hatred, threats and online harassment.

The Ahmadis

Followers of the Ahmadiya religion believe that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was a “Subordinate Prophet” (Hashim, 2018) to the Muslims’ last Prophet. They were considered Muslims until 1974 when then parliament enacted a constitutional amendment declaring them non-Muslims. Now they are non-Muslims as per the constitution of Pakistan. Their population is roughly 5 million in Pakistan and they are the most vulnerable religious minority. Ahmadis are a persecuted minority and generally considered to be socially undesirable. Dining and doing business with Ahmadis is opposed by the majority of Muslims. Their places of worship are attacked, their households are threatened and their social exclusion is a “norm”. People who hate Ahmadis proclaim two main reasons to justify their hatred. They believe that Ahmadis are the apostates and as per their interpretation of Islamic teachings, an apostate should be punished with death. Secondly, the haters claim that Ahmadis are blasphemers as they do not believe in the finality of the prophethood of the Muslims’ last Prophet, Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him).

The persecution of Ahmadis in the digital sphere

Pakistani Twitter witnesses massive abuse against religious minorities, especially Ahmadis. The last two years’ Twitter data was collected against hashtags that targeted Ahmadis and it showed a surge in hatred against them in online space. Generally, any hashtag on Pakistani Twitter against a particular group (whether political or religious) would remain on top trend for a few hours but when it is against Ahmadis it remains on the top trend panel for a day or two. Moreover, the number of users engaged in the propagation of the hashtag against Ahmadis also remains higher as compared to hashtags on political or any other social issues. On average, an organic hashtag on the Pakistani Twitter panel has 5,000 to 15,000 users participating, sending 5,000 to 20,000 tweets. But when it comes to the anti-Ahmadiya hashtag the number of tweets goes up to 78,000 with more than 10,000 users. This high number of users engaged in tweeting against Ahmadis indicates that general public sentiment is against Ahmadis and whenever a hashtag appears on Twitter, religiously motivated users contribute to its propagation. During the last two years, “Qadiani (the word used for Ahmadi) is the worst infidel” was propagated on Twitter multiple times with the total number of tweets exceeding 300,000. Four things were highlighted in the hashtags during the last two years: first, Ahmadis are the worst infidels and rejecting them

is part of religion; second, Ahmadis are traitors; third, Ahmadis should be thrown out of government jobs; and fourth, Ahmadis should be murdered as they are blasphemers. No doubt, TLP remained on top in propagating violent hashtags against Ahmadis but supporters of other political parties and the general public also added their voices. In July 2020, an Ahmadi was murdered during his court hearing in Peshawar. His murderer, Khalid Khan, was glorified on social media and hashtags “The winner’s message is ‘death to blasphemer’” and “Salute to the winner Khalid’s courage” were propagated on Pakistani Twitter and these hashtags remained on the top trend panel for more than two consecutive days with more than 200,000 tweets. These hashtags were not promoted solely by any single political party or religious group, but general users participated actively. This shows the level of public antipathy towards the Ahmadis. The cyber laws are meant to safeguard every citizen, but their poor or selective implementation gives space to social media users to threaten and propagate hate against minorities.

It is important to highlight that the Tehreek e Labbaik (TLP) emerged as the most prominent group who propagated the most hashtags (almost 70% of all anti-Ahmadiya hashtags) against Ahmadis. So to understand the modus operandi of online groups who promote violent extremism, I chose TLP to do further analysis.

The Tehreek e Labbaik (TLP)

The TLP Pakistan is a far-right Islamist political party that was founded by a cleric, Khadim Rizvi, in 2015. Khadim Rizvi belonged to the Barelvi sect of Islam. Traditionally this sect was considered more peaceful and polite. Its main representation was Sufism as compared to the Deobandi and Ahl e Hadith sects who aggressively propagated and were engaged in Jihad during the Afghan war in the 1980s and 1990s. After 9/11, the War on Terror started in Afghanistan and in Pakistan too. The State started “cleaning operations” against Talibans in Swat and tribal areas of Pakistan. This time the State started to patronize the Barelvi sect as its component of Sufism was effective to portray a soft image of Islam against the Taliban (Farooq, 2020). Khadim Rizvi was, however, an exception to the traditional Barelvism. He was a fire-brand mullah who believed in using violence to push his agenda. He gained popularity on his support for Mumtaz Qadri who murdered the then Governor of Punjab, Salman Taseer on the charge of blasphemy. TLP built its political campaign on the blasphemy issue and got registered as a political party in 2015. They actively protested against the hanging of Mumtaz Qadri in 2016. Since then TLP has capitalized its popularity by pushing the agenda of blasphemy. In 2017, TLP staged a sit-in against PMLN on a slight change regarding declaration of finality of the prophethood in one of the annexes to Election Bill 2017 (the words “I solemnly swear” were replaced with “I believe”). The protesters had tacit support of the military establishment (Siddiqui, 2017). This support gave TLP a kind of legitimacy to push their agenda. The military establishment wanted to oust PMLN in the 2018 general elections, so to curtail the vote bank of PMLN, they supported TLP to gain visibility in public (Butt, 2017). Since TLP’s sit-in in 2017, they aggressively campaigned against religious minorities, especially Ahmadis (Hashim, 2018). In 2018, they staged a huge protest against the acquittal of a Christian woman Asia Bibi who was falsely accused of blasphemy. But this time the military establishment stood with the civilian government of PTI and a crackdown was done against TLP on staging the sit-in.

Study methodology

Data against hashtags that were propagated by TLP during 2019 were collected. The Social Network Analysis (SNA) technique was used to analyze structural properties of online social

networks of TLP. To analyze the text of the tweets, the content analysis technique was used. A total of 2,03,900 (figure rounded to nearest hundred) tweets from 17,200 Twitter users were collected. This data was analyzed by using SNA to see the structures of online social networks among TLP supporters.

Main findings in the social network analysis

SNA is a technique used to understand structures of networks and to see the position of a node in the given network. Node means a Twitter user. Tie means the connection a user establishes with another user by reply, mention, quote or retweet activity. For instance, if a user sends a tweet without mentioning anyone and this tweet is neither retweeted nor quoted/replied, no Tie will be established.

Network Density (ND) is another characteristic that helps to understand the pace of communication within the network. The higher the density, the faster the communication within the network. It also reflects how sparsely or densely the nodes are connected. If the density is one, it means all the users in the network are connected to every other user. A density close to one may reflect that users are working as a team and might know one another in offline space.

For the given dataset, the density of the whole network of 17,200 users was 0.001, which means that only 0.1% ties were formed out of all possible ties that could have been established in the given network. However, the analysis of the network of the top few hundred most active users revealed that there existed very strong connections. Two samples of 100 and 200 user-networks were taken to see if there existed any online relations among Twitter users. The results revealed that the network of top 100 Twitter users had a density of 0.90, meaning that 90% of all possible ties were established. This high percentage is reflective of very strong connections between the most active users. The graph density for the network of the top 200 users was 0.46, which means 46% of all possible ties were established.

Reciprocity is a measure of mutual ties. It shows a conversation or interaction is taking place between two users. For the TLP network the reciprocity was 0.039. It means roughly 4% mutual ties were established. Further analysis of edge ties shows that Retweet percentages is the highest (96%). It means out of all (100%) ties that could be “mention”, “reply”, “quote” or “retweet”, the maximum proportion (96%) was retweets. It reflects that the users are not engaging in discussion, rather simply retweeting the exact tweet that was sent by someone. Such a high percentage (96%) of retweet shows that the hashtag is propagated inorganically by a group of people. Inorganic propagation means that organized groups in online space retweet a particular tweet multiple time. This phenomenon generates traffic on Twitter and its algorithms pick that particular tweet/hashtag and display it on the Top Trend panel. If a hashtag is propagated organically it means more people from diverse geographic locations are tweeting with that hashtag and it contains a good proportion of reply and quote tweets. It seems unnatural that 96 out of 100 users are retweeting something without even saying a word of their own. There is no exact rule what percentage of retweets makes a trend organic or inorganic; however, I have observed that on Pakistani Twitter organic trends had a less than 80% retweet ratio, generally.

There are certain characteristics of Twitter users that do not come under SNA but still can give important insights about users. For instance, Twitter issues a blue tick to users whose identities are confirmed by Twitter and they belong to categories of journalists, activists, or public figures. For the given dataset, out of 2,03,900 tweets, only three tweets were sent from a verified account. Most Twitter users from Pakistan do not have verified accounts but the absence of

verified users for a whole year nevertheless hints that people with known social identities and social following did not endorse the messaging of TLP.

On Twitter, there is a common observation that most people with real accounts have more followers as compared to friends (Twitter friends are the users who are following each other). But for TLP users the number of friends was higher than the number of followers. The average number of “followers” of each user were 1,699 while the average number of “Friends” were 1,780. Most Twitter users have more followers than friends but the case was the reverse for TLP users. For a comparison, the data of users who tweeted about the women’s march was looked into by the author. It was found that on average each user who tweeted with hashtag #AuratMarch had 6,222 followers and 868 friends. In Pakistan, the propagandists who work in groups, create multiple Twitter accounts and then mutually follow to increase outreach. TLP supporters used the same technique.

TLP’s account opening pattern

In the given dataset, 266,261 and 755 accounts were opened in 2015, 2016 and 2017 respectively. The number of new accounts increased in 2018 where 1,927 new accounts were opened. But a massive increase occurred in 2019 when 4,478 new accounts were opened in the first three months. Out of 2,03,900 tweets that were sent in 2019 by TLP, two-thirds were sent by the accounts that were opened in 2019. This trend indicated that the latest accounts were opened with the intention of propagating TLP messages on Twitter through an organized effort.

The first massive wave of account openings occurred in January 2019. This was the time when the government did a crackdown on the TLP leadership in response to their agitation against the acquittal of Asia Bibi. The second was in August 2019. This might have been done to protest against the revocation of Article 370 in India, which concerned Kashmir’s special status.

Qualitative analysis

Qualitative analysis of the collected tweets revealed that TLP supporters abused religious minorities, especially Ahmadis and the liberal voices. They labelled political opponents with titles that were reflective of their disconnect from Islam. Also, they glorified a convicted terrorists and threatened political opponents and minorities. TLP instigated violence among its followers and supporters by glorifying the terrorist acts of Mumtaz Qadri and Khalid Khan. The former murdered a governor while the latter murdered an Ahmadi in Peshawar Court where he was facing trial under blasphemy charges.

TLP propagated hashtags with words demanding the cleansing of Ahmadis. TLP followers expressed their views that Pakistan was created in the name of Islam so there was no place for blasphemers in the country. They incited violence with tweets containing messages like “any lover of the Prophet (PBUH) can get offended and kill the person who had been accused of blasphemy”. “It is time to fulfil the promise made to the winner Mumtaz Qadri” (Mumtaz Qadri was convicted of the murder of Salman Taseer), “we will cut out your tongue”, “Anyone with good faith should stand up and murder the blasphemer” and “expel them from the country”. TLP introduced the slogan “There is only one punishment for the blasphemer, and it is beheading.” Also, they propagated that if a blasphemer is apologizing, do not believe him/her. He/she is faking it. Similarly, they ran an online campaign against Sikhs claiming that TLP followers would take revenge on Sikhs. Khadim Rizvi, the leader of the TLP, said in his speech that it is time to take revenge for the Muslim women who were kidnapped by Sikhs at the time of Partition.

Modus operandi of TLP

A pattern was identified in running hashtags and mobilizing people by TLP. Based on social network analysis of the online networks along with content analysis, I identified the following three characteristics of TLP's Modus Operandi.

Everything is blasphemy

Using accusations of blasphemy remained a core strategy of TLP's campaigning, and they used it extensively in online space. A pattern can be seen in the accusations that TLP made against political opponents, especially Prime Minister Imran Khan, and the ideological opponents like liberals and supporters of non-violence. They termed every "non-desired" behaviour at the social and political level as blasphemy. For instance, Pakistan's leading English-language newspaper *Dawn* ran a story about a Pakistani-born British citizen who was involved in the London Bridge attack in 2019. The newspaper wrote that the attacker was of Pakistani origin (Rehman, 2019). This act of *Dawn* was labelled as blasphemy by TLP and a whole campaign was run on Twitter against the newspaper. TLP proclaimed that *Dawn* had digressed from the right path and should be punished for fighting against Allah and His Prophet. TLP instigated violence against the newspaper by propagating tweets like "If the State can't do [anything against *Dawn*], then send a message to Allah and the Prophet's (PBUH) personal security guards. Qadris [referring to Mumtaz Qadri who murdered Salman Taseer] would act upon it" (نَوْمَلَشَن، 2019). Similarly, on the issuing of a 50 rupee coin in the name of Sri Guru Nanak to mark his 550th birthday (Jamal, 2019), TLP declared the act as blasphemy and launched an online campaign against the government. TLP's social media supporters said "Isn't it dishonour (blasphemy) to Riasat e Madina [State of Medina]? No fear of God, no respect for the Prophet PBUH" (Adil, 2019). For them, issuing a coin in the name of any non-Muslim was equivalent to blasphemy and that should be punished. TLP turned every issue into blasphemy in an effort to keep themselves publicly relevant.

In 2019, university students organized a series of protests calling for an end to the ban on forming student unions. In 1984, the then dictator General Zia ul Haq imposed the ban. Apparently, the argument was to reduce on-campus violence, but this act damaged the very democratic fabric of society. Student unions were like nurseries where political and democratic ideas were introduced and cultivated in young minds. Decades later, students organized marches where they demanded the restoration of student unions. Women students actively took part in protests and the protesters chanted slogans citing liberal and democratic values. TLP found these student marches blasphemous and a threat to religious values. To counter student marches they propagated a hashtag – #WhenGreenWillSway (in Urdu). Under this hashtag thousands of tweets were sent, challenging and threatening the organizers and supporters of student marches. The wording of the hashtag was very symbolic. Some student protesters carried red flags, symbolizing the Left. In response, TLP threatened that when the green (symbolizing religion and TLP, as their flag colour is also green) will come to power, the Left will have no place in society. Liberal voices and human rights defenders who supported the student marches were also attacked by the TLP social media teams. Liberals, non-conservatives and leftists were labelled as "filth" that needed to be cleansed before it spreads to the whole country. Through Twitter hashtags, TLP spread a message that the cleansing of "filth" would only be possible when religion (Islam) comes into power in the country.

Creating false analogies: paving the way for blasphemy accusations

TLP created a false analogy that joining TLP is tantamount to love for the Last Prophet of Muslims and that anyone who claims to be a Muslim and lover of Muhammad (PBUH) should join TLP. Opposing TLP means the opposer hates the defenders of the honour of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This messaging through social media won many supporters to TLP. Now whenever TLP runs a hashtag on blasphemy many non-TLP supporters also contribute to the hashtag, presumably because they are expressing their love for religion and the Prophet. Similarly, TLP changed the etymology of the word traitor (Ghaddar) that's in frequent use on Pakistani social media to silence dissenting voices. TLP interpreted this word as deviance from religious teachings. They said that a traitor is a person who betrays their religion by not fighting for the finality of the Last Prophet of Muslims. Summative analysis of data revealed that the word "traitor" was used 1,300 times for the person who betrays their religion and the Prophet (PBUH).

At times, the blasphemy accusations were not labelled overtly and at once. A case was built gradually by alienating the person from Muslims, first. Then leveled blasphemy accusations against the person. For the purpose, a series of religious titles were used to alienate a person. For instance, words like "Gumrah" (astray), "Zindeeq", "Murtad" (apostate), "Munafiq" (hypocrite), "Kafir" (infidel), "Mulhid" (atheist) and "Dajjal" (Anti-Christ) were frequently paired with the name of a "potential blasphemer". In religious connotation and in local cultural settings it becomes easier to accuse a person of blasphemy if that person's reputation, outlook and ideology are not very religious. Therefore, assigning titles of "religious deviance" to liberal and apparently non-religious people and ideological opponents, makes it easier for TLP to accuse these people of blasphemy. Data revealed that the word blasphemer was used 7,000 times, followed by the word infidel (3,000 times), traitor (1,400 times) in the context of betrayal of religion (unlike the actual meaning of the word), hypocrite (1,200) and apostate (1,100). This reflects how frequently the political opponents are labelled with words that challenge the accused's allegiance to Islam. Consequently, it becomes easier to convince the general public that the accused is a blasphemer as he/she was never a good Muslim.

Maintaining a unique identity

TLP claims that their religious purpose is to protect the honour of the last Prophet of Muslims and their purpose is beyond mundane things. But their actions in online space reveal that they are no different from any other political party or pressure group who struggles to maintain its public presence. TLP propagates hashtags on Twitter in favour of blasphemy laws but when any other group propagates a hashtag with similar content TLP would not participate. This clearly shows that they talk about the issue when they alone get the credit. When it is a joint effort of multiple groups talking about blasphemy, TLP would disengage themselves in online space. The most active TLP supporters would never propagate a hashtag that had not been initiated by their own group. A visual representation of Twitter data explains this phenomenon. Figure 14.1 shows a relationship among online users and how they were aligned in different teams. There are four clusters of circles (each circle represents a Twitter user): three are placed on the top end of the figure and are connected to each other very tightly. However, the fourth one is at the bottom and has stronger intra-cluster connections (the lines connecting two circles represent online connection) but weaker inter-cluster connections. This figure is an actual representation of Twitter users who were propagating two separate hashtags. The top three clusters represent TLP users who propagated a hashtag on blasphemy, while the lower cluster represents

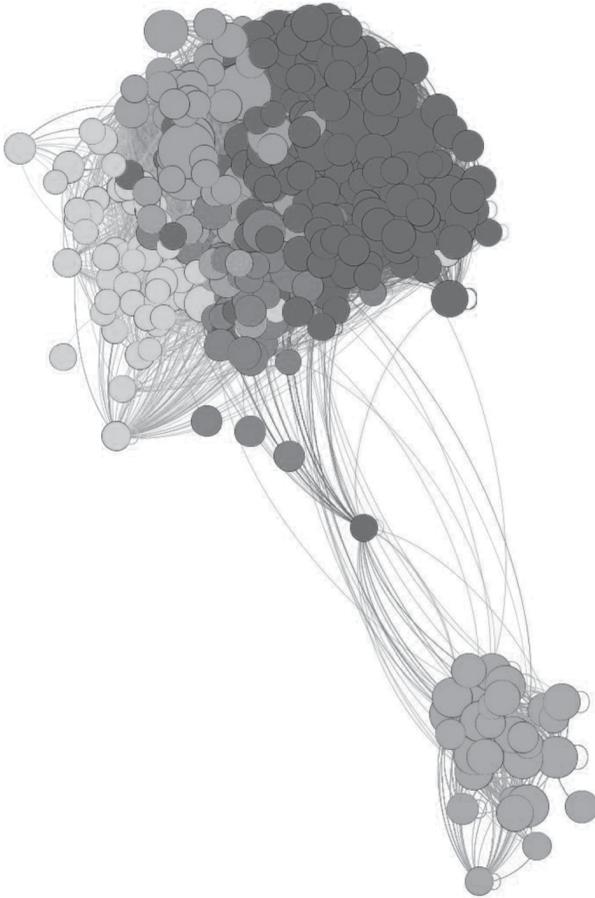


Figure 14.1 Same issue but divided they tweet.

Source: Twitter Data, compiled by the author (Rizvan Saeed)

another group who propagated hashtag #CyberGhustakhAzadKiun (translation: why cyber blasphemers are free). Now it is interesting to note that both groups tweeted against blasphemy but they ran separate hashtags. A few lines that are connecting the top and bottom clusters are of “mention” or “reply” ties. In simple terms, these lines appeared as a result when a member of one group tagged or replied to a few individuals of the other cluster. There were no lines (ties) that reflected retweeting of each other’s tweets. Despite the fact that both the groups were tweeting against blasphemy, TLP did not join the other hashtag. And the very next day, TLP again ran its own hashtag against blasphemy and accused the Prime Minister Imran Khan.

TLP has aggressively promoted a convicted terrorist in online space along with propagating hate speech against minorities. They clearly instigated violence against Ahmadis. All these acts are criminalized under the law of the land. Section 9 of PECA 2016 clearly mentions that glorification of a terrorist, a terrorist offence and hate speech are liable to punishment. Section 503 of the Pakistan Penal Code, which criminalizes intimidation. Likewise the propagation of malicious hashtags targeting the integrity and honour of any individual is also a criminal

offence. Section 20 of the PECA criminalizes displaying or transmitting information that a person knows to be false and that harms the reputation of a person.

Conclusion

Pakistan has witnessed consecutive democratic rule since 2008. The age of social media is also almost the same. Therefore, it is hard to make a comparison between the situation of social media control under a dictatorship and during democratic government. However, the situation worsened with each change of government since 2008.

During the autocratic rule of General Pervez Musharraf cyber laws were introduced to facilitate registration and accreditation of electronic subscribers and service providers. At that time, social media was not rampant in Pakistan. In the following years, the democratic government of Pakistan People's Party introduced the Investigation for Fair Trial Act with the intention to protect citizens' rights against unfair trials. However, the most important legislation regarding social media regulation was passed in Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz's tenure (2016), when laws were introduced to counter online violent extremism and hate speech. Later the PTI's current government added new regulations to PECA 2016 to control hate speech and violent extremism on social media. Regarding the implementation of the cyber laws, successive governments adopted a more selective approach. Despite visible evidence of hate speech against minorities and violent extremism by groups like TLP, the governments did not take effective actions under cyber laws. Pakistani Twitter remained inundated with hashtags that contained derogatory and violent content against minorities, especially Ahmadis. Although there have been democratic governments since social media expanded substantially in the country, they have failed to protect the democratic rights of minorities to take part freely in the digital world and to optimize their potential to contribute to the cyber world. Now be it poor or selective implementation of cyber laws, the most vulnerable victims are Ahmadis. This seems to continue, whether it is an autocratic regime or democracy, until the State takes concrete steps to effectively and impartially implement the cyber laws.

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