Social Media, National Security and Perception of Pakistani Millennial

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Abstract

The penetration of social media mainly Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram in Pakistan is very high. At the same time several organizations including political organizations, religious pressure groups, separatists, terrorists and nonstate actors are using social media to promote their ideologies and propagation in favor to achieve their vested interests which can be very detrimental to national security of Pakistan. The young generation (millennials) are captivated by the powerful effects of social media on their daily lives. The study aims to find out the relationship between the users of social media and their perception of the national security of Pakistan. The findings of the study show that national security is an important issue, and the users are aware of its challenges; consequently, they are aware of the harmful use of social media. The results also showed that the youth considered that rumors on social media can create panic among the masses. The majority of the respondents stressed the need for the online vigilance of social media and recommends that concrete steps should be taken for public awareness about this issue.

Keywords: *Social Media, millennial, national security.*

Introduction

In the 21st century, the most widely accepted technological development is certainly social media. Overall 61.34 million People of Pakistan are using the internet out of the 46 million are

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social media users of which 88.09 % use Facebook, 8.72 % Twitter, 1.18% Instagram, and 1.03% use YouTube (Social Media Stats Pakistan, 2021). Social Media is the most popular amongst millennials- born between 1981 and 1996, their age falls (25 to 32 years) and their oldest person is turning forty in 2021 (Meyer, 2021). They are also defined as individuals who are born after 1980 and before 2000. The very distinguished factor of this generation is the heavy usage of social media (Johnson, 2021). They, instead of reading or watching the news, are taking information and major stories from their favorite social media networks (Clark, 2018).

Social Media has both pros and cons as it is used for constructive purposes on one side and on the other side non-state actors take advantage of this for their corrupt and heinous agendas. Social media assists violent protests and terrorism activities (AlZaabi and Tomic, 2018). Social media is the main reason for 80% of crimes in India nowadays (Meena, 2021). The rumors on social media add force to the security issues as national security is one of the most serious matters for a country. Official narratives have been deconstructed by the power of social media therefore concrete efforts are being made by the authorities in Pakistan (Rashid, 2021). The forces of security want full control of a situation, which is a questionable thing when it comes to social media (Atran, Axelrod, Davis, and Fischhoff, 2017). The major fear of the country's military commander scenario of pre-invasion is that something should not be leaked out which would help enemies. On the other side, the media has also feared that the military might smother coverage of news to boost its image in

public or cover up the related mistakes. These fundamental differences would never change. The patriotic media and the forces of security have collaborated at times. But usually, animosity smudges their relationship. A better understanding of needs between the two is definitely an important factor.

There has been a conflict on social media for defense and national interest purposes (Azhar and Iqbal, 2018). In a conference, it was evident where Director General Inter-Services Press Relations (ISPR) Gen Asif Ghafoor located on the nation to stress the requirement to control and monitor social media as well as their track what users of it posting for national security purposes. Pakistani media has been instrumental to put breaks against several of the unlawful regime decisions. Traditional media emphasize more on state and politics (Perveen, Mehmood, and Yasin, 2017) however, social media is relatively free of these constraints where a without restraint culture of commenting succeeds. So, in the time of today's hybrid warfare, national security- the ability of a country to combat the threats of the enemies is of great significance to study. Particularly for Pakistan, as since its establishment it has been facing serious threats from inside and outside of the country.

The national security of Pakistan is in very challenging times due to hybrid warfare as social media drives against Pakistan (Nadeem, Mustafa, and Kakar, 2021). Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp have become an instrument for these falsified campaigns, particularly due to neighboring enemy country India. It is claimed that these tools are used to bring uncertainty and divisions in Pakistan (Atta, 2018). Description of national security

is considered as the state capability for citizenry defense and safety. It is argued that major section of the youth has become victims of anti-state propaganda Pakistan's youth population has also become a victim of these crossbreed conflicts (Makinda, 2017).

It is of relevance to find out the perception of the millennials about the role of social media and the situation of national security of Pakistan. This study aims to find out the perception of the social media millennials about the national security of Pakistan.

Research Questions

RQ1. Do the millennials understand the usage of social media in the context of the national security of Pakistan?

RQ2. How can millennials save themselves from the negative use of social media in perspectives of the national security of Pakistan?

Methodology

The population of this research was the department of media and communication studies of all the HEC approved private sector universities of twin cities Rawalpindi and Islamabad. The list of the approved private sector universities was taken from the HEC website and then a simple random technique was employed. Five universities were selected on the basis of their undergraduate program of media and communication studies. With the help of a support officer, 50 questionnaires were distributed in each university. Out of 250 questionnaires, 235 were usable questionnaires for data analysis. 125 respondents were male and 110 were female respondents. It was carefully identified that all

the respondents should be millennials, aware of National Security (Nation's safety against terrorism, threat, war) and they were using social media outlets including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram for the last five years and they consume more than five hours in a day on social media. The primary source of information is social media, particularly Facebook followed by Twitter with a slight difference.

Findings & Data Analysis

Following are the findings of the study.

Table 1: *Pakistan's national security current state*

	Excellent	Average	Poor	No Idea
Responses	4%	69%	20%	7%

A question was asked from the respondent about national security. 69% of the respondents perceive that the current situation of the national security is average; similarly, 20% think that it is very poor however only 4% of the respondent thinks that the current state is excellent (table 1).

Table 2: *Usage of social media and Pakistan's national security*

	SA	A	N	D	SD
Social media increases insecurity in Pakistan	27%	11%	0%	15%	17%
Social media supports security reactions against activities of the non-state actors	34%	13%	29%	6%	17%
Social media adds to the expansion of non-state actors' activities	24%	8%	15%	11%	41%
Social media manipulate the labeling of non-state actors' activities	40%	17%	20%	6%	18%

Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

Different questions were asked about the usage of social media and the national security of Pakistan. 27% of the respondents were agreed that social media (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp are the source of increasing insecurity (Table 2). However, 17% of respondents disagree that social media is not working as the catalyst in insecurity in Pakistan. A question asked about the non-state actors' activities and the reaction of security organizations. 34% strongly agreed that social media informs security reactions. 13% were agreed with this question, similarly, 17% and 6% strongly disagree and disagree with the statement and 29% show their neutral responses. 24% of the respondents think that online Media contributes advancement of non-state actors' activities however 41% think that it is wrong. 15% of the respondents show their neutral responses toward the statement. 40% of the respondents perceive and strongly agree that social media contributes to the labeling of non-state actors' activities. However, 18% were strongly disagreed, similarly, only 6% disagreed with this contribution.

Table 3: *Types of negative activities spread by Social media*

	Terrorism activities	Rumors	Hater speeches
Responses	10%	51%	39%

Table 3 shows that 51% responded said that rumors are being spread by social media similarly 39% declared that hateful speeches and 10% think that social media is involved in terrorism activities.

Table 4: *Social media assist the following*

	Propaganda in favor	Threats/ violence	Motivation
Responses	41%	26%	33%

In Table 4 it shows that respondents think that 41% social media is used as propaganda tool, however 33% respond in favor of Motivation. Similarly, 26% consider it as tool for threats and violence.

Table 5: *Types of efforts by the government*

	Counter Propaganda	Online Surveillance	Intelligent Monitoring
Responses	35%	40%	24%

Finding in Table 5 show that 35% of Respondents think counter propaganda by Pakistani Government helps in reducing the security challenges however 40% shows their responses toward online surveillance. 24% think that intelligent monitoring is the strategy to decrease the security challenges.

Table 6: *Suggestions to protect ourselves against offensive use of Social media*

Suggestions to protect ourselves against offensive use of Social Media		
Constructs	Responses	Percentage
Public awareness on the constructive use of Social Media	83	35%
Control and interception	31	13%
Collaboration between government and SM site owners	41	17%
Consistent monitoring of abuse of SM and block the sources	33	14%
Prosecute hate speech propagators Shut down sites	17	7%
Faith on security threatening information Usage of technology the discrimination of security threatening information	15	6%
Make Policies and Laws to control Social Media misuse	19	8%
Total	235	100%

A series of suggestion were asked from the respondents about the protection and improving security situation. As it can be seen from Table 6, 35% of the respondents consider that it is possible through public enlightenment, Table 6 shows that 13% showed their responses towards censorship and interception. However, 17% think that it is the mutual responsibility of government and social media site owners, similarly block the sources and sites is the easy way to stop the offensive use of the social media were the response of 14% of the respondents. 7% believe that spreading security is threatening. 6% of respondents think software that monitors security threatening information is a solution however only 8% said that policies and laws help to protect ourselves against offensive use of Social Media is Pakistani and improve our security situation.

Discussion

The study presents crucial insight into the users of social media and the national security of Pakistan which can be beneficial for the protection and defense of the citizenry in future. The findings show that the Pakistani millennials do understand the importance of national security and the sensitivity of this issue particularly while using the social media. Therefore, majority of the respondents believe that social media is a source of increasing insecurity and a tool of spreading rumors in addition to that it does manipulate the tagging of non-state actors' activities. This is why they have given many realistic suggestions to combat the feeble situation of national security and these are; increasing the awareness among the users, implementation of the censorship, interception and block the sources and sites policies. On the other side, there are many positive assessments about the relationship between the usage of social media and national security of Pakistan. These understandings explain that social media supports security reactions against activities of the non-state actors and social media can play a vital role in counter propaganda, online surveillance and intelligent monitoring.

Conclusion

Social media has established its powerful existence in the world. It has magical supremacy among the lives of the Pakistani millennials. The rumors or anti-state propaganda through social media in Pakistan is very high and the millennials understand its sensitivity. However, on the other side the concerned government departments should also play their part through online surveillance and intelligent monitoring.

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