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Juxtaposing Law, Media and Human Rights: Role of Social Media in Promoting Human Rights in Pakistan Case Study of Legal Reforms and Digital Activism

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Abstract

This research paper analyzes the potential role of social media as a tool for the promotion of human rights in Pakistan, specifically considering legal reforms and digital activism. The background of this study rests on the growing convergence of digital platforms with civil liberties, legal literacy, and advocacy movements. This study is founded on two objectives, revolves around two research questions, and tests two hypotheses concerning the extent of the reach and impact of social media as a tool in the promotion of human rights in Pakistan. To draw conclusions about the research questions, this study ultimately takes a quantitative approach. The study uses the survey method for data collection. A structured questionnaire is distributed to a sample of 175 participants from a variety of peoples, including social media activists, lawyers, human rights activists, victims, lawmakers/parliamentarians. The data is collected, and then subjected to analysis and depicted using visualizations to demonstrate the patterns of responses and frequency distribution. The study explores the ability of social media to be a means of providing and preserving human rights advocacy in Pakistan by strengthening the voices of those traditionally marginalized in society, generating public awareness and sentiment for marginalized communities, and pressuring lawmakers to amend problematic laws. Furthermore, the study provides evidence that digital media is often a sufficient means of awareness, largely promoting dialogues about the issues explored in this study, and documenting the real time violations of human rights and civil liberties. Overall, the research indicates that digital activism is a nascent social force that will continue to shape human rights discourse in Pakistan. While there are challenges in online spaces, like online censorship, misinformation and digital illiteracy, the recommendations recognize that there are some more sustainable legal protections for digital activists in Pakistan, more solid regulatory regimes, collaborative civil society and policy makers for realizing social media for more robust human rights advocacy.



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Introduction

Social media is a key communications, advocacy, and public engagement tool in this age of digital information. It is rekindling the ways that people and groups interact with the political, legal, and societal institutions of the world, particularly for countries like Pakistan that deal with severe restrictions to traditional media, and institutional bias. Social media, including platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, can be viewed as alternative spaces for discourse and activism, and are granting the citizens of Pakistan the opportunity to speak out against injustice, organize a movement, document abuses and hold decision makers to account. Pakistan's networks of communication are influenced by colonial laws until the Fair Trial Act (2013), which gave state surveillance a solid legal base, even allowing the state to collect evidence through monitoring. The problems caused by the absence of digital governance laws, including digital surveillance, have created fertile ground for abuse. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that the expansion of internet use in Pakistan means that inclusive policies, digital literacy, and technology are all essential, and the step by step processes to achieve the benefits ought not to come at the cost of human rights and freedoms. The role of social media as a potential area to strengthen human rights work has also considerably increased in recent years with cases of disappearances, gender violence, issues facing national minorities, and freedom of expression. Digital activism has not only drawn the attention of the nation to abuses against citizens, but it has also generated pressure on policy and lawmakers to legislate change about their conduct. The viral aspect of cyber campaigns has proved that public interest in such campaigns, combined with international scrutiny, can generate real action for policy or political will and legislative agenda.

However, the growing influence of social media as a way of bringing about legal and social changes in the real world is still a controversial issue. Doubts remain around the validity of digital campaigns, the digital divide in access to these platforms and the sustainability of movements in the internet space when confronted with government regulation and observation.

This research is an exploration of social media's role in enhancing human rights advocacy in Pakistan with a specific focus on how digital activism has had implications for legal reform and awareness among the Pakistani populace. This research aims to synthesize the experiences of actors in civil society and the legal sector as social media human rights activists, lawyers, human rights advocates, victims of rights abuses and the Pakistani parliament in order to provide the actual evidence of the dynamic relationship between technology and human rights activism in a developing country context.

Background

In the last few decades, the introduction of digital technology is changing how societies confront human rights issues. Digital technologies provide communities with very important communication spaces, mainly through social media, for opportunities of public expression, civic engagement, and the organization of social movements. In a country such as Pakistan, where advocacy for marginalized communities has traditionally failed for numerous reasons, social



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media has turned out to be a critical platform for activism and an apparent, inspiring opportunity for legal/human rights reform. Violence, crisis, and instability have defined Pakistan's political project since the nation's creation. The country is 'birthed' in violence following the partition of British India in 1947, such that Pakistan is a 'homeland' for Muslims to state the obvious. Of course, the fact of the matter is that its creation is largely done for the benefit of upper caste Muslims; indeed, the violence and mass bloodshed that displaced millions and crossed borders in the immediate aftermath of the event, amid anti Muslim riots and massacres, demonetizes Pakistanis claim to a homeland. In 1947, when Pakistan is founded, it had a significant non-Muslim population; over the last 75 years, it has dwindled to near nothingness. Furthermore, India, the new republic "born" along with Pakistan, also created through partition, has a vast Muslim population and continue to host one. Hence, from the beginning, Pakistan has been anything but a distinctly Muslim homeland.

Pakistan's identity has also faced additional crises from within, not least of all with its civil war in 1971 that led to the secession of East Pakistan and the birth of Bangladesh. This ruptured the vision of a uniting land for the Muslims, which has arguably contributed to Pakistan's ongoing existential crisis. While Pakistan does have Islamic ideals to rely on in the law and policies there are parts of the state politically still entrenched in colonial law, and has legislative structures that diverge sharply from the hardline religious nationalism the state is expected to epitomize. The discrepancy between the ideal and actual practices of the nation continues to fuel its existential crisis.

Traditionally, human rights violations in Pakistan go back many years, with violations such as limitation of freedom of speech/free expression, gender based violence, religious discrimination, and ethnic/linguistic based oppression being commonplace and problematic. Human rights violations remain problematic in many ways, including unimplemented laws, lack of political, and acquired or persistent institutional inertia. On the other hand, social media is allowed a space to provide awareness of violations that happened, created awareness of injustices, and have created public and international pressure for change. Social media is allowed for victims/activists to circumvent the barriers imposed by traditional news media, and allows direct communication with a broader and immediate audience, potentially generating a wider awareness/following and movement in support of marginalized groups that is critical at this existential time for the country.

Digital activism, particularly during the past decade is facilitated the amplification of abused people/victims, movements calling for justice such as #JusticeForZainab, and widening public dialogues in the very sensitive and taboo domains of abuse such as #AuratMarch, and against online harassment campaigns. With these movements, or something of the sort, social media is shown that the collective voice of the digital is powerful. The simply and easily implementable online platform has brought appeals to action and stepped up scrutiny of instances of violations. More importantly, this has led to engaging activists in more meaningful campaigns that have developed/changed social norms or possibly pushed for policy change.

Despite these developments, there is a lack of systematic research examining how effectively social media contributes to promoting human rights and influencing legal reforms in Pakistan. Most discussions remain anecdotal or



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event specific, lacking empirical depth. This study aims to fill that gap by conducting a structured investigation into the perceptions and experiences of key stakeholders, thereby offering a clearer understanding of the intersection between social media and human rights in Pakistan.

Research Gap

Pakistan's approach to internet regulation is shaped by Article 14 of its Constitution, which guarantees the right to privacy, including the privacy of digital communications. However, this right is not absolute and can be overridden under legal justifications. Prior to PECA's enactment in 2016, earlier laws such as the Telegraph Act of 1885 and the Pakistan Telecommunication Act of 1996 allowed extensive state surveillance over communication networks. The Fair Trial Act of 2013 further legitimized evidence gathering through mass surveillance. Although existing literature and anecdotal evidence suggest that social media become a vital tool for human rights advocacy in Pakistan, there remains a noticeable lack of systematic, data driven research that critically assesses its actual influence on legal reforms and policy change. Most prior studies focus narrowly on individual campaigns or isolated incidents without examining the broader, sustained impact of digital activism. Furthermore, the perspectives of key stakeholders such as victims, human rights defenders, lawyers, and lawmakers are often underrepresented, resulting in an incomplete understanding of the mechanisms through which social media affects human rights discourse and institutional reform.

This study addresses this gap by employing a quantitative survey based methodology to provide empirical evidence on how social media functions as a platform for human rights awareness and legal activism in Pakistan. It fills the gap in the literature by not only assessing the reach and perceptions of digital campaigns, but their real world impact on issues of law and public policy, with a multi-dimensional investigation that can be beneficial in shaping advocacy efforts and future academic investigations.

Problem Statement

In Pakistan, constitutional and international promises to guarantee human rights are marred by repeated violations such as gender based violence, censorship and suppression of free expression, enforced disappearances, and religious discrimination. Redress and legal reform through conventional means add time, politics, and distance between ordinary people, especially marginalized groups, access to remedy and accountability. During these difficult times, social media has grown to become an alternative space for advocacy, awareness, and mobilizing people, with the potential to influence public policy and change the discourse for legal reform.

While there are numerous digital campaigns and online movements, there remains a gap in the empirical literature to establish the role of social media in advancing human rights and impacting legal reform in Pakistan. Most of the literature is limited to in depth surveys examining defeatist cases, or literature that is not data driven. More fundamentally, most literature does not engage the perspectives of the key actors involved in this process e.g. social media activists, lawyers, human rights defenders, victims/claimants of historical injustices, and policy makers. Throughout its existence, Pakistan has oscillated between



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democratic and military rule. Four separate military regimes have interrupted democratic governance, most infamously during General Yahya Khan's leadership amid the 1971 conflict. The last military ruler, General Pervez Musharraf, held power from 1999 until 2008. Civilian rule has returned since then, but the military continues to influence the political system behind the scenes. This interference, called the power of "the establishment," has consistently disrupted democracy and reduced public trust in institutions. The emergence of right-wing religious extremism has added to Pakistan's complex sociopolitical landscape. Since the early 2000s, militant groups have been more blatant and violent, largely influenced by global and regional events. The refocused attention of groups such as Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in recent years has caused a resurgence in violence the recent violence triggers the attack on citizens and attacks on security forces. In both urban and rural areas, extremist groups have cultivated a culture of vigilantism, where public outrage particularly around issues like blasphemy frequently erupts into mob violence, vandalism, and even killings. With this gap in literature, we face a fundamental challenge of developing understanding of whether and how social media meaningfully furthers the promotion of human rights, and whether digital activism translates to actual legal and policy changes. Without this understanding, it is unlikely that any attempt to leverage social media for human rights purposes is effective, sustainable, or coordinated.

As such, this research examines and measures the role of social media in the promotion of human rights in Pakistan, with a specific focus on its relationship on policy changes and digital activism, through the eyes of individuals involved in or affected by the process.

Objectives

This research has two primary, research related objectives:

1. To explore the role of social media in promoting the awareness and advocacy of human rights in Pakistan, specifically among social media activists, lawyers, human rights defenders, victims, and lawmakers.
2. To assess how digital activism through the utilization of social media platforms has influenced the initiation or promotion of legal reforms associated with human rights in Pakistan.

Research Questions

The study is directed by 2 research questions:

1. What is the role of social media in the promotion and awareness of human rights issues in Pakistan?
2. How far can social media activism on digital platforms lead to legal reforms related to human rights in Pakistan?

Significance of the Study

The Government of Pakistan has increasingly using regulatory measures to establish control over the digital environment. One of the most disturbing and well known measures has been the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA). Initially presented as a method of defending users against online harm, PECA has vague wording, and gives sweeping powers to the state that can reasonably raise fears of state overreach. This has raised concerns about the potential misuse



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of the state's unfettered surveillance powers and vague definitions of terms. However, there continues to be institutional resistance. The judiciary in Pakistan has occasionally intervened and acted against executive control, and civil society specifically, organizations that advocate for digital rights, have consistently protested state actions and authoritarianism. These organizations work to raise awareness about the rights to online privacy, data protection, and better internet access for all, especially for those on the margins. This paper investigates the evolving landscape of digital authoritarianism in Pakistan and assesses how civil society actors are pushing back to preserve digital freedoms.

This study is of great significance in the context of Pakistan's ongoing socio-political transformation, impacting its digital landscape. As society becomes more reliant on social media for communication, activism, and information sharing, the importance of understanding its role in raising awareness of human rights issues is increasingly more relevant to researchers, policymakers, civil society organizations, and legal institutions.

First, the study provides empirical evidence to identify the use, role, strengths, weaknesses, limitations, and real world impact of social media as a tool for human rights promotion and advocacy. The evidence provided in the findings strengthens the empirical gap between digital activism and draft legislation relevant to the impacts that online campaigns on legal changes and shifts in public opinion.

Second, the research assesses several stakeholders, including social media activists, human rights defenders, victims, lawyers, and lawmakers, enabling the research to offer an analysis and interpretation of the issue under study with a more holistic understanding of social media's role in accessible and credible human rights dialogue from various stakeholders' perspectives, which increases the credibility and meaningfulness of the research findings.

The research helps to advance knowledge on digital activism and human rights in the developing world, especially where traditional media are limited or misinform the dissemination of credible sources. It provides a platform for future research on digital governance, freedom of expression, and civic agency in South Asia.

Finally, the findings and recommendations from this study can serve useful purposes for policymakers and advocacy organizations in developing more effective digital strategies, enacting effective legal protections, and designing public awareness campaigns that seek to enhance human rights in places such as Pakistan, and reinforces the potential of social media to serve as leverage for legal and social change, rather than just as a communication tool.

Literature Review

Pakistan's political situation remains tenuous. There are many governance problems, military coups, exits from the country, a rise in extremism, and attempts to suppress dissent that fertile ground for the occurrence of digital authoritarianism that has evolved over the past two decades. The same tactics used in traditional media to monitor, silence the critics, and control the narrative around the story of the day, are now available in the digital space.

The internet has changed how individuals collect and disseminate information. Of course, the internet's connectivity brings many questions around control, governance and surveillance in cyberspace.



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Regulatory approaches to internet usage differ across the globe. In India, for example, an internet blackout has occasionally been used to suppress protest actions resulting in negative criticism from human rights advocacy groups. China's strong arm of digital censorship allows the government to create public opinion and prevent revolt. In fact, even in democracies, surveillance has become a hot topic issue that leads to political arguments on the fine line between civil liberties and security. It's important to have a demographic that is known to access the internet in Pakistan to see how the changes in the digital era have an effect on the issues about the internet. The number of Pakistanis online is still limited, as the internet penetration rate of the country has increased from 6.3 percent in 2005 to 36 percent in 2023. Nevertheless, it is found that two thirds of this Asian country is not connected to the internet. Young people, a demographic that almost 64% of the nation are less than 30 hundred years, appear to be driving online interaction. Although more and more people in Pakistan are able to use the internet, there is an increasing focus on tightening select digital rules across the state.

Ideological perspectives of religion and military fuel how governance is conducted in Pakistan about digital issues. The most common justification for censoring the internet that officials and rights activists often criticize is an Islamic basis. Notably, the unreserved access to platforms such as Wikipedia, YouTube, and Facebook has previously been revoked due to suspected or confirmed blasphemous or obscene content. Political elite such as former Prime Minister Imran Khan have passionately confirmed that regulating the internet is necessary to confer respect to morality. Nationalism, a religious strategy, and military perspectives converge in resistance to the use of surveillance and numeric to limit public speak. For example, the Inter-Services Public Relations is a military media wing. The ISPR has openly mentioned that using surveillance, moderation, and censorship to protect Islamic values is their key agenda because it is part of a larger military agenda that resists a fifth generation attack, which includes foreign stresses. Therefore, the punitive digital environment gives priority to journalists, politicians, and activist capture and assassination priority. In 2016, Pakistan established its first digital space management policy, the Prevention of Electronic Crime Act. Before this, Pakistan did not have any law to combat acts such as hacking, identity theft, cyber terrorism, and hate speech. Given the overall security context at the time of real-time terrorism, PECA was deployed and framed as a part of national security, passed by the Pakistani legislature with unmatched swiftness. While intended as a negative measure, bordering on protective measures, the law has scrutinized for its vague definitions and use as a means of political repression and cessation of dissent toward the state directly or indirectly.

The most controversial part of the law is Section 37, which allows the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) to block or remove online content without clarifying the potential meaningfulness of harmful content, instead it mainly delves into vague threats such as Vulgarity or corruption of the youth, signing out oppressive definition even in the form of selective censorship. The law obliges that social media corporations satisfy any takedown request by the PTA within a period of twenty four hours; and maintain a physical presence in Pakistan, significantly empowering the state against digital platforms.



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PECA also empowered FIA with broader operational authorities providing considerable surveillance resources and the ability to seize electronic devices. Although it is claimed that these measures are effectively aiding investigations of cybercrime and extremism, critics point out the complete lack of accountability and oversight these measures supposedly impose. For instance, in 2018 the PTA made a deep packet inspection purchase from foreign vendors to advance its oversight systems, which intelligence services like ISI and for which the FIA routinely use, in order to comply with their mandated obligations for monitoring internet traffic and tracking the digital legacies of persons they identify as threats to the state.

In conjunction with legal regimes, the state has also sought access national databases to help bolster its surveillance plate. The National Database and Registration Authority NADRA is known widely for its duties concerning the identity of citizens. However, it is claimed, NADRA may have had to share biometric information with foreign intelligence agencies when it cooperated in programs concerning anti-terrorism. Same can be said for Pakistan's 'safe city' projects where the Pakistani apparatus partnered with Chinese firms to develop monitoring capabilities utilizing facial recognition, tracking vehicles, and even drone footage; ultimately integrating them into monitoring real time to identify and surveil citizens while repressing their urban security threats.

While they are framed as public safety measures, these measures have raised questions over their efficacy. After huge investments in surveillance technology and other security measures, major urban centers such as Islamabad and Lahore have continuing high crime rates. Critics argue that these types of technologies are being repurposed to monitor and repress political opposition and uncontrollable civilian dissent, as opposed to modifying security outcomes.

Alongside legal reform, the Pakistani state has also used more regular internet shutdowns in an effort to control discourse. Beginning in approximately 2010, when either political protests, religious observances, or state of security is to be determined present, the PTA is responsible for limiting access to internet and broadband services. Though framed as public order maintenance or terrorism abatement, such occurrences are most often recognized as being carefully planned appropriations to repress political opposition or infringe upon public gatherings? As well, and with almost sequential regularity, all governments of varying political affiliations have recently shutdown internet services to hinder political opposition parties, as well as their placements of only supporters at mobility sites.

Banning websites and other digital platforms in the current political context in Pakistan is another means of contextualizing digital authoritarianism. Censorship is often enacted as religiously or morally driven concerns, based in this case on the Islamic paradigm. For example, YouTube was banned from 2012-2016 because of the practical management of politically and religiously cognizant material. TikTok has also received temporary bans, on multiple occasions, for having immoral content. Even Twitter and Wikipedia have faced intermittent restrictions and bans for allegedly spreading blasphemous or anti-state material. These interference measures illustrate a broader state-strategy to control the digital narrative. One especially prominent instance occurred in 2021 during the Asma Jahangir Conference when former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, from his exile, attempted to address the audience via video link. The session



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faced internet shutdowns in what many say is a targeted blackout so that he could not denounce the government and military establishment. Also, as Internet services were suspended for a few days in May 2023 across the big urban centers following the arrest of Imran Khan, effectively choking on digital mobilization and communication, the situation was not unlike earlier ones.

Simultaneously, the surveillance of online activities ramped up. A law was passed in 2021 offending any remark against the military, all these years amid increasing digital monitoring of the populace. Notably, recordings from surveillance cameras have been introduced as evidence not only in investigations of vandalism but also to identify, prosecute, and arrest peaceful demonstrators.

The erosion of basic civil liberties in Pakistan since independence as a result of the heavy emphasis on national security is said to be in the name of counter terrorism. Invasive monitoring, unauthorized sharing of information, and non-applicability of personal data protection have become commonplace. Intelligence agencies have large social media monitoring programs, and facial recognition systems are being used increasingly for the tracking of people who attend public protests. Such trends have caused civil society deep concern, which has warned that such tools are being used less for public safety and more for political control. As the world moves toward smart cities with an emphasis on innovation and convenience, this emphasis is glaringly absent from Pakistan's narrow implementation of smart and safe city technologies, which focus on surveillance. With the Chinese companies' help, cities such as Lahore and Islamabad have been equipped with thousands of cameras, facial recognition systems, and central data systems. However, their usage has done little to prove the reduction of crime rates, but instead, alarmed people concerning privacy violations and the prospect of political misuse.

Pakistan's smart city programs, especially the ones funded in collaboration with China, have lauded more for their extensive surveillance capabilities than for any urban uplift. For example, in the Punjab Safe Cities Authority (PSCA) project in Lahore, thousands of cameras positioned across the city, supported by AI based monitoring tools and data centers. Following suit, Islamabad is now equipped with similar systems, with the involvement of Chinese tech giant Huawei in implementing the technology. While these systems claim to have introduced innovations in urban safety and emergency management, there is still little evidence to support their efficacy.

The data collected through these smart city systems is quite comprehensive, covering facial recognition scans, vehicle registration details, and real-time location tracking. However, the primal lack of sound data protection laws has made such data susceptible to misuse and breach. Cases of leakage of sensitive CCTV footage along with information pertaining to the profile of citizens have been recorded in the past, raising concerns over accountability in the implementation of these surveillance programs.

Huawei, the main tech provider for Pakistan's safe cities, has touted its systems as powerful tools for reducing crime and improving emergency responses. However, independent assessments, like those from the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), have questioned these assertions, finding little to no evidence that crime has actually decreased in areas where these systems are in place. Detractors argue that the true purpose of this infrastructure is to keep tabs on political opponents, activists, and journalists, all



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under the guise of national security. While official statements emphasize counterterrorism and public safety, technologies like facial recognition and digital surveillance are increasingly being used to stifle dissent. People identified at protests or those who express criticism online have faced tracking and detention. These actions raise significant concerns about the potential misuse of technology in a nation already struggling with severe political divides and a fragile democracy.

In summery from the point of digital governance trajectory, Pakistan displays a downward trend in promoting digital proficiency for digital governance in the country. Authoritarian control. However, laws such as PECA and projects such as these safe cities cannot be warranted in the umbrella of security and development, they often serve as tools of repression and devices for suppressing protest and 204 Rio de Janeiro and the limits of the developmental state perpetrators, and a literal alibi for violent behavior. Consolidating state power. In the absence of robust institutions, open accountability. In Pakistan If we do not ensure digital inclusion, and simultaneously impose checks, balances and ensuring protections for civil liberties, the digital space in Pakistan is at the risk of just another end frontier for repression. The role of civil society civil society has a vital role to play in pushing for more balanced progress. Through public information activities, such as legal and public awareness campaigns, as well as to international advocacy of making sure that Pakistan's digital evolution does not come at the expense of basic human rights.

Research Design

This study utilized quantitatively based research design in seeking to understand the role of social media in facilitating human rights in Pakistan, specifically in relation to legal reforms and digital activism. The use of quantitative research is appropriate for this study as it establishes research questions or hypotheses that can be measured and analyzed statistically, offering objectivity.

Survey research provided a means to collect primary data from a heterogeneous sample including social media activists, practitioners such as lawyers, human rights defenders, victims of human rights abuses, and lawmakers. A structured questionnaire is developed incorporating both closed and Likert-Scale question types to elicit the participant's perceptions, experience, and evaluation of the role social media plays in increased awareness for human rights and legal reform. The target participant population for the study included individuals engaged in digital human rights activism or affected by it.

Following a purposive sampling strategy, 175 respondents are drawn to obtain a mix of relevant people. This sampling approach is employed as it targets a sample with experience in, or influence on, digital human rights activism, where even a proportion represented could provide contextual meaning. The data that is collected is analyzed by way of descriptive statistics, and the findings were presented in pie chart forms to depict the distribution of opinions and trends regarding different stakeholder groups. The design allowed for two hypotheses tested concerning the role of social media in raising awareness and influencing legal changes.

In conclusion, the research design enables systematic collection, data analysis and interpretive conclusions validly about the role of social media as an advocacy tool for human rights promotion and policy influence in Pakistan.



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Research Methodology

This section provides an overview of the systematic procedures and processes used in the study, presenting how we collected, analyzed, and interpreted data about social media's role in promoting human rights and influencing resorted laws in Pakistan.

1. Research Approach

The study adopts a quantitative research approach due to the need for statistical data and objective analysis. This research approach can measure variables relating to awareness, activism, influence, and awareness of social media's role in promoting human rights.

2. Research Method

The research employs the survey method, which is ideal for gathering data from a large number of individuals in a limited period. In-depth surveys are an effective way of gathering evidence and an appropriate way of detecting patterns, behavior and opinion, especially when trying to quantify traditional media stakeholder perceptions and then hypotheses.

3. Population and sampling

Target Population: The population, above all, consists of people who are directly engaged in or directly affected by digital human rights activism in Pakistan. This means:

- Social Media Activists
- Human Rights Defenders
- Victims of Human Rights Abuse
- Lawyers
- Lawmakers and Policymakers

Sampling Technique: The non-probability purposive sampling technique is applied in the study as selective sampling of individuals based on having the appropriate knowledge or experience about the subject.

Sample Size: 175 individuals were purposively selected. This sample is deemed appropriate for quantitative analysis and provides a broad range of perspectives throughout diverse sectors who are concerned about human rights.

4. Data Collection Instrument

The primary data collection tool is a structured questionnaire.

The questionnaire contained

- Closed-ended questions, that enable to answer easily,
- Likert scale items, to measure the strength of opinion from strongly agree to strongly disagree.
- The questionnaire is pilot tested for applicability, relevance and reliability.

5. Data Collection Procedure

- Data are collected online and in person distribution of the online questionnaire depending on access and preference of respondents
- Each participant had a chance to give informed consent and confidentiality maintained.



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6. Variables

Independent variable regarding social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.)

Dependent Variables:

- Level of awareness of human rights issue
- Engagement with digital activists
- Impact on law reform
- Perceived success based on follow up of online campaign

7. Data Analysis Techniques

Data Access and Use

- Data is coded, and entered into SPSS (or Excel).
- Frequencies and percentages are completed for descriptive statistics.
- Pie charts are used to depict the distributions of responses, and the patterns based on demographics and profession.
- Inferential analyses are performed where appropriate to all test hypotheses in research regarding effectiveness of social media.

8. Validity and Reliability

- Content validity is confirmed through consultation from an expert in methodology where the instrument was administered
- A pilot study is completed to examine reliability and internal consistency of the instrument.
- The instrument is amended accordingly from the feedback.

9. Ethical Considerations

- Participation is voluntary with informed consent
- All anonymity and confidentiality are maintained.
- Ethical clearance obtained.

This methodology for research provides a sustainable and replicable methodology to find out how social media is transforming human rights activism and legal changes in Pakistan.

Data Analysis

Furthermore, data from the structured questionnaire are systematically analyzed through quantitative statistical methodologies in order to assess the effects of social media in facilitating human rights, as well as impacting legal reforms in Pakistan. The data are analyzed based on the perceptions of stakeholders, objectively and meaningfully interpreting how social media plays a role in human rights in Pakistan and hypothesizing about how this might impact change.

1. Data Preparation and Coding

Once completion of data collection from 175 participants, all responses are reviewed, coded and entered into the SPSS software program for statistical analysis. Each questionnaire item is given a numerical code for the fast calculation of frequencies and percentages.



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2. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics to summarize and describe basic features of the dataset are utilized in this study. The descriptive analysis in the study included:

- Frequencies (The number of times a response is provided)
- Percentages (the proportion of responses)
- Mean (average score of Likert-type items in the questionnaire)

Descriptive statistics allowed for a straightforward understanding of the demographic characteristics of the respondents and how they felt about the key variables in the study.

3. Visual Representations

In order to increase clarity and understanding, the results are presented through pie chart representations to show:

- Respondents by profession (activists, lawyers, victims, etc.)
- Levels of agreement that social media is effective in raising awareness
- Social media effect for policy or law reform
- Censorship and misrepresentation online
- Frequency of digital activism

These images provided a more accessible way to compare trends and the respondents' responses.

4. Hypothesis Testing

Two hypotheses is tested using descriptive responses and cross tabulation to identify trends:

- H1: Social media has a significant impact on raising awareness about human rights in Pakistan.
- H2: Digital activism on social media contributes to law reform in Pakistan relating to human rights.

Although inferential tests such as chi-square or t-test were not the objectives because of the descriptive nature of the study, the frequency trends and general patterns in the responses provide supporting evidence for both hypotheses.

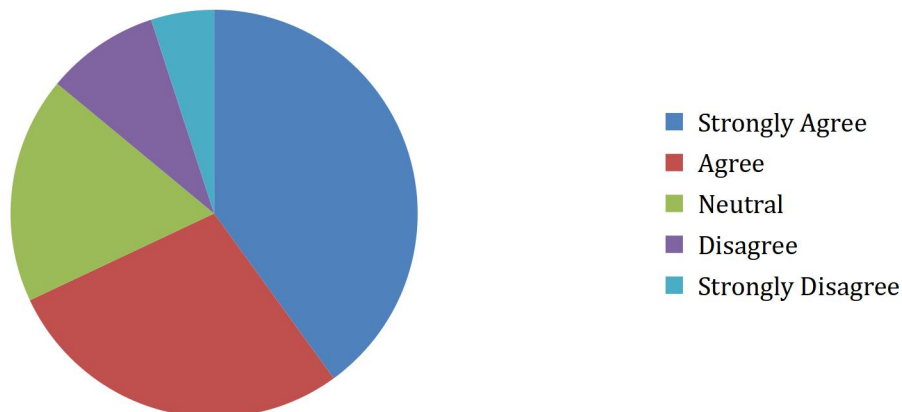
5. Key Findings from Data Analysis

Respondents overwhelmingly agreed and strongly agreed (56% and 43% respectively) that social media increased the visibility and awareness of human rights issues. This is particularly true with respect to issues such as gender based violence and reports of enforced disappearances.

- As noted by many respondents, digital campaigns and movements are instrumental in influencing and initiating legal conversations and victories. The emergence of online movements such as #JusticeForZainab and #AuratMarch permits the potential of shared actions and embodiment of similar aims.
- Several respondents identified online censorship and misinformation as a problem of equal concern to issues of digital.
- Stakeholders appeared to have moderately convergent views on the need within our collective umbrella for legal protections for digital activists, while preserving accountability for digital space for some capacity of regulations for online spaces to prevent abuses without limiting freedom of expression.

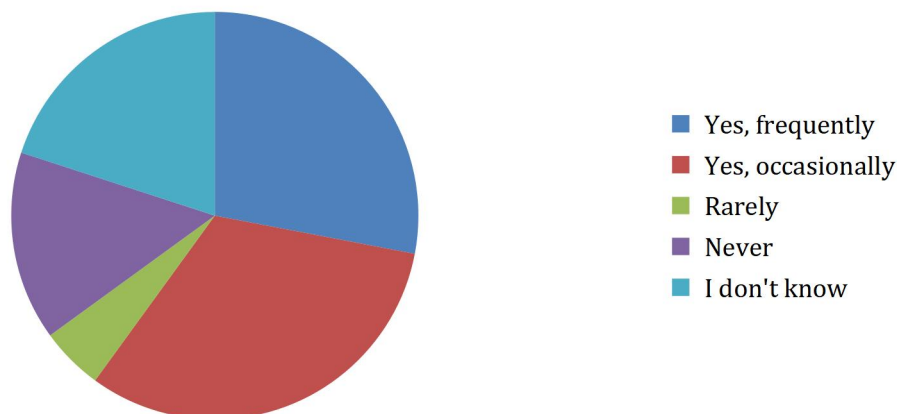


**1. To what extent do you agree with the statement:
“Social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook,
Instagram) have helped increase public awareness
of human rights issues in Pakistan”?**



Discussion: The study reveals that the respondents are strongly agreed and agreed on the statement issued in questionnaire that social media platforms like twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have helped increase public awareness of human rights issues in Pakistan, while rest of the respondents were found neutral, disagreed, and strongly disagreed.

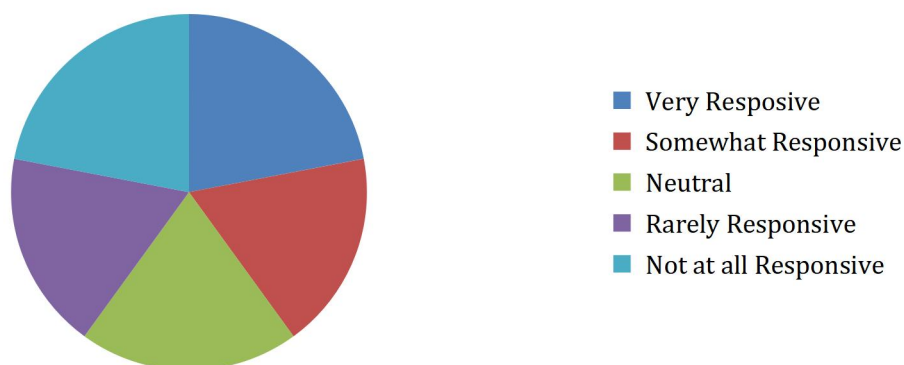
**2. Have you observed any direct or indirect legal
reforms in Pakistan that were influenced by social
media campaigns (e.g., #JusticeForZainab,
#AuratMarch)?**



Discussion: The study reveals that respondents had observed both direct and indirect legal reforms in Pakistan that were influenced by social media campaigns like Zainab Murder Case viral/trended with hashtag #JusticeForZainab, similarly in #AuratMarch

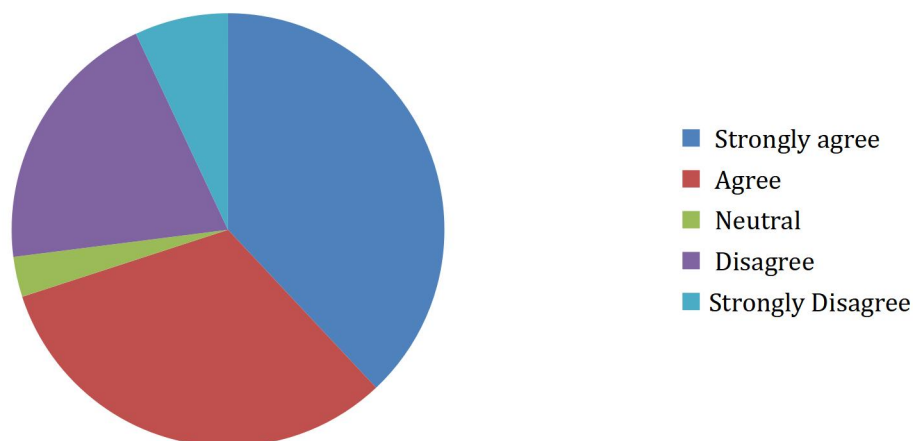


3. In your opinion, how responsive are lawmakers or policymakers to issues raised through digital activism on social media?



Discussion: A balanced response is concluded from the analysis of collected data i.e., in feedback to how responsive are lawmakers or policymakers to issues raised through digital activism on social media respondents answered in a balanced manner of very responsive, somewhat responsive, neutral, rarely responsive, and not at all.

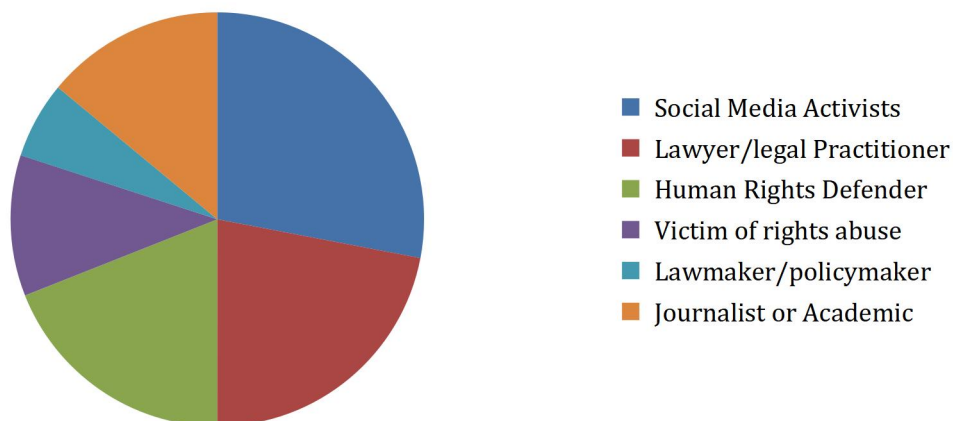
4. Do you believe social media provides a more inclusive platform for marginalized groups (e.g., women, minorities, victims) to voice their concerns compared to traditional media?



Discussion: Sample from Population of the study strongly agree, agree, and believe that social media provides a more inclusive platform for marginalized groups eg., women, minorities, and victims to voice their concerns compared to traditional media while a small number of respondents strongly disagree this statement and some of the respondent were found neutral in response to this question.

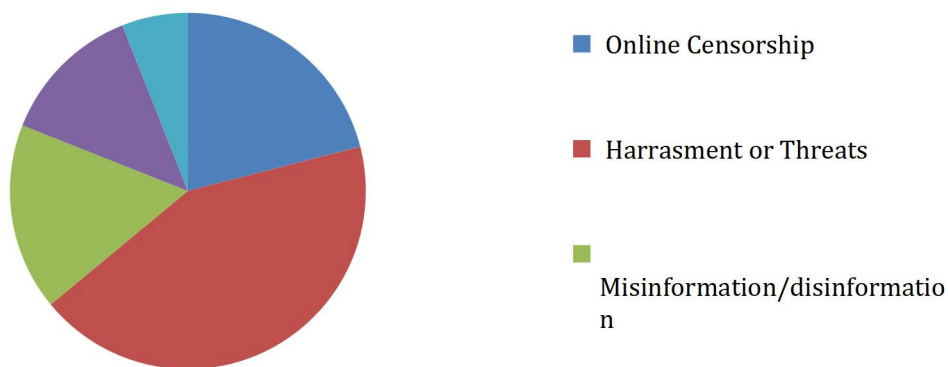


5. What is your professional or social role in relation to human rights advocacy?



Discussion: The demographics of respondents data shows that it includes the majority of social media activists, lawyers, human rights defenders, victim of rights abuse, lawmaker/policy maker, and journalists or academic.

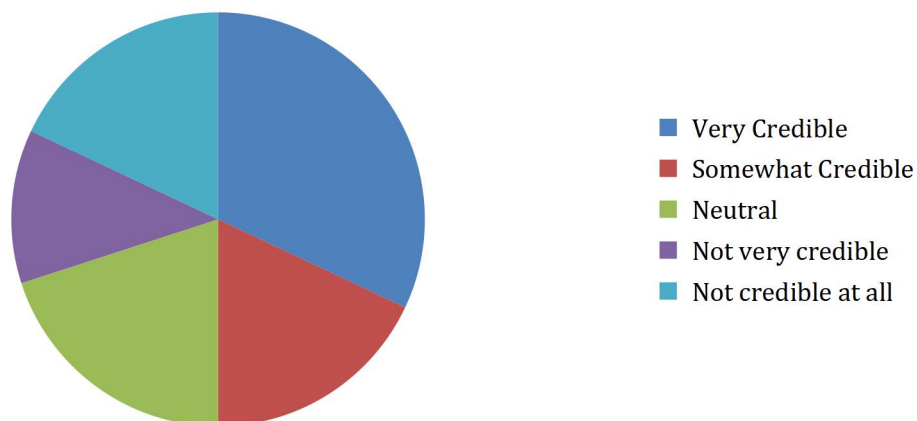
6. Which of the following challenges have you personally encountered or observed in online human rights activism?



Discussion: Respondents of the study mentioned in chart 5th personally encountered the following threats in online human rights activism i.e., harassment at peak, online censorship secondly, and other legal threats.

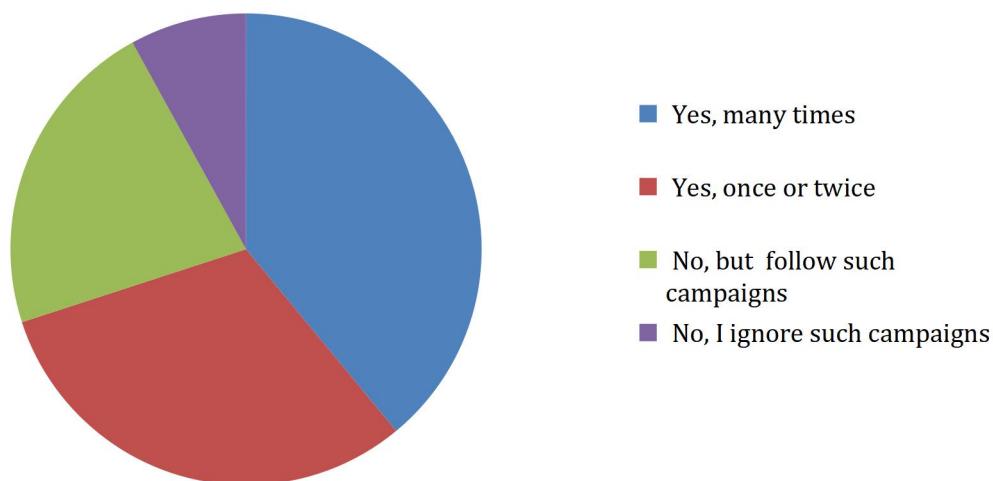


7. How credible do you consider human rights campaigns launched on social media in Pakistan?



Discussion: The study find out that human rights campaigns launched on social media in Pakistan are credible mostly while in some cases they are found to be not credible at all.

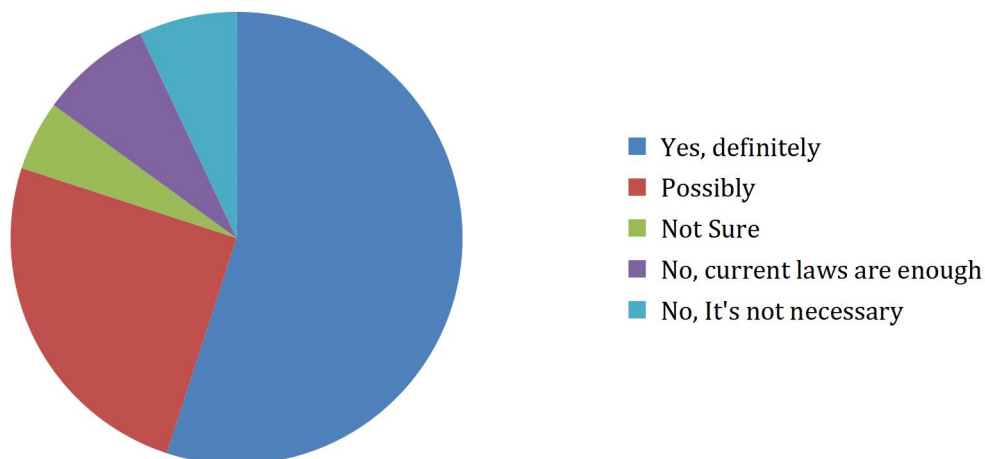
8. Have you ever changed your opinion or taken action (e.g., petition signing, protest participation, donations) based on a human rights campaign you saw on social media?



Discussion: Many times lawyers, journalists, human rights activists, and academic had changed their opinion or taken action i.e., petition signing, protest participation, donations based on a human rights campaigns you saw on social media.

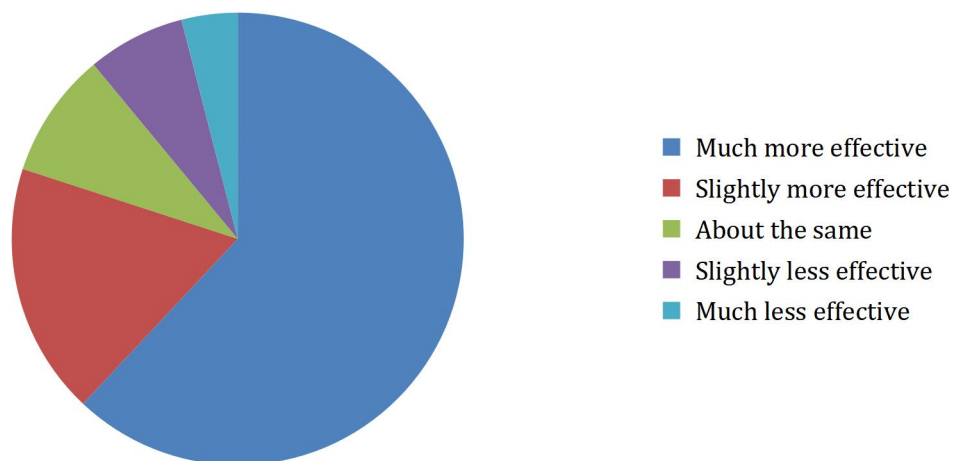


9. Do you believe there is a need for stronger legal protections for individuals involved in online human rights advocacy in Pakistan?



Discussion: Lawyers, Journalists, and Human Rights activists believe that there is a need for stronger legal protection for individuals involved in online human rights advocacy in Pakistan.

10. Compared to traditional media, how effective do you find social media in initiating real social or legal change regarding human rights?



Discussion: The study reveals from the analysis of the collected data that in comparison to traditional media social media is much more effective in initiating real social or legal change regarding human rights.

Findings

Social Media with Broad Based Audience for Public Awareness

Activists, victims, and allies are utilizing social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook and Instagram to bring awareness to human rights issues in contexts where mainstream media is limited or silent.



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Amplification of Marginalized Voices.

In the majority, respondents expressed that social media provides an opportunity for marginalized people (e.g. people from a gender minority, people from a racial minority or victims of violence) to obtain visibility for their issues, experiences, and to express themselves.

Public Mobilization and Pressure

Online campaigns have shown an ability to mobilize public opinion and exert pressure on legislators, the judiciary, and authorities to act or respond to human rights violations.

Potential to Impact Legal Reform

The research showed that digital activism is assisted in the initiation of, or acceleration of discussions around, legal reforms particularly where they concern high profile incidents of gender based violence and child protection.

General Agreement on the Benefits of Social Media

A range of stakeholders, including lawyers, activists, and policymakers, agree on the benefits of social media to promote human rights and legal justice although there were concerns about abuse of the platform.

Challenges Identified

The reported challenges were most commonly:

- Online censorship and removal of content
- Disinformation or fake news
- Low levels of digital literacy, in particular but not only in rural areas
- Harassment of activists and abuse online





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Conclusions

- Social media has developed into a powerful alternative to traditional media in Pakistan, providing a useful tool for human rights advocacy.
- Digital activists have the potential to influence discourse and reforms around legal issues, however, there is often success at the institutional level which is commonly linked to public interest and institutional responsiveness.
- While there are clearly positive gains, there is a need to deal with more structural challenges such as censorship, disinformation and lack of protection in the digital sphere, in order to enhance the role of social media for granting human rights.

Recommendations

1. Build Judicial Protections for Advocates

Build a clearer and more nuanced legislative framework and process to better protect online human rights defenders or advocates, from harassment, cyber-bullying, or government sponsored censorship.

2. Foster Digital Literacy

Build campaigns and user literacy to foster capacity building, as a country, to positively, safely, responsibly, and informed use of social media, for advocacy.

3. Develop Legislative Frameworks

Research and develop efficient, effective, equitable, transparent content regulation (that is accountable and has the appropriate structure that is aligned with a truthful framework).

4. Promote Multi-Stakeholder Cooperation

Build partnership collaborations with civil society organizations, collegial media users, digital platforms, professional advocates, and policy makers, working together with a shared sense of proactive digital advocacy.

5. Empower Needs Based Research and Monitoring's

Promote and support the development and implementation of current and ongoing needs-based and Oxford University type studies to review social media as a human rights strategy, and analyze social media trends as they relate to future recommendations for reform in Human Rights Law.



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