ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PML-N AND PTI SOCIAL MEDIA HANDLES FOR STRENGTHENING LEADERSHIP IMAGE AMONG FOLLOWERS

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Abstract
This study examines the comparative role of social media in leadership image management by Pakistan's two major political parties, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). As digital platforms have become central to political communication, parties increasingly rely on social media to shape public perception, strengthen leadership branding, and engage supporters. Despite the growing importance of these platforms, limited research has explored how PTI and PML-N differ in their leadership image management strategies and how these strategies influence audience engagement and loyalty. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected from 51 social media users through a structured questionnaire employing a Likert scale. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS through descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis to examine the relationships among social media strategy, follower engagement, and audience loyalty. The findings reveal that both political parties effectively use social media to strengthen their leadership image and maintain public engagement. While PTI is perceived as adopting a more dynamic, emotionally driven, and crisis-oriented communication style, PML-N emphasizes governance, policy achievements, and political stability through a more structured approach. The results indicate moderate positive relationships between the social media strategies of both parties and follower engagement, whereas the relationship between social media use and audience loyalty is positive but comparatively weak. These findings suggest that although digital communication significantly contributes to leadership image management, long-term political loyalty is also shaped by broader political, social, and governance factors. The study contributes to the literature on political communication by providing a comparative understanding of leadership image management through social media in Pakistan and offers practical insights for political strategists and communication scholars.

Keywords: Social Media Strategy; Leadership Image Management; Political Communication; PTI and PML-N; Audience Engagement

1. Introduction

The rapid evolution of social media has significantly transformed political communication globally, enabling political parties to engage directly with their supporters. In Pakistan, social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram have become crucial tools for political parties. By leveraging these platforms, parties seek to build a strong digital presence, influence voter sentiments, and manage their leaders' public image strategically. Social media's role in shaping political narratives is particularly crucial in countries like Pakistan, where digital platforms serve as a primary means of communication for younger demographics (Ali, 2023). Both PTI and PML-N have capitalized on these platforms to foster engagement, drive political agendas, and respond to crises, thereby shaping the public's perception of their leadership.

Social media has transformed the political environment in the last ten years, enabling political parties and politicians to engage their constituents directly (Chadwick, 2017). Contrary to the traditional media, which is commonly under state regulation or control, social media websites like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter have politicized political discourse by providing real-time engagement between the public and political actors (Enli, 2017). In Pakistan, where political debate has traditionally been controlled by mainstream

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CJSSR
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Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

media, social media has allowed political parties to circumvent mainstream gatekeepers, communicating directly with their supporters (Ali, 2021).

Political communication in Pakistan was revolutionized with the 2013 elections, wherein the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) successfully used social media to mobilize young people and first-time voters (Akhtar, 2020). Social media has since then become a key weapon for Pakistani political parties, especially PTI and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), to create public opinion, handle crises, and decide elections (Khan, 2022). Social media has emerged as a war zone where, apart from the dissemination of policies, political parties also control the image of their leadership that significantly influences the perception of voters (Haider & Khan, 2023).

1.1 Social Media as a Tool for Political Image Management

Political image management entails the systematic construction of the public image of a leader so that it complies with what their supporters wish for and aspire to (Azeem & Haider, 2021). Political parties have social media platforms where they can use live, interactive communications to reinforce beneficial images of leaders while combating unflattering depictions (Cheng, 2020). This corresponds to the agenda-setting theory, that media not just affects what people think about, but also impacts how they frame major issues (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

For Pakistan, PTI and PML-N have employed platforms such as Twitter and Facebook to manage the narrative around their leadership. Such tactics involve targeted messaging, content posting, and using social media influencers to increase the visibility and popularity of party leaders (Naveed, 2022). This enables parties to dynamically manage their image, reacting quickly to crises or negative reporting in mainstream media (Iqbal & Ahmed, 2023).

1.2 Social Media as a Tool for Political Image Management

PTI, under the leadership of Imran Khan, has been a frontrunner in using social media to galvanize support, especially among younger demographics. With a well-coordinated digital strategy, PTI's social media posts often emphasize themes of justice, anti-corruption, and nationalism (Rehman, 2022). The party leverages Facebook and Twitter to host live sessions, share campaign updates, and respond to allegations swiftly, thereby maintaining a strong digital presence (Ashraf, 2023).

Conversely, PML-N, historically dependent on traditional media, has evolved to fit the social media environment by expanding its online activity. The party emphasizes showcasing development initiatives and governance successes, leveraging platforms such as YouTube and Instagram to share visual content that resonates with urban voters (Mahmood & Rizwan, 2023). The rivalry between PTI and PML-N online mirrors larger trends in political communication, where social media is an important instrument for political branding and voter mobilization (Shafiq, 2022).

1.3 The Role of Social Media in Shaping Public Perception and Political Engagement

Social media sites have emerged as strong instruments for influencing public opinion about political leaders and their policies. The interactive nature of sites such as Twitter and Facebook enables political parties to interact directly with the electorate, creating a feeling of belonging and responsiveness (Khan, 2022). Research indicates that use of social media has a dramatic effect on the level of participation among voters because users are most likely to participate in political events online, e.g., to share posts, comment, or join virtual town halls (Ali, 2023).

Studies have also indicated that social media can also further echo chambers, in which users are only shown to a great extent content reflecting their previous beliefs, further polarizing political discourse (Zain, 2021). This trend can be witnessed in Pakistan, as PTI and PML-N supporters tend to exchange vicious arguments online, which also indicate the highly polarized nature of Pakistani politics (Ahmed & Qureshi, 2023).

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1.4 Problem Statement

Social Media's growing influence on Politics in Pakistan provides Political Parties with the means to directly cultivate narratives and manage the Public Relations of their Political Leadership. Two major Political Parties of Pakistan, namely Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), have diversified their Social Media offerings to grow and manage their Support Base and Public Opinion. Current research/practice has focused on the Digital Campaigns of PTI and PML-N from the lenses of Political/Commercial Advertising, Elections Campaigns, Populism, Messaging, and Engagement of the Audience. These works have analyzed the disparate frameworks of Communication, and the respective efficacies of Online Campaigns; most have emphasized the Social Media Campaigns in terms of their outcomes and communication characteristics, and have neglected the aspect of Leadership Image Management. The scope of analysis has been further hampered due to the limited research in comparing the PML-N and PTI Social Media Campaigns and Engagement Strategies aimed at Leadership Image Management, as well as the Loyalty and Perception of the Audience. A lack unified approach to this research has left the Digital Politics of Pakistan in the Global Context behind in the Social Media Strategies of Leadership Image Management. Thus, this research aims to view the PTI and PML-N Social Media Strategies aimed at Leadership Image Management, Engagement Strategies, Loyalty and Perception of the Audience.

1.5 Rationale of study

In a time when social media has emerged as a key instrument for political participation, it is important to know how political parties strategically utilize these platforms to enhance their leadership image. This study offers a comparative study of the social media strategies of Pakistan's two leading political parties, PTI and PML-N, to influence public opinion and consolidate their leadership narratives. Through their online communication behaviors, this research adds to the developing conversation of political communication, specifically in the agenda-setting and image management realms in Pakistani politics. In contrast to existing studies that have broadly addressed social media as a vehicle in promoting political discourse, this research provides a detailed comparative analysis of how political parties dynamically build and maintain leadership images among fans. This book improves the knowledge of digital political branding and offers insights into the influence mechanisms, engagement, and persuasion in party-driven online environments. The findings have practical implications for political communication strategies, equipping political actors, analysts, and scholars with knowledge to navigate and optimize leadership messaging in the digital landscape.

1.6 Objectives of the study

Following are some objectives of study:

- To analyze the social media strategies employed by PTI and PML-N for managing their leadership image.
- To identify the similarities and differences in social media engagement tactics used by both parties.
- To assess the impact of these strategies on followers' loyalty and perception.

1.7 Hypotheses

The hypotheses are given below:

- H1: PTI's social media strategy is more effective in engaging followers compared to PML-N.
- H2: There are significant differences in the social media tactics employed by PTI and PML-N in managing leadership image.
- H3: Effective use of social by political parties positively influences followers' loyalty and perception.

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1.8 Research questions

The research questions for this study are given below:

- What are the primary social media strategies used by PTI and PML-N to manage their leadership image?
- What differences exist in the engagement tactics of PTI and PML-N on social media platforms?
- How do these social media strategies impact followers' loyalty and perception of political leaders?

2. Literature Review

Akram, Arshad, and Naseem (2014) examine the use of social media by PTI and TLP, mainly regarding their use of religion in political messaging. They reveal the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party utilizes religious messaging with the intent of reaching and consolidating the voting base of the religious and conservative citizens of Pakistan. This contrasts the Pakistan Muslim league-Nawaz party, which uses a neutral messaging strategy.

Ali (2023) investigates the role social media, especially Facebook and Twitter, play in increasing political engagement among the citizens of Pakistan. The study finds social media activities facilitate the fulfillment of the active role of citizens. This is especially the case among the youth given the political engagement activities of the PTI.

Ali, Butt, and Iftikhar (2022) discussed the Twitter engagement activities of PTI and PML-N after the Panama Papers leak and conclude that PTI gained substantive engagement from the public for primary engagement, whereas PML-N's engagement was tardy and traditional.

Andleeb (2023) utilized content analysis to conclude that emotionally charged posts by PTI yield a significantly greater engagement than the policy-based posts of PML-N. Emotional content attracts engagement.

Awan (2023) examines the use of social media by the Pakistan political party contestants, mainly PTI and PML-N, to articulate the party's political message. The study finds the distributed design of PTI's social media structure empowers members to post politically relevant content, making PTI's content more viral.

Aziz, Parveen, and Qasim (2021) investigated the effects of election marketing on potential voters within the Pakistani electorate and the approaches used by PTI, PML-N, and PPP. They assert that PTI's unrelenting and combative social media marketing that posts about the rival parties being corrupt is more likely to change voter opinions than the more traditional social media posts used by PML-N. They also suggest that PTI countered the PML-N social media posts and voted using anti-corruption focused posts and social media that appealed directly at potential voters. Conversely, the more highly traditional posts of PML-N were aimed at their supporters alone and did not seek to win voters away from PTI.

According to Chaudhary, Ghani, and Hussain (2021), PML-N employed few social media marketing tools to engage the voters of Punjab during the 2018 elections and therefore lost out on marketing opportunities. Social media marketing was a vital tool PTI used to win the elections.

Faiz (2022) focused on the populist politics of Imran Khan, within the context of PTI's political campaigns. He described PTI’s success in branding itself as a reforming, and therefore, more modern political party, in contrast to PML-N, who offer politics of a more traditional, closed and dynastic succession which fails to resonate with youth. He emphasized PTI’s media outreach and populist stance in portraying PTI as a reforming and modern political party, in contrast to PML-N, who offer more closed and traditional politics.

Using Goffman's (1959) presentation the self as a model, PTI and PML-N utilize social media to construct their public persona. Both parties prefer selective representation. Rather

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than focusing on the traits or qualities of their leaders most valued by the public, such as integrity and efficiency, they prefer to focus on traits that represent the values and ethics of their members.

According to the research of Haq & Din (2022), social media is a critical tool in the development of hate speech, especially as a means for political expression. They argue that both PTI and PML-N embrace hate speech, but that the more advanced method of PTI is more sharply polarizing, with PML-N employing a traditional method.

Using Critical Discourse Analysis (2024), Haroon & Imran, focused on the social media specifically of PTI and PML-N in the 2018 elections and found that PTI, using a quick and proactive method, focused on corruption and therefore spoke to the youth. PML-N used traditional methods and therefore lacked a quick and proactive method. PTI's quick and proactive method positively represented the party and corruption and therefore focused on the public's pressing concerns.

In examining PTI's populist nature in their online support, Hina & Sohail (2022), explain that PTI's support of the transformation of Pakistan represents a shift from the PML-N's support of a dynasty, and thus, is more appealing to the supporters of the party.

Hussain & Sajid (2018) traced how social media helped politically mobilize Pakistan's youth during the 2013 elections. Their results show that the PTI successfully used Twitter and Facebook to dominate online discourse and influenced the youth vote noticeably more than the PML-N did.

Lashari, Bhand, & Katohar (2024) studied PTI's use of fake news on Twitter during the non-confidence movement, where PTI's use of Twitter to send quick, emotionally charged updates in real time was contrasted with the more controlled and slow updates used by PML-N, resulting in poor engagement with PML-N's updates.

Muzaffar, Yaseen, & Safdar (2020) claimed that PTI's digital outreach was instrumental in mobilizing new voters in the 2018 elections, an effort that was largely absent in the PML-N campaign.

Naqvi (2024) studied how social media was used by PML-N to frame the return of Nawaz Sharif as leader. The study contrasts PTI's use of Interactive Media news versus the more top-down communication used by PML-N, and how PTI's use of bottom-up strategies extends reach and influence among the youth.

Qamar, Adnan, & Malik (2022) stated that, while PML-N's use of Twitter is largely for communicating policies, PTI's use of Twitter is for real time crisis management. This leads to a large difference in engagement, with PTI's use of Twitter more engaging and PML-N's use of Twitter more passive and tardy.

Rahman & Shurong (2024) interpreted the social media-centric agenda-setting techniques of PTI. This exhibits that PTI uses themes surrounding corruption to monopolize the virtual agenda so that opposing parties such as PML-N are forced to reply to the accusations made against them and are denied the opportunity to propagate their own agenda. The study confirmed that PTI monopolizes social media to set the public agenda around issues of anti-corruption, thus, making PML-N defensive. PTI leads social media agenda-setting, altering the public discourse online.

According to Riaz & Shah (2020), the PTI social media campaign was more successful in soliciting voter participation for the 2018 Elections than the social media campaign of the PML-N. PTI is the dominant party in social media activism for voter participation. PML-N is the laggard party in social media activism and is the dominant party in the use of social media for the publication of public relations. Sadaf & Afridi (2022) analyzed the discourse of posts by PTI and PML-N on Twitter during the Senate elections. They concluded that PTI was successful in utilizing emotions to engage the electorate more than PML-N, who was

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CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
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unsuccessful in using emotions to engage the electorate more than PML-N, who was more successful in using a rational approach to engagement.

Shabbir and Haider (2023) studied how the PTI and PML-N parties used social media in campaigning and how they used social media in campaigning. The study showed how social media used by PTI was more decentralized and user based and as a result, the posts went viral. PTI social media posts were more appealing to young voters, while PML-N social media posts were more centralized. PML-N social media posts used a victimization narrative of Nawaz Sharif. The study shows that PTI used more creative and innovative social media campaigns, which is why these campaigns were more successful.

Shami (2023) discussed the long-form social media posts used by PML-N to appeal to the older and conservative voters, and how this strategy is more traditional. Imran Khan and PTI were more creative and used more innovative social media campaigns and posts, while Shabaz Sharif and PML-N were more traditional. This study showed that PML-N social media campaigns predominantly consisted of longer and more formal content, such as posts and videos, while PTI used social media campaigns that consisted of shorter posts that were more creative and made to go viral. The use of social media for the PML-N voter campaigns was also more creative, in comparison to the PML-N social media campaigns, which were more formal.

Siddiqua (2021) explored ICT use by PTI and the difference between their aggressive online approach and the conventional approach of PML-N. The study showed how the aggressive approach of PTI led to higher online interaction through the use of direct allegations and taunts towards rivals. In contrast, PML-N used deliberate messages. The study also suggested that the aggressive approach of PTI led to higher online interactions, and PML-N's traditional approach led to less interaction.

Siddique, Munir & Qayyum (2024) used the political anthems of PTI and PML-N to illustrate the use of the emotional appeal of PTI and the organizational messages of stability and continuity of PML-N which target the established base. The study focused on the higher resonance of the emotional appeal of PTI among the youth compared to the messages of stability and security of PML-N. The study also praised the ability of PTI in the digital sphere of use of emotional appeals and the construction of loyalty. Sohail (2024) focused on the portrayals of PML-N and PTI by the Pakistani news channels. PTI focused on the populism and the reformist imagery, while PML-N focused on the Positive Legacies of Traditional Governance reinforcing the narratives of stability of accomplishments in policy and infrastructure to cater older voters. This also plays a role in shaping the perceptions of the first time voters.

Tudor & Malik (2024) focused on the digital campaigns of PTI and PML-N and the confidence withdrawal of 2022. The study pointed out that the real time updates of PTI on Social Media led to the highest change in PML-N's Emotional State while the delayed participation of PML-N led to a significant reduction in online activities during the crisis. The study concluded that PTI's updates during the critical moments led to the highest change in the Emotional State of PML-N.

Ullah, Marwan, & Anwar (2022) studied how PTI and PML-N represent political matters on social media. It shows how PTI's crisis-driven content is populist and gets more traction than the content of PML-N, which focuses on policies and messages of stability for the established voters.

Zahid & Khan (2023) studied the representation of the civil-military relationship of PML-N and PTI. PML-N's posts focus on the continuity of governance, and PTI propagates a reformist stance. The research also identifies that PTI attracts more youth and PML-N more established voters. Zaib, Zulfiqar, & Javed (2024) studied PTI's protest language on social media especially the posts which focus on the demand of holding fair elections. The study

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ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
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describes PTI's populist rhetoric on social media, which is in contrast to the formal speech style of PML-N on social media.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework serves as the foundation for this study by providing established theories and models that explain the role of social media in political image management. The social media strategies of PTI and PML-N are analyzed through Agenda-Setting Theory and Framing Theory in this study.

2.1.1 Agenda-Setting Theory

The Agenda-Setting Theory by McCombs and Shaw (1972) infers that the media affects popular opinion by shaping what gets importance. For purposes of this study, social media is an agent of contemporary agenda-setting whereby the political parties spotlight certain issues and stories to direct public opinion. PTI and PML-N use digital forums to project the strengths of leaders, achievements made in policies, and deferring criticism.

The major implications of this theory in this research are:

- PML-N's structured approach in promoting governance and stability through controlled messaging.
- The strategy of PTI of using emotionally charged and populist messages is to dominate the online discourse.
- The ability of social media to set the political agenda by prioritizing key issues and narratives.

2.1.2 Framing Theory

The Framing Theory, crafted by Goffman (1974), supposes that not only does the media inform citizens what to think about but, more importantly, how to think about it. Through carefully constructed framing of their stories, parties can shape perception of leadership and governance among people.

Key elements of framing in this study:

- PTI frames its leadership image around reform, justice, and nationalism, often using emotionally appealing language and visuals.
- PML-N emphasizes experience, governance success, and stability, framing its leadership as reliable and policy-driven.
- Social media allows both parties to counter negative framing from opponents and mainstream media through direct engagement.

2.2 Research Gap

Previous research has studied PTI and PML-N's social media campaigns, but most studies look at things like political messaging, campaign engagement metrics, types of populist rhetoric employed, and the types of content posted. There has been scant research done on the tactical side of both parties' social media campaigns and on things like the engagement tactics used by both parties' social media campaigns and the effects of both parties' social media campaign engagement on the loyalty and perceptions of their followers. This study focuses on the PML-N and PTI's social media campaigns and leadership image social media strategies and the loyalty and perceptions of their followers and the effects of both parties' social media campaign engagement on the loyalty and perceptions of their followers and fills the gaps.

3. Research Design

This research aimed to capture a quantitative assessment of PTI's and PML-N's social media strategies on leadership imaging using a survey. Using a random sample of 51 social media users, this survey aimed to gain a broad range of views on political engagement and the social media user base. The survey used a Likert scale to create engagement questionnaires and leadership perceptions and preferences to select a social media platform. SPSS was used to

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ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
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analyze the engagement and loyalty correlation, and social media strategy assessments using inferential statistics and descriptive statistics.

4. Results

4.1 Hypotheses Testing

H1: PTI's social media strategy is more effective in engaging followers compared to PML-N.

Table 1: Correlation between PTI strategy and engagement

		PTISTRATEGY	PTIENGAGEMENT
PTISTRATEGY	Pearson Correlation	1	.394**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.004
PTIENGAGEMENT	Pearson Correlation	.394**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Pearson correlation coefficient between PTI's social media strategy (PTISTRATEGY) and engagement (PTIENGAGEMENT) is 0.394, which indicates a moderate positive correlation between these two variables. This suggests that as PTI's social media strategy improves or becomes more effective, there is a moderate increase in follower engagement. The significance level of 0.004 ($p < 0.01$) indicates that this correlation is statistically significant at the 0.01 level, meaning that the observed relationship is unlikely to be due to random chance.

In other words, the data suggests that PTI's social media strategies have a measurable and significant impact on how engaged their followers are. The stronger the strategy, the more likely it is that followers will interact and engage with the content.

Table 1 : Correlation between PMLN strategy and engagement

		PMLNSTRATEGY	PMLNENGAGEMENT
PMLNSTRATEGY	Pearson Correlation	1	.417**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.002
PMLNENGAGEMENT	Pearson Correlation	.417**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Pearson correlation coefficient between PML-N's social media strategy (PMLNSTRATEGY) and engagement (PMLNENGAGEMENT) is 0.417, indicating a moderate positive correlation between these two variables. This suggests that as PML-N's social media strategy improves or becomes more effective, there is a moderate increase in follower engagement. The significance level of 0.002 ($p < 0.01$) shows that this correlation is statistically significant at the 0.01 level, meaning the observed relationship is highly unlikely to be due to random chance.

In conclusion, the data suggests that PML-N's social media strategies play a significant role in enhancing follower engagement. The better the strategy, the more likely followers are to interact with and engage in the content shared by the party. For PTI, the Pearson correlation

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between PTI's social media strategy and follower engagement is 0.394, which indicates a moderate positive correlation.

- For PML-N, the Pearson correlation between PML-N's social media strategy and follower engagement is 0.417, which also indicates a moderate positive correlation, slightly stronger than PTI's correlation.

H2: There are significant differences in the social media tactics employed by PTI and PML-N in managing leadership image.

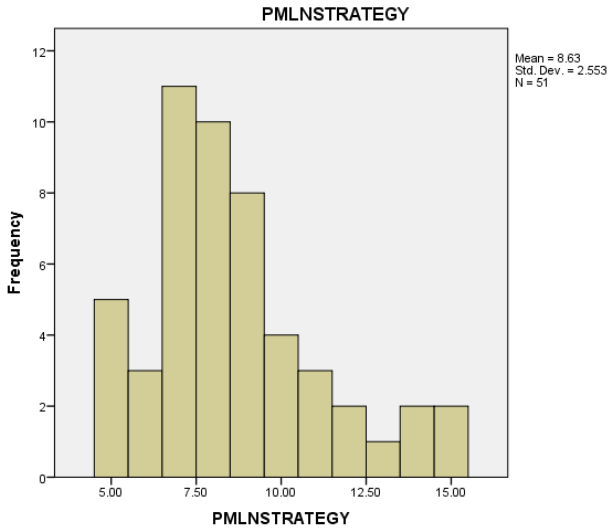


Figure 1: PMLN strategy of using social media

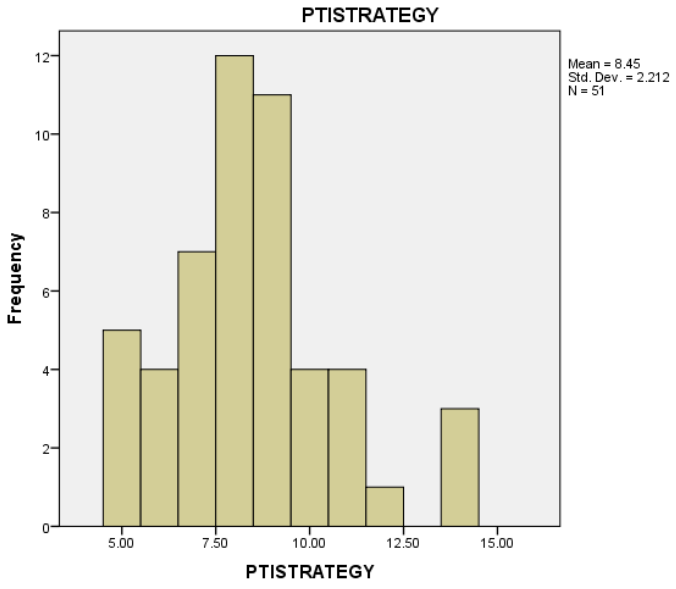


Figure 2: PTI strategy of using social media

The PML-N and PTI strategy frequency tables highlight differences in how each party uses social media to manage the image of their party leadership. Each table registers 51 respondent opinions, against which ratings can be compared. For PML-N, response ratings of 7, 8 and 9 were the most common, with respondents almost certainly rating PML-N's strategies in the mid- to high-range. A combined score of the ratings from 5 to 9 was expressed by 72%

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CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

of respondents, which points to a strong strategy. Very few respondents rated the strategy in the high-end range, with only 3.9% going for ratings of 14 or 15.

For PTI, response ratings of 8, 9 and 7 were the most common, with respondents concentrating more than PML-N respondents, in the upper-mid range. A combined score of the ratings from 5 to 9 was expressed by 76.5% of respondents, which is a slightly better range from PML-N, 72.5%. In the ratings of 14, PTI respondents rated more than PML-N respondents, with ratings of 14 at 5.9% for PTI and 3.9% for PML-N. For both parties, ratings were clustered in the mid-range to high-range in the effectiveness of social media to manage social media in the image of their leadership. Rating ranges of 8 and 9 for PTI are more clustered than for PML-N, showing that PTI's perception of social media is more effective.

PTI's strategy prompted more extreme high ratings (14). This suggests that some respondents believe their tactics are more impactful. However, the distribution of ratings in the PML-N strategy appears to be more uniform. There are fewer extreme high ratings. The results suggest that both parties have effective social media tactics. PTI may be perceived as more effective social media tactics at the higher end of the social media effectiveness scale, though the difference is not that significant in the competitive environment. Strong strategies are present in both parties, however aggressive and effective social media image management strategies are perceived to be present in PTI.

H3: Effective use of social by political parties positively influences followers' loyalty and perception.

Table 0-2Correlation between social media use and loyalty of audience

		SOCIALMEDIAUSE	LOYALTY
SOCIALMEDIAUSE	Pearson Correlation	1	.290*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.039
LOYALTY	Pearson Correlation	.290*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.039	

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The Pearson correlation coefficient between social media use (SOCIALMEDIAUSE) and loyalty (LOYALTY) is 0.290, which indicates a weak positive correlation between these two variables. This suggests that as social media use increases, there is a slight increase in follower loyalty. The significance level of 0.039 ($p < 0.05$) indicates that the correlation is statistically significant, meaning that the observed relationship is unlikely to be due to random chance. This result suggests that effective use of social media by political parties does have a positive influence on followers' loyalty, but the strength of the relationship is weak. The correlation is statistically significant, confirming that there is some evidence to support the idea that as political parties engage more effectively on social media, it can positively impact their followers' loyalty. From the correlation, the hypothesis that "Effective use of social media by political parties has a positive effect on followers' loyalty and perception" is supported to some extent. The correlation is significant statistically, but the weak strength of the correlation shows that although social media usage has an effect on loyalty, the impact is not strong.

5.1 Discussion

The motive behind this research was to perform a comparative study of the social media strategy of PTI and PML-N to strengthen the leadership brand amongst the supporters. The

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

research experimented with three hypotheses and analyzed engagement patterns, success, and effectiveness of online tactics employed by the two parties.

The correlation test revealed that PTI's social media strategy was moderately positively correlated with engagement ($r = 0.394$, $p = 0.004$). Similarly, PML-N's strategy was also slightly more positively correlated ($r = 0.417$, $p = 0.002$). These results show that both parties have reasonably good social media engagement strategies, with PML-N's strategy being slightly more correlated with engagement. Thus, the hypothesis that PTI's social media strategy is more effective than PML-N's in engaging followers was not supported. The findings indicate that while PTI is widely recognized for its strong digital presence, PML-N's structured and governance-focused approach also yields significant engagement.

The frequency count of strategy ratings revealed that PTI uses a more aggressive and affect-based strategy, relying on crisis-related messaging and populist arguments. PML-N emphasizes the accomplishments of governance and formal content, however. The combined data reveals that PTI had a greater frequency of ratings in the upper-moderate range (8 and 9) while PML-N had a more balanced perception. The presence of extreme ratings for PTI suggests a more polarizing strategy. This supports the hypothesis that there are significant differences in the social media tactics of both parties.

The correlation between social media use and follower loyalty ($r = 0.290$, $p = 0.039$) indicated a weak but statistically significant relationship. While social media engagement contributes to loyalty, its impact is not overwhelmingly strong. This suggests that while digital strategies influence perception, other factors, such as offline political actions and traditional media coverage, also play a role in shaping long-term loyalty. Thus, this hypothesis is only partially supported.

5.2 Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights into the comparative social media strategies of PTI and PML-N, it has several limitations:

1. **Sample Size and Scope**: The study was conducted with a limited sample size (n=51), which may not fully represent the broader population of social media users engaged in political discourse.
2. **Platform Focus**: The study primarily examined Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Other platforms such as TikTok and WhatsApp, which are also widely used in political discourse, were not analyzed in detail.
3. **Lack of Longitudinal Data**: The study is based on a cross-sectional analysis. A longitudinal study tracking changes in engagement over time would provide deeper insights.
4. **Content-Specific Analysis**: The study did not conduct a detailed content analysis of the specific types of posts (e.g., videos, memes, text posts) that generate the highest engagement.

5.3 Recommendations for Future Research

To further enhance the understanding of political social media strategies, future research should consider the following:

1. **Expand Sample Size**: Conduct a larger-scale study with a more diverse demographic representation to generalize findings more effectively.
2. **Investigate New Platforms**: Considering the emergence of TikTok and WhatsApp as platforms for political engagement, subsequent research should examine their influence on shaping public opinion.
3. **Perform Longitudinal Studies**: Analyzing social media tactics over several election seasons would give knowledge about how interaction patterns change.
4. **Integrate Sentiment Analysis**: Utilizing AI-powered sentiment analysis software to determine the emotional effect of social media messages might

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generate more profound understanding of political communication effectiveness.

5. **Consider Offline Effect**: Researching the extent to which online activity is transferred into offline political action, e.g., voting behavior or civil disobedience, would give a fuller view of social media's impact.

By overcoming these limitations and including these suggestions, future studies can provide more in-depth understanding of the changing role of social media in political image management

5.4 Conclusion

The findings of this research reveal that PTI and PML-N both effectively utilize social media to construct leadership images, though in different ways. PTI possesses a more dynamic and emotive approach appealing to youth voters and employs real-time crisis management. PML-N, on the other hand, follows systematic communication, highlighting governance achievement and stability. PTI enjoys an edge in triggering high engagement, but PML-N's strategies are equally effective in shaping leadership perception.

This study further highlights that social media is a powerful medium of contemporary political communication but not the singular determiner of political allegiance. As much as cyberspace provides the space for participation, interaction, and image building, long-term political allegiance depends on a number of variables, that is, the performance of the government, economy, and popular sentiment. The results indicate that political parties must counter their online efforts with ground-level work to establish lasting trust and credibility among supporters. Furthermore, the results indicate that PTI's social media presence, while highly engaging, tends to be more volatile and issue-driven, often responding to crises and trending topics. PML-N, on the other hand, has a more formal and policy-oriented orientation, which resonates with a section of people who look for continuity and governance rather than aggressive social media campaigns. These contrasts highlight the need for adapting digital strategies based on the choices of the audience and political aspirations. The research presents evidence that both PTI and PML-N have their own strategy for digital engagement, and in their own manner, they are effective. Future electoral campaigns in Pakistan will even more incorporate social media as a fundamental strategy, so it becomes important that political players sharpen and adjust their online messaging for optimal effects.

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