# Analysis of Tweets on Panama leak by Political Leaders of Pakistan

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## Abstract

This study aimed to explore the frames and slants used on twitter about PANAMA leak issue in Pakistan. As the twitter is widely used platform for political discourse and activism, having great popularity in Pakistan for political interests. The study has covered the time period from the uncovering of Panama Leak Issue in April 2016 to one of the big decision, disqualification of (Ex) Prime Minister Mian Muhammad Nawaz Shareef, in July 2017. The sample of the study consists of 943 tweets including 446 by PML-N, 373 from PTI and 124 tweets by PPP. This study is a content analysis of political tweets of leading political party leaders. The detailed analysis has been carried out following qualitative and quantitative research techniques. Findings indicate that the political leaders framed the issue according to their political interests. The issue remained strongly unfavourable to Sharif family as two leading opposition political parties' leaders raised voices against them. Analysing tweets provided an understanding of the biased approach of political leaders.

*Keyword: Tweets, Panama leak, Political Leaders, Pakistan, PTI, PPP*

## Introduction

Globally adoption of internet in general and social media in particular is gaining public attention to an alarming way. Figures of digital media users have vividly increased. From marketing to the campaigning, from relief work to the mob gathering, it has provided variety of areas in which it is serving its users (Shirky, 2011). World data estimation shows that among the 80% of the world youth, 830 millionin 104 countries are using online service (WAM, 2017). However, in world internet usage, 4 billion are expectedly using internet. In comparison to other countries, Africa is on top whose internet users are increasing with the rate of 20 % per year (McDonald, 2018). Same author reported that according to the hoot suite analysis 2018, internet penetration is so speedy that around the world, 4.021 billion persons are using internet and number is increasing with the rate of 7% a  year. Among the social media users this number is 3.196 billion and increasing with the rate of 13 % after each passing year. So these figures are showing increase in internet and social media users which mean people are spending more time in using this digital service (KEMP, 2018). This is the speedy penetration of digital media, that among youth, half of them are being online (WAM, 2017). Same study revealed the statistics of 104 countries which show that young people (15-24) was up to 80% who remained online. In this 67% were present in developingcountries whereas just 30% were in Countries which are Least Developed ones. Among all the persons using internet, one-fourth are the young persons. The number of young people using internet is 35% in least developed countries whereas figure is much less (13%) in developed countries (Statista, 2022). In Pakistan Social media is used for number of purposes including marketing,

socio-political discussions, political activism and also for social vigilantism, online messages are posted on real-time showing their opinion and thoughts. Various activities, including some political events, conflicts, campaigns and public emotions, are those observable topics which are easily available on digital media. As cited by Howison et al. (2011) and Chadwick (2013), these topics and the reality they show has become a prime focus for activities, campaigning and political analysis. Along with other areas e.g.marketing and a platform for sharing routine tasks, it has greatly served in political arena.

In Pakistan, along with the Facebook, twitter is gaining more and more popularity as being a main political discourse platform. Dependency of other sources of communication e.g. TV (in news and talk shows) has also made it more prominent. Nowadays twitter is not only widely used by general public, it is in the use of marketers, social workers and also political parties. Impact of social media on traditional media is not new in Pakistan. News casters use to quote the statements of political leaders being taken from twitter. However twitter became very popular after panama leak issue. Like many other countries of the world panama leak issue disclosed the name of ex- prime-minister of Pakistan for the reason ofbeing involved in keeping offshore companies. Panama leak carried 11 million documents that provided proof of association between Nawaz Sharif family and offshore companies. Later the supreme court of Pakistan ordered for the investigation of an issue by a joint team including civil and military persons (The News, 2017). In Pakistan for a prime minister it is not legal to keep the assets hidden. Panama leak pointed out the involvement of Nawaz Sharif's

children in owing offshore companies and assets that they did not disclosed in their wealth statement.

This study is aimed to explore the themes and slants used on twitter about PANAMA leak issue in Pakistan. As the twitter is widely used platform for political discourse and campaigning, it also got great popularity in Pakistan for political interests. The study will cover the time period from the uncovering of Panama Leak Issue in April 2016 to one of the big decision, disqualification of (Ex) Priminister Mian Muhammad Nawaz Shareef, in July 2017 (The News, 2017).This study will focus on how the issue got handled and framed on twitter. This will provide an understanding how this social interactive site "Twitter" is influencing public opinion by framing the political contents. Further, underlying study is aimed to identify the Topic/theme and slants used in tweets of leading political leaders during panama leak issue. The current study will investigate whether the tweets were more pro-government or were against the government stance. Study would observe the number of people following a particular political person and also the number of likes, replies and Retweet in response to a particular tweet. This study would show the political stance of tweeter tweets related to the panama issue.

## Literature Review

As being one of the biggest political information sharing platform, twitter has a link with the field of political communication. For many years, after the world war 11, field of political communication covered limited set of topics (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). Majority of the work was either focusing

the media content or otherwise the individual voting behaviour. They did all workin the political system which was comparatively stable. However, very little progress was observed in the decade of 1940s and 1960s (McNair, 2017). Now the global political instability has raised questions on the generalizations which were based on the previously stable politics. The technological advancement specifically in media has not only made the media effects more stronger but also brought more complications.one of the change brought by technological advancement is the broadness in the area of research in political communication including both areas of micro and macro concerns.

**The Historical Development of Political Communication Research**

Political communication research is considered to be a main area of research specially while discussing the effects of mass media. In 1960, Klapper gave the concept of "limited media effects". He got these results after conducting research on political election campaign At one side this concept got the landmark status in the respective field whereas on the other side it faced heavy criticism. This limited effect model remained in voice till 1970s when technological advancement brought significant changings in political communication research (Klapper, 1960).

**Framing and Political Reality**

Framing is considered to be an integral part of political process. Ricker in 1986 and Schattschneider in 1960 argued that political success is based on how the political leaders do news framing by emphasizing the selective content. In winning political support, leaders use to selectively present the

reality. After getting the support in favour of their policies, leaders further start framing through argumentation (Druckman, 2007). Chong and Druckman further argue that frequency of exposure given to the content, frame strength variation, involvement of competing frames and credibility of source are the main elements which moderate the framing effects. However frame with more credible source is usually more successful one in moulding public opinion. Gamson and lasch in 1983 and later on Gamson in 1992 clarified that the latent motives of a news item can be understood by analysing the frames they use to construct the news story. They identified that framing makes the people informed about the core latent ideas in different events specially related to the conflicted issue. McLeod (2002) divide the individual effects of media into four major classes. These classes focus on its role as opinion former, cognitive change agent and perception builder in a political system.

**Media Framing**

Tuchman in 1978 greatly discussed the role of journalist in framing the news content. However along with journalist's framing, audience framing is also important in analysing the end results. (Tuchman, 1980). Erving Goffman in 1974 analysed audience framing as "schemata of interpretation" which makes the public to locate it, perceive it accordingly, to identify and then to label it as information they receive from environment (Verhoeven, 1982). According to Mebane and kinder (1983), almost all of the news stories are presented in inverted pyramid style; but individuals use to collect data matching their point of view. These further act as a framework that individuals use in understanding other news stories (Jenning, 2002).

## Studies on Twitter

### 2013 Pakistan General Elections and Twitter

A twitter research was conducted on 2013 general elections in Pakistan by two researchers, Saifuddin Ahmed and Marko M. Skoric. Following research was conducted by following the content analysis technique. In this research, both selected four political parties. In each political party, they further selected one leader belonging to each party. Research was supported with research questions in which they focused on frequency of twitter usage of some political party, extent to which they use it for interaction, what function tweets belonging to political leader/party serve, relation of using twitter with the actual success in election 2013 etc. (Ahmed, 2014).

### 2011 Singapore General Elections

Another study on twitter data was conducted by Marko M. SKORIC, Nathaniel D. Poor, Palakorn Achananuparp, Ee Peng LIM and Jing JIANG IN 2012.This  study focused the Singapore General Elections 2011.In this study twitter usage during the official election campaign in 2011 was observed. Purpose of the study was to analyse the twitter power and its influence on election results. Researchers were interested to check whether the large number of tweets could have any influence on any specific political leader's vote turnout. So the questions were designed to analyse the frequency of tweets and then later on their share in vote at national or constituency levels. For measuring the tweet data, different key words were used e.g. political party names, contesting persons etc. Strong correlation was found between number of tweetsand frequency of vote to the political leader (Marko, 2012).

## 2009 H1N1 Outbreak in US

A research on H1N1 outbreak in 2009 was analysed. This was analysed in relation to the twitter data. Content analysis technique was used for this purpose. Tweets were collected from May to December 2009. During this period, frequently used terms e.g. "H1N1", swineflu" and "swine flu" were searched. For tweet collection, twenty five tweets per hour were collected which means 600 tweets per day. For accuracy in data assessment, only English language tweets were observed. Simple random sampling technique was used which was based on the feasibility as 25 tweets per hour were selected. For content categorization, tri axial approach was followed. In this, content of the tweet, expression used and type of link given under the tweets were mainly observed. In this Retweet were not included because of changed contextual form. During the coding, statements with ambiguous or neutral meaning were not included. Chi square test was used to analyse the trend that whether the trend changed over time or not etc. (Chew, 2010).

## Hypothesis:

**H1**: Greater number of primary and secondary tweets will focus on financialcorruption/money laundering.

**H2**: Tweets belonging to PML -N are more pro-Sharif family in comparison to the tweets of PTI.


## Research Method

This study is a content analysis of political tweets of leading political party leaders. The detailed analysis could be done by following both the qualitative and quantitative techniques of research (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992). Tweets of leading political parties e.g.  PML (N), PPP and PTI will

be analysed. Time period for research is the time when panama Leak issue came to the screen in the month of April 2016 to the first outcome that is the court decision about disqualification of Ex-Prime minister Nawaz Sharif in July 2017.

## Population and Sampling

The population of this study will be the tweets being tweeted on tweeter by leading political party leaders e.g. PML (N), PPP and PTI during the selected timeline. Tweets have been retrieved from the tweeter pages of prominent party leaders. Tweet have been taken by manually downloading them from specified pages. One year timeline is specified from April 2016 to July 2017. Tweets were further categorized in two categories, primary tweets and secondary tweets. Tweets were categorized just to avoid confusion about number of Retweet and Retweet by political leaders. Primary tweet category is the one in which all main tweets (actually written by political leader) were considered. Whereas secondary tweet category contained those tweets which were valued by political leader and so Retweeted or gave a reply on its twitter account page.

## Tweets Selection

Three leading political parties of Pakistan (PML-N PTI and PPP) have been selected for the study. Tweets of the said political parties will be examined. The time line of the study is April 2016 to July 2017.Tweets and their response would be examined in the research study. There is a rationale in selecting these three political parties as firstpolitical party (PML N) is the one which was in government and also the same on whose leader, there is

a charge of money laundering, misuse of public office, offshore companies and illegal flats etc. Whereas the other two political parties are opposition parties who aresignificantly anti/unfavourable to PML N government.

## Variables of Study

In this study Variables are Topic, Slant, Frame and Words being used. Following are the details of these variables.

### Topics

Topics regarding Panama Leak issue in Pakistan have been pointed out after an initial reading of the issue and tweets. Below are the topics identified for the study; Financial corruption/money laundering, Court proceeding, Protest, Qatari Shehzada/ Qatari khat (letter), Offshore Account, Derogatory language against leaders, Accountability and Miscellaneous.

### Slant

In this study slant refers to the tone of the tweets towards Panama Leak issue in Pakistan. This study is following the methodology of already existing studies and so in this, slants are divided into three categories; i.e., favourable, neutral and unfavourable. . Slantwill be coded separately for each of the topics/Themes. Each slant will be coded in the classification of favourable, unfavourable and neutral. This will be applied to all the topics/themes

### Coding Unit

In this research study topic, frames, slant, number of reply, Retweet and likes will be examined as variables and to measure these variables, the entire related information in tweets is the context unit and unit of analysis. In research study content, smallest unit of whole data being considered is

called as unit of analysis. Therefore this unit of analysis is further categorized as Recording units and context units. Recording unit is defined as one whose facts are counted (Prasad, 2013). In this study, tweets discussing Panama issue in Pakistan are the context unit for identifying the topic. Similarly each Tweet is the recordingunit for identifying slant in the story. If half of the tweets of each political leader is carryinggovernment slant and half are carrying anti-government slant then such tweets will be coded as neutral in slant. However if the tweets are more pro-government then these will be coded as favourable, whereas anti-government tweets will fall in unfavourable slant category.Frame will be recognized in the entire issue from the context of the tweets. The frame identified in the tweets are Money laundering legal/illegal, court proceedings as justified/unjustified, protests as justified/unjustified, Qatari khaat as legal/illegal, offshore account legal/illegal and accountability as justified/unjustified. Therefore overall tweet categories will help in developing a link of case history and court decision about disqualification of Prime-minister Nawaz Sharif.

**Analysis and Results**

The sample of the study is 943 tweets, 446(47.3%) belonged to *PML-N,* 373(39.6%) by *PTI* and 124(13.1%) panama leak related tweets were tweeted by *PPP* (Table 1). Collectively the three political parties tweeted 396 (42%) primary and 547(58%) secondary tweets. Primary tweets contained 54(5.7%) tweets of PML-N, 321(34.0%) of PTI and 21(2.2%) of PPP. Whereas on the other hand these three political parties have total 547(58%) number of secondary tweets. These included 392(41.6%) tweets of PML-N, 52(5.5%) of PTI and 103(10.9%) of PPP. (Table 1). From the

overall data sample belonging to above mentioned three political parties has total 22.07 mean length value (in words) . Mean length value of PML(N)tweets is22.17,PTI is 23.64 whereas 16.96 is the mean value of PPP tweets length(in words) (Table 1).

Table 1.

**Tweet count of political party with the type of tweet**

| | | | Types of Tweet | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Secondary | |
| TweetbyParties | PML(N) | Count | 54 | 392 | 446 |
| | | % of Total | 5.7% | 41.6% | 47.3% |
| | PTI | Count | 321 | 52 | 373 |
| | | % of Total | 34.0% | 5.5% | 39.6% |
| | PPP | Count | 21 | 103 | 124 |
| | | % of Total | 2.2% | 10.9% | 13.1% |
| Total | | Count | 396 | 547 | 943 |
| | | % of Total | 42.0% | 58.0% | 100.0% |

$H_1$: Greater number of tweets will focus on financial corruption/money laundering.

First hypothesis proved as primary and secondary tweets falling in financial corruption category got greatest number. Overall in financial corruption/money laundering category 266(28.2%) tweets were tweeted in which 134(14.2%) were in primary and 132(14.0%) were in secondary tweet category. In court proceeding category 98(10.4%) primary and 118(12.5%) secondary tweets were tweeted with total 216(22.9%) number of tweets. In protest category, there were total 23(2.4%) tweets including

8(0.8%) primary and 15(1.6%) secondary tweets. In Qatari shehzada /Qatri khaat   category, there were total 42(4.5%) tweets including 15(1.6%) primary and 27(2.9%) secondary tweets. In offshore/company category, there were total 41(4.3%) tweets including 22(2.3%) primary and 19(2.0%) secondary tweets. In derogatory language category, there were total 29(3.1%) tweets including 16(1.7%) primary and 13(1.4%) secondary tweets. In accountability category, there were total 151(16.0%) tweets including 57(6.0%) primary and 94(10.0%) secondary tweets. .In miscellaneous category, there were total 175(18.6%) tweets including 46(4.9%) primary  and 129(13.7%) secondary tweets (Table 2).

Table 2.

### Distribution of tweets in Topic/Theme of tweets categories

| | | | Financial corruption/money laundering | court proceedings | protests | TopicThemeoftweet Qatari Shehzada/ Qatar khaat | Offshore account/ company | Derogatory language | Accountability | Misc. | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Types Of Tweet | primary | Count | 134 | 98 | 8 | 15 | 22 | 16 | 57 | 46 | 396 |
| | | % of Total | 14.2% | 10.4% | 0.8% | 1.6% | 2.3% | 1.7% | 6.0% | 4.9% | 42.0% |
| | secondary | Count | 132 | 118 | 15 | 27 | 19 | 13 | 94 | 129 | 547 |
| | | % of Total | 14.0% | 12.5% | 1.6% | 2.9% | 2.0% | 1.4% | 10.0% | 13.7% | 58.0% |
| Total | | Count | 266 | 216 | 23 | 42 | 41 | 29 | 151 | 175 | 943 |
| | | % of Total | 28.2% | 22.9% | 2.4% | 4.5% | 4.3% | 3.1% | 16.0% | 18.6% | 100.0% |

Table 4.2. (b)

**Chi-Square Tests**

|  | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 33.056[a] | 7 | .000 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 33.910 | 7 | .000 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 20.860 | 1 | .000 |
| N of Valid Cases | 943 | | |

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 9.66.

Figure 1
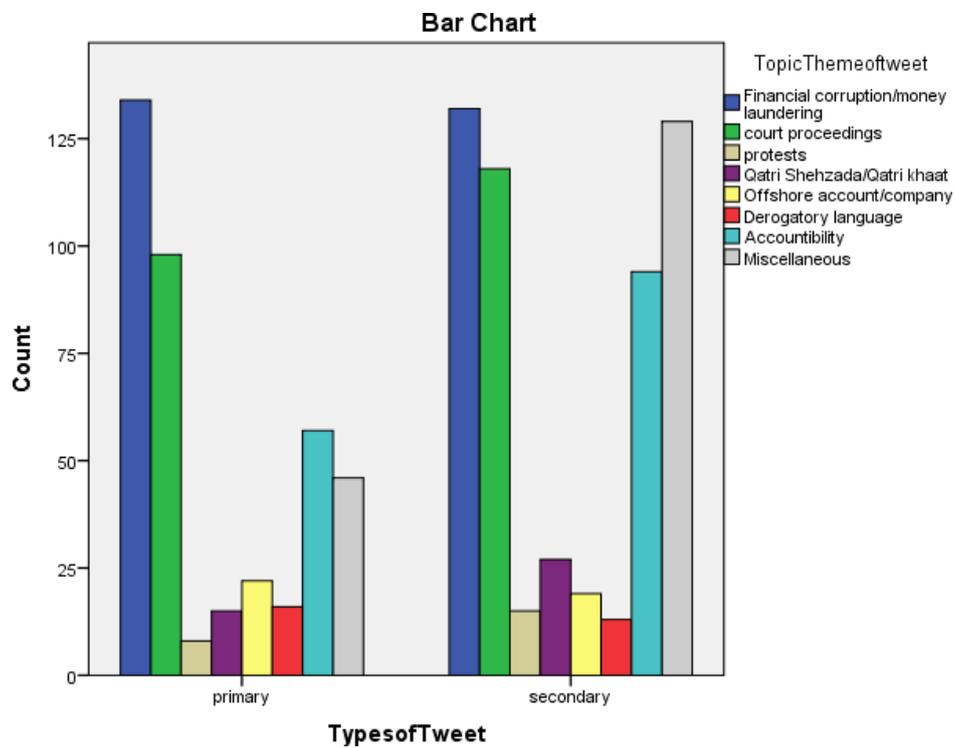


H2**:** Tweets belonging to PTI will be more against Sharif family then PPP.

Second hypothesis also proved as number of PTI tweets in unfavourable slant is352(37.3%) and PPP tweets falling in unfavourable slant category is 111 (11.8%).

**Discussion**

According to Edward Snowden panama leak is "the biggest leak in the history of data journalism". As this leak exposed the financial corruption of leaders and powerful personsof many states, Sharif family name was also present in it. Tweets were categorized as primary and secondary tweets. In primary tweets main tweets written by political leaders were taken in. Whereas in secondary tweets retweet and replies by political leaders were taken in. Different political leaders followed different trends. Among three selectedpolitical leaders of PML-N Maryam Nawaz is the most active user of twitter. Number of tweets belonging to Maryam Nawaz is much more than any other leader selected in research study. However Maryam Nawaz preferred secondary tweets on primary tweets. She retweeted and gave reply to others tweet. Number of her primary tweet is far less thansecondary ones. Maryam Aurangzeb was second PML-Nleader whose tweets were observed. Maryam Aurangzeb typed in very less tweets related to panama leak issue and same was the case with Shahbaz Sharif. In PML-Nslant coverage, overall PML-Ntweets followed favourable slant and portrayed Sharif family as innocent and considered allegation charges wrong. None of the tweet followed unfavourable slant and very few number of tweets followed neutral slant.

In theme/topic coding categories, PML-N in comparison to any of the other category, focused more on court proceedings that included JIT sessions, statement of judges and responses of political leaders. Number of greater tweets in this category shows that they wanted to show public there was a question on the objectivity of judicial system. Other than miscellaneous category, second major tweet category with greater number of tweets was financial corruption/money laundering. PML-N tweets following favourable slant shows that they continuously tried to prove themselves as innocent. All other tweets categories got average number of tweets. Second political party whose tweets were observed for study purpose was PTI. One of the reasons of taking tweets of PTI was its position as opposition party. Imran khan is not only a representative of PTI but he is also on the forefront in proving allegation charges on Sharif family as correct. Imran khan preferred to give direct statement in the form of primary tweets (main tweet) rather than secondary tweets. Number of Naeem ul haq and Asad Umar‟s primary tweet was also more than secondary tweets.  In slant categories PTI mainly used unfavourable slant category whereas little number of tweets also covered neutral slant. In topic/theme categories, PTI mainly focused on financial corruption of Sharif family.  On second, party focused on court proceedings in their effort to prove theallegation charges as correct. All other categories were also given focus but in a little number.

Third political party which was selected for research study is Pakistan People's Party (PPP). PPP is not only as opposition party but it is also one of the oldest political parties of Pakistan. Number  of tweets belonging to PPP is far less than previous two parties.All three members preferred secondary

tweets on primary/direct tweets. Firstly Bilawal Bhutto was selected as being a chairman PPP. Whereas, Khursheed shah and Shazia Atta Mari were other two members belonging to PPP. All members took less interest in discussing concerned issue on twitter as what the number of tweets show. In In slant categories PPP mainly used unfavourable slant category whereas very few number of tweet was also in neutral category. None of their tweets were favourable to Sharif family. In topic/theme categories, PPP"s tweets discussed the financial corruption/money laundering of Sharif family. Secondly they gave preference to the accountability category. They focused on the point that accountability must be done. Whereas tweets in all other topics were less in number. One of the reason of focusing on accountability could be the previously disqualification of ex-Prime minister Yousaf Raza Gilani as a result of contempt of court case.

In this study number of likes, reply and re-tweets were also observed as these help inproviding understanding about public interest in the topic. In primary and secondary tweets, more likes were observed in the main tweets of the political leader as being his statement. Great difference in number of likes also tells about public interest in primary tweets. Secondly the number of replies were also much more in primary tweets than on secondary tweets. This also tells about public great interestin primary tweets. Thirdly, number of re-tweets was observed which provided same results as people preferred to re-tweet primary tweets. This all tells that public wants their leader totweet rather than re-tweet some other's message or giving reply to some other's tweet. Although social media has provided ease to the political leaders to keep themselvesremain in touch with their supporters and the general

public, it greatly helps in moulding public opinion on some particular issue. As these three of the main political parties used twitter platform for their matter of interest, judiciary decision came against PML (N) and resulted in the disqualification of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

**Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Future Researchers**

Due to time and resources limitation the study has some limitations. Research study covered the time period of fifteen months which is a limited time in providing understandand focusing on the role of twitter. In this research one of the social media networking site twitter was observed. On twitter same issue is discussed in different ways. On twitter using #tag has become a common trend. Same issue was also discussed on #panama papers, but the page has an open access as anyone can send message on these pages. In a broader spectrum, research could also be conducted on these relevant pages. Another limitation that researcher faced during the research was getting an easy access to the relevant data. Although data is available even from the time when twitter took a start of this site but that data is provided on demand through GNIP which provides data on payments. One of the reasons is the commercial interest of the site. Because of the financial constraints, all the data was manually downloaded by scrolling down the pages of relevant political leaders. In manually downloading large images and videos was also constraint in reaching the relevant research data. In this research, along with number of likes, number of replies and number of re-tweets were also observed. In case of replies and re-tweets, one can go to the details of replies to the main tweet (primary tweet) and replies in response to the re-tweet. This could be very helpful in

providing understanding about the response of audience. Twitter is just one of the social networking site, there are many other sites which are having same objectives e.g. Facebook. Therefore research could also be done on other sites as well which could be very helpful in getting an access to the mind of the public.by eliminating financial and limited time constraint; one can conduct a research at broader level.

## Conclusion

It can be concluded that the political leaders framed the issue according to their political interests. The issue remained strongly unfavourable to Sharif family as two leading opposition political party leaders were against them. Using twitter platform provided an understanding about biased approach of political leaders. This is because very few tweets belonging to PML-N were neutral and majority of tweets supported Sharif family's point of view. PPP and PTI approach also seemed biased to a very few tweets were in neutral category and majority used unfavourable slant. PML-N in many of its tweets raised questions on the objectivity of judiciary and claimed allegation charges false. It ran vast campaigning on social media especially on twitter and Facebook. PML-N remained far less in the number of primary tweets than secondary ones and PTI was in greater number of primary tweets that could be one of the reasons that they failed in changing the mind of general public in proving the allegations false. It is not just the case of twitter, same was the PML-N attitude on other platforms e.g. newspaper, TV etc. In her statement given in DAWN newspaper, Maryam Nawaz strongly condemned the decision given by SC about the disqualification of PM and said "JIT report REJECTED. Every contradiction will not only be contested but

decimated in SC. Not a penny of public exchequer involved: PMLN (DAWN, 17)''. Political leaders employed different frames and slants which indicate how the same issue is portrayed differently by the people having differing political idealogies.

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