

## **Social Media as an Extended Public Sphere: A Study of Twitter (X) in the Context of India-Pakistan Relationship**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The conventional public domains, namely print and broadcast media, have often functioned as intermediaries in the complicated and long-standing association between India and Pakistan. The primary objective of this research is to investigate the functioning of Twitter or 'X' as an extended public sphere and its impact on the development and circulation of public narratives about India-Pakistan relations. The present study is based on mixed method sequential explanatory design; in which data was first analysed quantitatively through the Mozdeg Big Data Analysis Software and then qualitative analysis was done through Speech Act Analysis. The results show that Twitter has introduced a novel aspect to public discourse, enabling a broader and more diverse exchange of ideas and narratives. The study concludes with recommendations about how social media can be used for the promotion of peace between India and Pakistan and to develop better relations between common citizens of the two countries.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Twitter, Public Sphere, India-Pakistan

## INTRODUCTION

Social media has become an effective tool for people to interact in public conversation and take part in democratic debate (Suherlan, 2023). People may now interact with one another on an international level thanks to platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter or 'X', which have helped to remove time and space barriers and allow the creation of new societies and networks. The effect of social media on the public sphere is still up for question. Some academics argue that it has increased the scope of public conversation, while others argue that it has reduced the standard and variety of conversations in society. This study focuses on Twitter and how it affects the India-Pakistan relationship as it analyses social media's function as an enhanced public sphere. Years of clash and tension between Pakistan and India have been characterized by both nations using a variety of weaponry and political strategies to achieve their objectives (Yuan, 2022). Residents from both countries use Twitter to share their ideas and opinions on a variety of topics, from politics and popular culture to entertainment and sports, and Twitter has developed as an alternative platform for public conversation and policymaking.

This study draws on Habermas' idea of the public sphere. Habermas claims that the public sphere is a place of rational-critical discourse where people can interact freely and openly about issues of shared interest (Lunt and Stenner, 2005). It is also a place where people can engage in rational-critical discussion without being restricted by political or commercial interests. The development of the media during the 20<sup>th</sup> century resulted in a decline in the standard and variety of public discourse as well as an increase of news ownership and management in the hands of a small number of large businesses (Balkin, 2021). The public sphere has faced new difficulties and opportunities with the development of online platforms in the 21st century. On one hand, online

services like Twitter have made it possible for people to connect and interact with one another on a worldwide scale, removing time and space barriers and promoting the development of new societies and networks. On the other hand, these online platforms have additionally come under fire for their part in spreading false information, boosting hate speech and extreme viewpoints, and reducing the value and variety of public dialogue.

### **Background of India-Pakistan Relations**

The history of India-Pakistan relations has many ups and downs. The reasons behind these unstable bilateral relations are unresolved issues, the major one being Kashmir (Mangrio, 2012). Pakistan has fought four wars with India in 1948, 1965, 1971, and 1999 (Behera, 2007). Due to this hostile historical background, the overall sentiments of people in Pakistan are anti-India. The projection of India is very negative in Pakistani Urdu Press. Urdu press in Pakistan often labels Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi as the “Butcher of Gujrat”, “Killer of Muslims” and “Hindu Extremist” (Turabi, 2016). There is a popular narrative in Pakistani media that Pakistan always works for peace and India has an attitude of war and hegemony (The Print, 2019). However, besides these differences both countries have good ties in the field of entertainment due to some cultural commonalities. All three superstars of Bollywood- Shahrukh Khan, Salman Khan, and Amir Khan- are Muslims and are equally popular on both sides of the border. Similarly, Pakistani dramas have a massive viewership in India (Rao, 2010).

### **Aim of Study**

This study aims to discuss the narrative built on a social media platform, namely Twitter, regarding India-Pakistan relations. The rapid proliferation of social media and the dynamic landscape of digital communication technologies have significantly transformed individual’s engagement in public debate (Bridges, 2021). In order to get a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which

new media are altering communication dynamics within the context of the India-Pakistan relationship, it is essential to examine the content being shared on social media platforms such as Twitter and assess its impact on the transformation of public sphere debates.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The historical framework of political and military hostilities between India and Pakistan has rendered their bilateral relationship difficult to negotiate. The examination of these conflicts and their impact on public sentiment may now be approached from a novel perspective, facilitated by the emergence of social media platforms (such as Twitter) as a significant social media platform for debate and public participation (Shafiq, 2021). Twitter has a significant influence on discourse by highlighting underrepresented viewpoints and exposing previously hidden aspects of popular opinion (Hussain, Shahzad & Saud, 2021). The rise of technology, particularly the emergence of the internet, has facilitated the democratisation of information distribution and reconfigured the landscape of public discourse (Schlesinger, 2020). Technological advancements have facilitated the capacity of individuals to express their opinions, share information, and engage in global discourse, enabling their voices to be heard (Can and Alatas, 2019).

The advent of social media platforms such as Twitter has given rise to the emergence of online communities, effectively supplanting conventional public squares (Gil de Zúñiga, Michalska and Römmele, 2022). Individuals from many regions throughout the globe are given the opportunity to express their opinions and engage in discussions inside these virtual communities (Dagoula, 2019). These digital platforms provide individuals an opportunity to express their views about the India-Pakistan relationship, engage with a wider audience, and maybe question prevailing narratives. To comprehensively understand the evolving dynamics of

public discourse within the India-Pakistan context, it is essential to acknowledge the underlying reasons that have contributed to the transition of public sphere discussions from traditional offline platforms to online forums (Rajgarhia, 2020). Significant determinants in this transition are the aspects of accessibility, anonymity, and the prospect of discovering and engaging with like-minded others (Roosevelt, 2007).

For an understanding of the complicated nature of public discourse, it is essential to go into the examination of how linguistic expressions differ based on the specific medium used, particularly within the context of India-Pakistan debate in the contemporary digital era (Ittefaq, 2019). The choice of communication medium significantly influences an individual's capacity to express themselves effectively and comprehend others, as well as their likelihood of being comprehended. This impact is seen across several platforms, including direct interpersonal communication, social media platforms like Twitter, and conventional forms of media (Suherlan, 2023). The mechanisms that regulate the formation of linguistic expressions exhibit variability across different modalities of communication. Conventional in-person interactions provide the opportunity for more complex and comprehensive dialogues via the use of non-verbal cues, vocal intonation, and immediate feedback (Pathak, 2019). Twitter, as a social media platform, specifically encourages concise and rapid exchanges, potentially impacting the level of profundity and manner of expressions (Ittefaq, 2019). To comprehensively understand the details of public discourse in the India-Pakistan context, as influenced by many communication channels, it is essential to possess a solid understanding of these dynamics.

The mode of information communicated may exhibit significant variations across different mediums (Faheem and Basharat, 2023). The adoption of a novel method of expression among Twitter users may be attributed to the constraint of the 140-character restriction imposed on their

tweets, as well as the widespread usage of graphic components such as hashtags and memes. It can also examine the alterations in content, tone, and style of expressions across various media, offering an understanding of how participant's selection of medium influences their communication of ideas and emotions within the framework of the India-Pakistan relationship (Ahmed, Mubeen & Nawaz, 2022). When examining the India-Pakistan relationship within the context of social media, particularly Twitter, it is crucial to take into account the concept of divergent expression within emerging public spheres, which may depart from the officially sanctioned narrative (Soofi, 2020). This can be helpful in examining the underlying factors and consequences of expression deviation, shedding light on its potential impact on public discourse and its potential to challenge traditional narratives. Traditional narratives have a significant role in shaping public discourse, particularly in the context of politically sensitive relationships such as those between India and Pakistan (Ahmed, 2021).

The widespread use of social media platforms has facilitated the amplification of divergent viewpoints that deviate from the traditional narrative (Qureshi et al, 2022). To have a comprehensive grasp of the complexities of public communication within the India-Pakistan relationship, it is essential to recognise the underlying factors that contribute to variations in expression (Kiley and Vaisey, 2020). The encouragement or discouragement of expression deviance may be influenced by several social, political, cultural, and personal factors (Rasheed, Naseer and Khawaja, 2021). The effect of social media on public discourse and involvement has paramount significance in the India-Pakistan relationship. The impact of Twitter, specifically, on the formation of public discourse, dissemination of news, and promotion of engagement in discussions around contentious global matters possess a major concern (Jafri, 2020). This is why an attempt to investigate the impact of social media on information distribution, and highlighting

its role in democratizing access to platforms for those who may have previously lacked a voice is a significant research area (Ittefaq, 2019).

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This research was done through a mixed-method sequential explanatory design. Sequential explanatory research design involves collecting and analysing quantitative data first and then qualitative data in two consecutive phases within one study. In this research, at the first step, quantitative analysis was done to know the trends in tweets. The data was analysed quantitatively through sentiment analysis by using Mozdeg Big Data Analysis Software. At step two, the variation in sentiments was further analysed qualitatively through Speech Act Analysis, in aim of understanding the background and context of tweets.

### **Research Ethics**

In this study, the researchers made sure to follow all the ethical concerns. To maintain the authenticity, data was retrieved by using Mozdeg Big Data Analysis Software. Spelling and grammatical errors were removed only for the academic nature of the study. Identity of tweeters were not disclosed to ensure the privacy of the people.

### **Sampling Technique**

In this research, 10 hashtags were selected as a selection criterion for the search. These hashtags were about India-Pakistan relations and were trending on Twitter in Pakistan between August 2019 to August 2021. The ten hashtags included in the sample were: #LOC, #pakindia, #AbhiNandan, #CitizenshipAmendmentAct, #27feb, #kartarpurcorridor, #freekashmir, #Kalbhushan, #blackdayforindiandemocracy, #SayNoToWar.

### **Quantitative Data and Sentiment Analysis**

For quantitative analysis, the researchers used the sentiment analysis technique, which aids in deriving the opinion of the individuals or the user regarding a topic. It is a technique that simply focuses on text data and detects positive and negative sentiments in text. It is a method that is often used by researchers to identify sentiment and understand opinions and feelings. It organizes textual data contained from numerous tweets into positive, negative, or neutral emotions. The sentiment analysis for this study is conducted through Mozdeh Big Data Text Analysis, which is a free software that is used for data extraction from Twitter and to conduct sentiment analysis. Data was categorized quantitatively into 5 categories each for positive and negative sentiments: 1) None; 2) Weak; 3) Moderate; 4) Strong; and 5) Very Strong.

### **Qualitative Data and Speech Act Analysis**

The tweets were further analysed qualitatively using Speech Act Analysis, which helps to understand how speech or social media post achieves some kind of outcome or objective (Chandler et al., 2018). Speech Act Analysis categorizes Tweet content into five categories: Assertive, Directive, Expressive, Commissive and Declarative. As the present study is grounded in the social context of online debates while assessing the freedom of expression on Twitter, Speech Act Analysis is the most suitable method to analyze the online debate about India-Pakistan with all its complexities and diverse opinions. From each of the following hashtags, the ten most retweeted tweets were analyzed: #LOC, #pakindia, #AbhiNandan, #CitizenshipAmendmentAct, #SurpriseDay, #kartarpurcorridor, #freekashmir, #Kalbhushan, #blackdayforindiandemocracy, #SayNoToWar. An average value of both positive and negative sentiments and estimated negative sentiments was calculated through the Mozdeg Big Data Analysis software.

## RESULTS

### Quantitative Results

Table 1 shows an analysis of 9,280 tweets which mention the term “India-Pakistan”. The results show that the negative sentiments towards India-Pakistan debate was prominent among tweeters (5.4% strong and 0.2% very strong) as compared to the positive sentiments (0.2% strong and 0% very strong).

**Table 1**

Overall Sentiment Analysis of India-Pakistan (Number of tweets analysed= 9,280)

Sentiment Value	Positive	Negative
None	74.4%	63.3%
Weak	16.5%	15.3%
Moderate	7.2%	15.7%
Strong	0.2%	5.4%
Very Strong	0.0%	0.2%

Table 2 shows an analysis of the overall sentiments of male tweeters, which shows that the negative sentiments towards India-Pakistan debate were strong among male tweeters (5.7%) as compared to the positive sentiments (0%).

**Table 2**

Overall Sentiment Analysis of Male Tweeters (Number of tweets analysed= 6,143)

Sentiment Value	Positive	Negative
None	58.4%	66.0%
Weak	35.8%	16.9%
Moderate	0.0%	11.3%
Strong	0.0%	5.6%
Very Strong	0.0%	0.0%

Table 3 shows an analysis of tweets of females which shows that the negative sentiments towards the India-Pakistan debate was higher among female tweeters (6% strong and 0.3% very strong) as compared to the positive sentiments (3.1% strong and 0% very strong).

**Table 3**

Overall Sentiment Analysis of Female Tweeters (Number of tweets analysed= 3,137)

Sentiment Value	Positive	Negative
None	68.7%	59.3%
Weak	12.5%	18.7%
Moderate	15.6%	15.6%
Strong	3.1%	6.2%
Very Strong	0.0%	0.2%

Table 4 below shows an analysis of 1,233 tweets which mention the hashtag “#LOC”. The results show that the negative sentiments towards India-Pakistan debate in #LOC was higher among tweeters (4.5% strong and 0.2% very strong) as compared to the positive sentiments (0%).

**Table 4**

Overall Sentiment Analysis of #LOC (Number of tweets analysed=1,233)

Sentiment Value	Positive	Negative
None	79.4%	57.4%
Weak	15.4%	18.5%
Moderate	5.0%	19.2%
Strong	0.0%	4.5%
Very Strong	0.0%	0.1%

Table 5 shows an analysis of 1,259 tweets which mention the hashtag “#pakindia”. The results show that the negative sentiments towards India-Pakistan debate in #pakindia were higher among tweeters (2.6% strong and 0.6% very strong) as compared to the positive sentiments (0%).

**Table 5**

Overall Sentiment Analysis of #pakindia (Number of tweets analysed=1,259)

Sentiment Value	Positive	Negative
None	79.6%	88.5%
Weak	15.9%	5.7%
Moderate	4.4%	2.5%
Strong	0.0%	2.5%
Very Strong	0.0%	0.6%

Table 6 shows an analysis of 1,179 tweets that mention the hashtag “#AbhiNandan”. The results show that the negative sentiments towards India-Pakistan debate in #AbhiNandan were higher

among tweeters (5.6% strong and 0% very strong) as compared to the positive sentiments (1.4% and 0% very strong).

**Table 6**

Overall Sentiment Analysis of #AbhiNandan (Number of tweets analysed=1,179)

Sentiment Value	Positive	Negative
None	45.0%	50.7%
Weak	32.3%	28.1%
Moderate	21.1%	15.4%
Strong	1.4%	5.6%
Very Strong	0.0%	0.0%

Table 7 shows an analysis of 923 tweets that mention the hashtag “#CitizenshipAmendmentAct”.

The results show that the negative sentiments towards India-Pakistan debate in #CitizenshipAmendmentAct was higher among tweeters (10% strong and 0% very strong) as compared to the positive sentiments (strong and very strong 0%).

**Table 7**

Overall Sentiment Analysis of #CitizenshipAmendmentAct (Number of tweets analysed=923)

Sentiment Value	Positive	Negative
None	65.0%	55.0%
Weak	35.0%	20.0%
Moderate	0.0%	15.0%
Strong	0.0%	10.0%
Very Strong	0.0%	0.0%

Table 8 shows an analysis of 1,084 tweets which mention the hashtag “#Surpriseday”. The results show that the positive sentiments towards India-Pakistan debate in #Surpriseday was higher among tweeters (22.2% moderate and 0% strong and very strong) as compared to the negative sentiments (11.1% moderate and 0% strong and very strong).

**Table 8**

Overall Sentiment Analysis of #Surpriseday (Number of tweets analysed=1,084)

Sentiment Value	Positive	Negative
None	55.5%	88.8%
Weak	22.2%	0.0%
Moderate	22.2%	11.1%

Strong	0.0%	0.0%
Very Strong	0.0%	0.0%

Table 9 shows an analysis of 426 tweets which mention the hashtag “#Kartarpurcorridor”. The results show that the positive sentiments towards India-Pakistan debate in #Kartarpurcorridor was higher among tweeters (17.8% moderate) as compared to the negative sentiments (7.1% moderate), whereas strong and very strong sentiments, both positive and negative have equal value (3.6% and 0%).

**Table 9**  
 Overall Sentiment Analysis of #Kartarpurcorridor (Number of tweets analysed=426)

Sentiment Value	Positive	Negative
None	60.7%	71.4%
Weak	17.8%	17.8%
Moderate	17.8%	7.1%
Strong	3.5%	3.5%
Very Strong	0.0%	0.0%

Table 10 shows an analysis of 749 tweets which mention the hashtag “#freekashmir”. The results show that the negative sentiments towards India-Pakistan debate in #freekashmir was higher among tweeters (8% strong and 0.5% very strong) as compared to the positive sentiments (4% strong and 0.9% very strong).

**Table 10**  
 Overall Sentiment Analysis of #freekashmir (Number of tweets analysed=749)

Sentiment Value	Positive	Negative
None	71.6%	56.6%
Weak	19.7%	14.9%
Moderate	3.5%	19.7%
Strong	4.0%	8.0%
Very Strong	0.9%	0.5%

Table 11 shows an analysis of 898 tweets that mention the hashtag “#kalbhushan”. The results show that the negative sentiments towards India-Pakistan debate in #kalbhushan was higher

among tweeters (3.6% strong and 0% very strong) as compared to the positive sentiments (1.8% strong and 0% very strong).

**Table 11**

Overall Sentiment Analysis of #kalbhushan (Number of tweets analysed=898)

Sentiment Value	Positive	Negative
None	80.0%	30.9%
Weak	16.3%	16.3%
Moderate	1.8%	49.0%
Strong	1.8%	3.6%
Very Strong	0.0%	0.0%

Table 12 shows an analysis of 660 tweets which mention the hashtag “#blackdayforindiandemocracy”. The results show that the India-Pakistan debate in #blackdayforindiandemocracy was neutral in term of sentiments of both positive and negative sentiments having equal value (20% weak and 0% each for moderate, strong, and very strong).

**Table 12**

Overall Sentiment Analysis of #blackdayforindiandemocracy (Number of tweets analysed=660)

Sentiment Value	Positive	Negative
None	80.0%	80.0%
Weak	20.0%	20.0%
Moderate	0.0%	0.0%
Strong	0.0%	0.0%
Very Strong	0.0%	0.0%

Table 13 shows an analysis of 869 tweets which mention the hashtag “#SayNoToWar”. The results show that the negative sentiments towards India-Pakistan debate in #SayNoToWar was higher among tweeters (7.9% strong and 0% very strong) as compared to the positive sentiments (0.5% strong and 0% very strong).

**Table 13**

Overall Sentiment Analysis of #SayNoToWar (Number of tweets analysed=869)

Sentiment Value	Positive	Negative
None	82.9%	68.6%
Weak	8.51%	9.5%
Moderate	7.9%	13.8%

Strong	0.5%	7.9%
Very Strong	0.0%	0.0%

Table 14 shows that the estimated negative sentiments are high in seven hashtags, whereas only three hashtags have estimated sentiments values for positive sentiment (total 9,280 tweets). The overall value of positive sentiments about India-Pakistan online debate is 1.3174, whereas the value of negative sentiments is 1.6398, with an estimated negative sentiment of -0.3224, which shows that the online debate on Twitter regarding India-Pakistan has high negative sentiments as compared to the positive sentiments.

**Table 14**

Average value of negative sentiments (*Number of tweets analysed=9,280*)

Hashtags	Average Positive Value	Average Negative Value	Estimated Negative Sentiments
<i>#LOC</i>	1.2564	1.7145	-0.4582.
<i>#pakindia</i>	1.2484	1.2102	0.0382.
<i>#AbhiNandan</i>	1.7887	1.7606	0.0282.
<i>#CitizenshipAmendmentAct</i>	1.3500	1.8000	-0.4500.
<i># Surpriseday</i>	1.6667	1.2222	0.4444
<i>#kartarpurcorridor</i>	1.6429	1.4286	0.2143.
<i>#freekashmir</i>	1.3690	1.8075	-0.4385
<i>#kalbhushan</i>	1.2545	2.2545	-1.0000
<i>#blackdayforindiandemocracy</i>	1.2000	1.4000	-0.2000
<i>#SayNoToWar</i>	1.2606	1.6117	-0.3511
<i>Overall Sentiments</i>	1.3174	1.6398	-0.3224

## Qualitative Results

Speech Act Analysis confirms that discussion was multi-dimensional, with 37% tweets being Assertive, 12% being Directive, 7% being Commissive, 32% being Expressive and 12% being Declarative. Table 15 shows one example from each hashtag for the five categories of Speech Act Analysis.

**Table 15**

Categorization of Tweets (Number of Tweets Analysed=100)

Speech Act Analysis Categories	Hashtags	Examples of author categorization of Tweets
Assertive	1. #CitizenshipAmendmentAct	1. "Illegal Annexation of Kashmir, Babari Masjid, #CCA #CitizenshipAmendmentAct which excludes Muslims are all targeted towards subjugation of Minorities."
	2. #AbhiNandan	2. "No one can escape from Pakistan not even #Abhinandan or #Kalbhushan. No Mr. India."
Directive	1. #Surpriseday	1. "Let's celebrate the day with a cup of tea, which is indeed fantastic #27 Feb #Surpriseday"
	2. #freekashmir	2. "STOP state Terrorism in Kashmir STOP Fake Encounters in Kashmir STOP Cold-Blooded Murders in Kashmir. #freekashmir."
Commissive	1. #LOC	1. "We must not let the cease fire at the #LoC lull us into a false sense of security. The Indian government has shown many times over, they cannot be trusted and how they will be using this ceasefire to plot and plan against both #Kashmiris and #Pakistan."
	2. #freekashmir	2. "Without resolving #Kashmir dispute, lasting #peace cannot be maintained in the region. #FreeKashmir."
Expressive	1. #HappySurpriseDay	1. "Thank You Pak Air force for such an unforgettable moment #HappySurpriseDay"
	2. #blackdayforindiandemocracy	2. "06 December do you have this idea, you who have broken the dome of the mosque not the building but our hearts have been broken. Your wickedness has no limit #blackdayforindiandemocracy #BabriMasjidDemolition."
Declarative	1. #SayNoToWar	1. "We want peace. We don't want war #SayNoToWar."
	2. #CitizenshipAmendmentAct	2. "Without framing Rules, implementation of CAA is merely a political gimmick. Citizenship on communal discrimination is unacceptable #CitizenshipAmendmentAct #CAA."

Speech Act Analysis of tweets in selected hashtags shows that the tweeters have different arguments in online discussion related to India-Pakistan issues. If the tweeters are expressing anti-India sentiments in the hashtags #CitizenshipAmendmentAct, #freekashmir, #kalbhushan and #AbhiNandan, they are also urging that both governments should respect each other by giving up the craze of hegemony in #SayNoToWar. The debate on Twitter regarding India-Pakistan is more assertive in nature with significant tweets (37%). This shows that tweeters are referring to an already

existing notion or narrative. The tweeters are asserting the involvement of India in terrorist activities in Pakistan in #Kalbhusan, cross border attacks, violation of ceasefire and a hunger of hegemony in #LOC and #pakinda. Arrest of Indian pilot AbhiNandan and the failure of Indian Airforce was discussed in #AbhiNandan. Whereas #freekashmir and #CitizenshipAmendmentAct has an assertive discussion on human rights violation by Indian government and Indian army in Kashmir.

The analysis also shows that the tweeters in Pakistan are more emotive while tweeting about India, with 32% tweets falling in the category of Expressive Emotions of anger, hatred, and disappointment being expressed for India and the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in #CitizenshipAmendmentAct and #blackdayforindiandemocracy. The sentiments of fear, pain, and distress for Indian Muslims and Indian-occupied Kashmir were shared in #CitizenshipAmendmentAct, #FreeKashmir and #blackdayforindiandemocracy. The positive sentiments of pride and happiness were expressed by tweeters in #AbhiNandan and #SurpriseDay, where tweeters from Pakistan were celebrating the success of Pakistan Airforce for shooting down the Indian Airforce fighting Jet.

The analysis also shows that 12% tweets were Directive in nature, where the tweeters are asking to stop the human rights violations in Kashmir in #freekashmir, #CitizenshipAmendmentAct, and #blackdayforindiandemocracy. The tweeters are also celebrating the victory of Pakistan Airforce in shooting down of Indian Air Force fighter and are inviting other Pakistanis to celebrate this success in #SurpriseDay. The 7% Commissive discussion includes the suggestions to resolve the core issues between two countries including Kashmir issue for long term and permanent peaceful relations in #pakindia, #LOC and #freekashmir. Whereas 12% Declarative tweets include discussion on Indian Citizenship Amendment Act in #CitizenshipAmendmentAct where this act is declared as brutal and ruthless, and a violation of basic human rights. The tweeters are also discouraging the war and

hegemony by declaring a desire of peace in #SayNoToWar. They are also declaring India and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi as a terrorist and killer of innocent Kashmiris in #freekashmir, in #CitizenshipAmendmentAct and #blackdayforindiandemocracy.

The overall discussion on Twitter regarding India-Pakistan is more negative and hostile and there was only one pro-India hashtag #SayNoToWar which was trending on Twitter in Pakistan. Only one hashtag #kartarpurcorridor was neutral, where tweeters shared sentiments of happiness and pride for the prevailing religious harmony in Pakistan, but they also expressed the sentiments of fear for the possible cross-border terrorism. The other eight hashtags #LOC, #pakindia, #AbhiNandan, #CitizenshipAmendmentAct, #SurpriseDay, #freekashmir, #Kalbhushan, #blackdayforindiandemocracy were anti-Indian and more negative sentiments were expressed in the online discussion. This shows that on Twitter, the online debate is re-enforcing the anti-Indian narrative of traditional media in Pakistan.

Top trends on Twitter such as #SayNoToWar were the only trend where people were talking about peace between India and Pakistan. On the other hand, #SayYesToWar was also being discussed. Tweeters were also discussing the exploitation of Rohingya Muslims through CAA. In #blackdayforindiandemocracy, the debate is focused on the demolishing of the Babri mosque and the decision of the Indian Supreme Court towards it. The analysis shows that multiple topics have been discussed by social media users in different types of speech. The results also show that discussion on various issues about India was more changed and diverse on Twitter. In all hashtags, the average value of negative sentiments was 1.6398 and the average value of positive sentiments was 1.3174. Thus, the data shows that Twitter media serves as a platform for the common man to express his thoughts and sentiments freely. Speech Act Analysis shows that among ten trending hashtags, six were anti-India and #KartarpurCorridor was a neutral trend in which people were

tweeting about religious harmony in Pakistan. The Speech Act Analysis shows a variety in expressing and sharing thoughts in different categories with a wide range in emotions from positive sentiments of happiness, pride, and joy to negative sentiments of hatred, anger, hostility, and disappointment.

If the tweeters in Pakistan appreciate the peace initiatives of Pakistani government by releasing Indian Airforce pilot AbhiNandan and by opening borders for the Kartarpur corridor, the other tweeters are also criticizing the government of Pakistan for these acts as a surrender to international pressure. Therefore, it was found from the analysis that tweeters were able to express their views even against their own governments to discuss any law or policy that they did not find appropriate. Overall, the analysis implies that social media platforms serve as one of the contributing factors for social change, which gives opportunity to users for freedom of expression and gaining collective support from their online communities.

## **DISCUSSION**

To sum it all up, this study examined how social media, mainly Twitter, shapes public conversation and opinion in respect to the India-Pakistan relationship. To compare the attitudes and opinions stated on Twitter about Pakistan's neighbours to the traditional narrative, the study used a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design. The study highlighted that social media has created a new digital public forum where people can express their thoughts and participate in public discussions without restriction or control (Dahlgren, 2005). Freedom of expression has been significantly impacted by the new communication platforms made possible by the digitization of media. The freedom of speech allowed on Twitter, allows people to share their views more openly.

The results of the study imply that social media, especially considering the India-Pakistan relationship, has grown into an important medium for public conversation and opinion formation. The feelings stated on Twitter turned out to be in opposition to the traditional narrative, demonstrating that social media gives people a platform to freely voice their thoughts, even when those opinions conflict with past voices. Taylor and Narayan (2018) explored in their research that alternate and different narratives are expressed on Twitter. Their study was based on celebrations of Australia Day. The present study has also shown how important it is for individuals and groups to use online platforms responsibly and to encourage thoughtful discussion on issues of common interest.

Based on this study, we can imply that social media can become a potent tool for advancing democratic principles and encouraging citizen participation in decision-making. The study conclusions have significant consequences for decision-makers, media experts, and others working to advance democratic principles and encourage citizen participation in the political process. According to Jensen (2013), politically active citizens also enthusiastically participate in political debate on online forums to promote progressive narratives. However, to prevent the creation of echoes and bubble filters, it is essential to understand the constraints of online platforms and the necessity for responsible use. Echo chambers refer to reinforcement of existing perception by restricting access to diverse perspectives and opinions (Diaz & Nilsson, 2023); whereas, bubble filter, also termed as “intellectual isolation” is a consequence of selected personalized searches based on websites algorithms (Dubois & Blank, 2018).

### **Limitations**

Language barrier was the biggest limitation of the study, as only tweets in the English language were included. Thus, sentiments of tweeters who shared their views in Urdu are not part of the

findings. Although Twitter has a very clear policy regarding the re-tweeting by bots, there is a possibility of the presence of bots in the selected tweets. On Twitter, bots are automated accounts that can send tweets, follow other twitter handles, like and retweet just like humans.

### **CONCLUDING RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study concludes that social media can be used for the promotion of peace between India and Pakistan and can be helpful in solving problems such as communication gaps and hostility. Social media can gather the online community on a particular issue for to help create positive social change and promote social harmony. In fact, social media can become an effective tool in peacebuilding efforts. Based on the findings of this study, the governments of India and Pakistan can also use social media to promote peace. The findings of this research can also be helpful for policy makers in designing social media regulations without restricting freedom of expression and to maintain truthfulness and fairness.

#### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

There is no conflict of interests to declare.

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#### **Ethics and Permissions**

This study has received ethics clearance from the Research Committee, School of Media & Mass Communication, Beaconhouse National University, Lahore.

#### **Data Sharing and Availability Statement**

Data is available upon request from the corresponding author.

#### **Author Contributions Statement**

The authors contributed equally to this study and agreed on the final version of the manuscript.

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