Building Citizens 'Trust in Government Through Twitter: An Alternative of Poor Communication Between Government and Public

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Abstract

Across the world, social networking systems are becoming a major source of interaction between government and people. Governments are utilizing this channel for the provision of information and developing public positive opinion whereby the public can approach government or its officials to make informed decisions. Due to direct communication between ruler and the ruled, chances of transparency, responsiveness, and accountability increase, which ultimately enhances the public level of trust in government. Therefore, the current study argues that uncertain, weak, and hesitant relationships between government and people will negatively affect public trust. Thus, social network systems, especially Twitter can play an alternative role.

It may enable a commoner to interact with his/her representatives without any bureaucratic involvement. In this study, the researchers investigated how the use of an officer's Twitter account for online communication affects Pakistani citizens' trust in their government. We surveyed 390 people who followed a government agency's Twitter account and analyzed the data using structural equation analysis. The study found that the credibility of a leading officer's Twitter feed influenced citizens' trust in the relevant agency and the central government. Trust in Twitter as a governmental medium also positively influenced this expansion of trust. However, the study had some limitations, including a small sample size and insufficient consideration of Pakistani organizational culture factors. It did not examine the relationship between local governments and residents or consider how demographic characteristics affect citizens' trust. Future research should address these gaps and explore the factors that influence citizens' trust in the government, including the expertise, attractiveness, and friendliness of spokespersons.

Keywords: Citizen Trust, Social Network service, Twitter, and Pakistan

Introduction

Democracy can sustain easily where government is accountable and citizen's level of trust on the government is high. The formation of both of the factors is significantly linked with the type of communication between government and public.

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For the last two decades, social network services (SNS) in Pakistan have made it effortless as well as cheap for people to develop relations between each other (Mangi, Soomro, & Malik, 2018). With the passage of time, various political parties have also started to take advantages of SNS (Muzaffar,

Yaseen, & Safdar, 2020). Now, it is fault finding for the government to enhance the level of public trust by communicating directly to people through social media. When compared with traditional media, SNS is much faster, cheaper, influential and biasfree platform for the government to communicate with its citizens (Bruhn, Schoenmueller, & Schäfer, 2012). This platform has already been used by almost every leader of the developed world. For instance, prime minister of the UK (Aharony, 2012) or president of the United States significantly rely on Twitter to spread any information as compared to the electronic or print media (Ott, 2017). Twitter enables the leaders to reach out to the people who actively consume SNS instead of Television or radio. Likewise, various states have adopted the system of direct communication to people including Pakistan, where "spokesperson" appears as the best example. The basic function of the spokesperson is to share the information with people. Throughout the world, these spokespersons are utilizing SNS that enables them not only to propagate information but also to receive timely and healthy feedback from the public. This direct communication between the public and government through Twitter has developed an atmosphere that is close to the fundamental principles of modern democracy. In this atmosphere, governments can easily take reliable and informed decisions. On the other side, users of Twitter can easily hold these decisions accountable and public pressure can bbe developed for ensuring transparency without any bureaucratic involment (Ausserholer & Maireder. 2013). Published literature on the domain has examined the state of governmental Twitter feeds but scant number of researchers has acknowledged public trust in government as an independent variable particularly in Pakistan (Mansoor, 2021). One of the major reasons to consider it as an independent variable is to analyse the level of public satisfaction and expectations in the services provided by the government.

Public trust and new form of governmental media

Researchers of the domain agree that public trust in the government is quite critical for the legitimacy and swift functioning of the government (Mangi, Shah, & Ali Soomro, 2019). It encourages the public to comply with the government and to abide by laws and regulations. Due to the trust, citizens get familiar with the government policies that ultimately increase their attitude

towards e-governance (Myeong, Kwon, & Seo, 2014). Contrarily, informational distance between the ruler and the ruled may cause public distrust (Ihlen & van Ruler, 2007).

To manage public psychological attachment, various steps have been taken by the government across the globe to alleviate informational discrepancies. Information and communication technology (ICT) is one of these steps which have been adopted by the governments to improve communication (Liu & Yuan, 2015). Literature supports the idea that ICT helps governments to provide interactive, efficient and transparent services as well as communication. Specially, social media has fascinated governments to use this platform for influential communication. Due to its high accessibility, transparency and usability, social media has smoothened the way to e-government that is the most popular form of government nowadays (Addo & Senyo, 2021). It is argued that Twitter as a communication platform has successfully increased government to citizens (GtoC) efficiencies such as responsibilities, transparency and cooperation. It is implicitly considered by the researchers who examined Twitter as a user communication platform that public trust in their partner developed because of the exchange of information (Panagiotopoulos, Barnett, Bigdeli, & Sams, 2016). Thus, it can be assumed that the adoption of new modes of communication is playing a significant role throughout the world in obtaining public trust.

The current study is an academic effort to analyze the role of Twitter in developing public trust on government in Pakistan which has been ignored by the studies so far.

Aim and objectives of the study

Published literature highlights that there is a poor and weak relationship between the people and government in Pakistan, therefore, the current study aims to examine it scientifically with the help of public trust. On the basis of this aim, following objectives were targeted:

1. To analyze the relationship between provision of information by government with the credibility of information provider.
2. To measure the relationship between provision of information by government with the credibility of governmental institution (ministry, department or agency).
3. To investigate the relationship between the credibility of governmental institutions and public trust in that institution with social network system.
4. To analyze the relationship between public trust in a specific government institution and public 'trust in government in general.

5. To measure the moderating effect of trust in governmental Twitter on the relationship between citizens' trust on specific governmental institution and trust in government in general.

Conceptual framework and hypothesis development

Provision of information and authority's credibility

In developing trust, public perception regarding the credibility and validity of the information is essential. In order to establish Government to Citizen (G to C) trust, almost every government shares information with the public (Sáez Martín, Haro de Rosario, & Caba Pérez, 2015). Truthfulness, accuracy, completeness and timing are some of the characteristics of the information that government shares (Hassan, Wright, & Yukl, 2014). The government requires providing accessible and reliable information with the public. The elements related to the provision of information by the government through Twitter is divided into few categories. These are; availability (AVTY), accuracy (ACCY), timeliness (TISS), diversity

(DITY), connectivity (COTY), sufficiency (SUCY). Beside these elements, appropriate level

(APEL) of obtaining feedback from a Twitter account of the spokesperson (of a minister or an officer) is recently added by various researchers of the domain. The construct *information provision* has been developed by combining these measurement variables (figure1). Practically, information is being provided through two different Twitter accounts, one is spokesperson's personal account and second is department, ministry or government agency's account which is mostly handled by the authorized person. On the basis of these observations, it can be hypothesized that:

H-1a. Information provision by the government will significantly and positively affect provider's (spokesperson or officer) credibility in his/her individual Twitter account.

H-1b. Information provision by the government will significantly and positively affect credibility of government's department, ministry or institution's Twitter account.

Credibility of source and public trust

An individual's believability which is the outcome of his/her relationship with particular evidence like information reliability is commonly known as credibility. Honesty, expertise, trustworthiness and predictability are considered as the essential elements of credibility of information (Corritore, Marble, Wiedenbeck, Kracher, & Chandran, 2005). For the government's communication through Twitter, two elements are said to be more critical, one is *expertise* (Wei, Cong, Miao, Zhu, & Li, 2016) and the second is *predictability* (Kunneman, Liebrecht, & van den

Bosch, 2014). Mostly, the element of *predictability* is used by the parties in opposition as a counter communication which is based on previous experiences of communication. The expectations of Twitter users regarding governments' efforts for citizen relationship (CIIP), applicability of feedback (APCK) and improvement of relationship (IMIP) in the time to come, are some of the factors that help in the measurement of predictability (Kunneman et al., 2014). Likewise, the element *expertise* highlights communicators' ability to understand the information and knowledge related to it. Present study measures *expertise* as users' feeling regarding the questions that how much government is able to reflect into its policies (ABSS) and information sufficiency (SUCY). In addition, comfort in communication also plays an important role in developing users' credibility. Comfort in communication means the level of convenience in expressing views or information through Twitter. In this study, it is measured as comfortableness in participating on Twitter (CONG).

The construct, credibility of governments' institution/ministry/agency/department to public relationship is constructed through these measurement variables. The credibility of communicator in receiving or spreading information develops form his/her level of attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise. Content of information and image or worth of information provider are considered as the major sources of credibility. Therefore, it can be argued that information provider's image, character, and influence in the government are some of the basic components that originate consumers' attitude toward information (ATIN). Thus, a government minister or officer who is influential in his/her party or institution and has a positive public image will be a strong choice to be elected to communicate with citizens through Twitter. Likewise, citizens' trust may be increased if an influential, expert and trustworthy person spreads information as a spokesperson. Hence, it can be hypothesized that:

H-2a. Credibility of spokesperson (personal account) will significantly and positively affect public trust in government institution (agency, ministry, or department) with social network system.

H-2b. Credibility of government institution (agency, ministry, department's account) will significantly and positively affect public trust in government institution (agency, ministry, or department) with social network system.

Building public trust in government

Durable and reliable relationship of participants originates trust. It is a kind of mutual confidence between the participants (trustee and trustor). This mutual confidence between citizens

and governmental institutions (GOON) develops public trust. Factors such as information contents (INTS), attitudinal change (from negative to positive) (ATGE) and public assumption for improved communication (AION) by tweeting are generally considered as essential components in originating public trust in GOON through Twitter.

Similarly, public trust in government (overall)(PTGT) results from public partial trust in the services provided by the government via Twitter (TSVR). It includes worth, sufficiency, representativeness and competence of the information being provided via Twitter. The constructs, trust in governmental institution (GOON) and public trust in government (PTGT), were developed on the basis of these measurement variables (figure1). Literature supports that public trust in a particular department, ministry, institution, or agency can be expanded to the entire government. Further, it is argued that public utilization of SNS highlights the improvement of specific agencies of government which attracts people to respond. Public responsiveness to specific government agencies is strongly related to the advancement of their trust in government in general. The present study is limited to examining public trust in governmental Twitter (GOER) among SNS. The essential components of GOER are content appropriateness (COSS), accuracy of the content (ACNT), Twitter timeliness (TWSS) and citizens' trust in governmental media in general (TGMG). As discussed above, citizens' trust expands indirectly from a particular governmental institution to government in general, therefore, it is argued that public trust in GOER can also perform as a moderator. Thus, it can be hypothesized that:

H-3. Public trust in governmental institutions (GOON) will significantly and positively affect.
public trust in government (PTGT)

H-4. Public trust in governmental Twitter (GOER) has a significant and moderating effect on the relationship between public trust in governmental institutions (GOON) and public trust in government (PTGT).
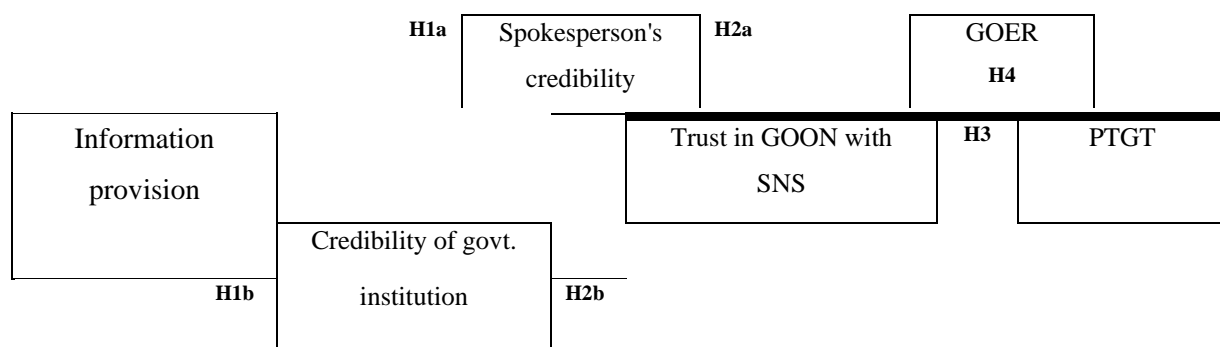

Figure 1. Conceptual model

Note: GOON=*Governmental institutions*; SNS= *Social network system*; GOER=

Governmental Twitter; PTGT=*Public trust in government*; Govt= *Government*

Source: Developed by the researcher

Research Design

This study identified the target participants as Pakistani Twitter users who follow multiple accounts of various governmental institutions on Twitter accounts and accounts of leading officers such as secretaries and spokespersons. Since the users' demographic characteristics can influence their adoption and use of social media services, it was crucial to consider and control these factors during the sampling process. To achieve this, a probability sampling method (Berzofsky, McKay, Hsieh, & Smith, 2018) was employed to ensure that the sample reflected the current distribution of demographic features (e.g., gender, age, education level) among Pakistani Twitter users, thereby reducing sample errors such as self-selection bias and underrepresentation.

To select the sample respondents, this study utilized the Twitter accounts of seven Pakistani government institutions as a starting point and compiled a list of potential candidates who represented the characteristics of the overall population. A message requesting participation in the survey was then posted on the targeted Twitter pages. The survey was conducted online during the period of August 1, to December 30, 2022, employing a five-point Likert scale.

Out of a total of 433 completed questionnaires, some respondents were excluded due to inconsistent or duplicated responses, resulting in 390 valid respondents, which accounted for 90% of the original sample data.

For data analysis, this research employed the analysis of moment structures (AMOS), a covariance-based structural equation modelling technique (Jamil, Rekarti, Briandana, & Audinna, 2019). To determine the extent to which each measurement item was associated with its primary construct compared to other constructs, the study conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using SPSS 24.0.

Finding of the study

In this study, various tests were conducted to assess the accuracy and consistency of the research model. The researchers also used path analysis of a structural equation model to examine the hypotheses (Akar & Mardikyan, 2014). Tests were carried out to determine the convergent validity, model fitness, and discriminant validity (Giacobbi Jr, Tuccitto, Buman, & Munroe-Chandler, 2010). The statistical results align with the expected values mentioned in

Table 1, indicating that the research model is generally valid. Discriminant analysis was used to compare different constructs and their sub-measurements, and all correlation values were found to be lower than the rooted average variance extracted (AVE) values as shown in Table 2. The measurement model demonstrated composite reliability (CR). Significantly, the factor loadings for all items, as indicated by the CR and AVE loading values in Table 3, were found to be significant with p-values of 0.01. Moreover, all six constructs obtained convergent validity as their respective CR values exceeded 0.70. Additionally, since all items had factor loadings higher than the cutoff value of 0.60, the model can confidently establish appropriate convergent validity.

Table 1. Validity and Model fit

	Indices	Findings
Convergent Validity	CR	>0.859
	SFL	>0.689
	AVE	>0.609
Fitness of Model	X/DF	2.859
	GFI	0.889
	CFI	0.959
	NFI	0.961
	RFI	0.941
	RMSEA	0.071
Discriminant Validity	MSV	0.509<0.611
	ASV	0.491<0.611
	R	R <√AVE

Note: CR=Composite reliability; SFL=Standardized factor loading; AVE=Average variance extracted; X/DF=χ^2/degree of freedom; GFI=Goodness-of-fit index; CFI=Comparative fit index; NFI=Normed fit index; RFI=Relative fit index; RMSEA=Root mean square of approximation; MSV=Max shared variance; ASV=Average shared variance; R=Correlation between items.

Table 2. Discriminant Validity

	Information Provision	Spokes' person credibility	Credibility of Govt institution	GOON	PTGT	GOER
Information Provision	0.969					
Spokes' person credibility	0.659	0.980				

Credibility of Govt institution	0.649	0.650	0.980			
GOON	0.670	0.689	0.629	0.969		
PTGT	0.719	0.459	0.479	0.719	0.969	
GOER	0.680	0.409	0.509	0.529	0.759	0.979

Table 3. CR value of constructs

Construct	Measurement	CR	AVE
Information Provision	SUCY	0.759	0.691
	ACCY		
	DITY		
	TISS		
	AIA		
	COTY		
	APEL		
Credibility of government institution	CIIP	0.719	0.609
	APCK		
	IMIP ABSS		
	SUCY		
	CONG		
Spokes' person credibility	CIIP	0.741	0.641
	APCK		
	IMIP ABSS		
	SUCY		
	CONG		
GOON	PSP	0.829	0.789
	ATGE		
	UCG		
	INTS		
PTGT	Overall Trust	0.809	0.769
	TSVR1		
	TSVR2		
	TSVR3		
	TSVR4		
	TSVR5		
GOER	TGMG	0.819	0.791
	ACNT		
	COSS		
	TWSS		

Hypotheses Testing

The findings from our hypotheses testing, as shown in Figure 2, reveal that our research model effectively captures a noteworthy positive correlation between the government's provision of information and the credibility users attribute to government information when conveyed by a high-ranking official on Twitter ($\beta = 0.391$, t = 1.679). Moreover, we observe a similar positive relationship between the government's information provision and users' credibility of governmental information when communicated through an official Twitter account of a governmental agency ($\beta = 0.459$, t = 1.909), as indicated by the path coefficients and t-statistic measurements. Additionally, our model demonstrates significant positive connections between the credibility Twitter users attribute to communication from leading officers and their trust in a government agency using social networking sites ($\beta = 0.539$, t = 1.929), as well as between users' trust in a government agency's Twitter account and their overall trust in the government ($\beta = 0.489$, t = 1.949). However, we find that the relationship between Twitter users' credibility in governmental agency-to-citizen communication and their trust in a government agency using social networking sites is not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.369$, t = 1.049). Lastly, users' trust in Twitter significantly moderates the positive relationship between their trust in a government agency and their trust in the government as a whole ($\beta = 0.059$, t = 1.629).
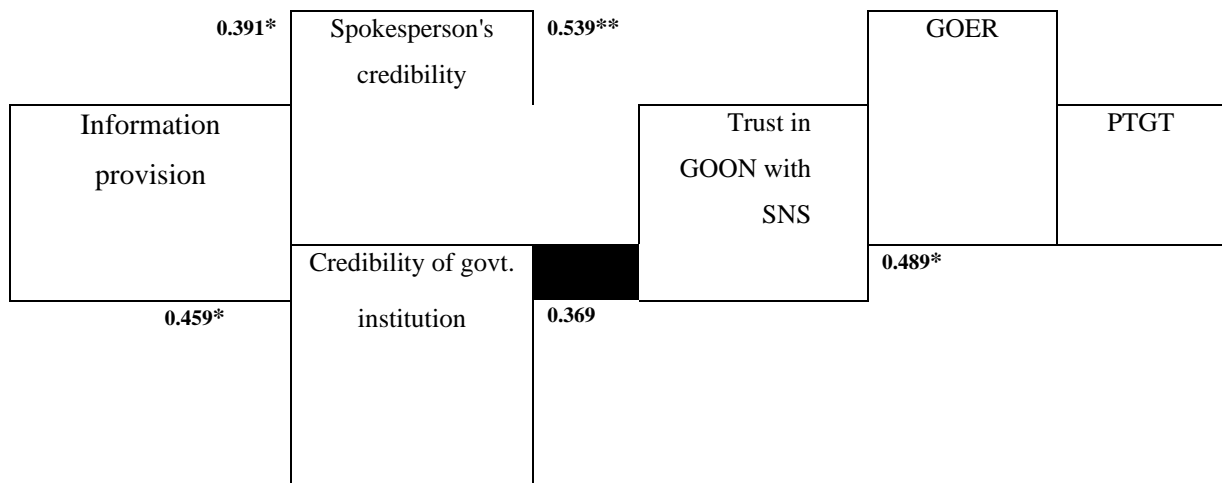

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Source: Developed by the researcher

Discussion

Spokes' person role and public trust in government

This study provides concrete evidence that when a spokesperson effectively uses Twitter, it can enhance the trust of citizens in the officer, as well as in their department and the government as a whole. The research emphasizes that citizens place more trust in the Twitter account of a leading officer who directly responds to and takes responsibility for individual requests, compared to an agency's account. The utilization of Twitter by a leading officer aligns with the personalized nature of social media, as it meets citizens' expectations of an influential and well-informed individual who shares reliable messages and presents themselves through images. The study also confirms that timely and appropriate dissemination of public information, ensuring its completeness and accessibility, contributes to the credibility of the information presented. Additionally, despite the inherent risks associated with cyber theft and security threats, citizens' trust in their communication channels and partners becomes even more important. Previous analyses of governmental Twitter networks assumed that mutual trust between the government and tweeting citizens already existed (Vergeer, 2015), but online relationships are more easily established based on limited information and can be dissolved more quickly than offline relationships. This fragility of online relationships implies that users' Twitter networks do not always guarantee trust in their tweeting partners or the medium itself. Therefore, this research argues that. measuring citizens' trust in their government and the medium is crucial in assessing how they trust their government with a new communication tool.

Before utilizing a government Twitter account, the spokes' person should familiarize themselves with the characteristics of Twitter communications (Thomases, 2010). It is crucial to understand that Twitter's real-time nature can easily lead to the spread of inaccurate information, creating a wrong social perception and reducing the perceived credibility of relevant accounts among the public (Guarino, Trino, Celestini, Chessa, & Riotta, 2020). Our findings indirectly suggest that any misinformation provided by a governmental Twitter post can result in a loss of credibility and trust in the government's Twitter feed. Therefore, the officer should ensure that the content shared on Twitter is based on solid facts and provides credible information. It is crucial for government officials to manage their Twitter communication effectively.

When a proxy manages the leading officer's Twitter account, it is important to delegate this responsibility carefully to a deputy (Lin, Hoffman, & Borengasser, 2013). Our study suggests that citizens' trust in the officer depends on the credibility of the information provided

and the reliability of the provider. If the proxy posts inconsistent or irrelevant messages on behalf of the spokes' person, it can render the agency's Twitter communication ineffective and result in a loss of trust from citizens. During an election period, the spokes' person Twitter messages on political topics can trigger negative communication from rival candidates and their supporters, potentially undermining the trust established through previous reliable tweets (Zompetti, 2019).

Furthermore, the leading officer should aim to provide "informative, short, and simple" messages based on accurate facts to the public on Twitter. With its character limit of 140 letters, Twitter serves as a platform for breaking news and links to other government communication channels. However, the officer should not view Twitter solely as another advertising medium or a means to share personal aspects of their private life with followers.

This can lead to situations where governmental agencies share repetitive information or the officer discloses personal records, both of which can diminish the government's credibility and citizens' trust.

Based on our findings, adopting a "government first, citizens later" approach to Twitter utilization will not foster trust in the government among citizens. It can reinforce the perception that the government evades sincere communication with the public, leading to apathy towards government policies. Government spokespeople should strive for a balanced approach in utilizing various media channels and not overly rely on Twitter. Over- dependence on Twitter can create information and democratic divides when citizens who do not use the platform are not adequately informed by the government. Additionally, relying heavily on Twitter can lead to communication problems by over-representing minority opinions, as the platform tends to reflect the ideas of heavy users and advocates. Therefore, government spokespeople should carefully consider the advantages and disadvantages of
Twitter is used and complements it with other communication
channels.

Conclusion

Democracy observer institutions as well as independent researchers of the domain have shown their concerns about the declining level of public trust in government across the world since the last decade. Literature indicates that trust in government is closely related to public perception about government's efficiency, transparency, and responsiveness. Similarly, the public level of satisfaction from the services being provided by the government is considered

as an essential factor in developing public perception and opinion. In the developed nations-governance is being utilized in order to provide quick and reliable services and to create strong communication with the public. This helps the governments to create positive perception among the public that ultimately enhances their level of trust. In addition, it connects the ruler and the ruled directly that again reduces the chances of public misperception related to the government. Therefore, the current study is an effort to investigate the impact of Twitter on building trust between government and the people in Pakistan. However, the study had some limitations, including a small sample size and insufficient consideration of Pakistani organizational culture factors. It did not examine the relationship between local governments and residents or consider how demographic characteristics affect citizens' trust. Future research should address these gaps and explore the factors that influence citizens' trust in the government, including the expertise, attractiveness, and friendliness of spokespersons.

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