

## **The Perils of E-Governance: Impact of Trump's Tweets within US-Pakistan Relations**

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### **Abstract**

Theory of e-governance postulates the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for delivering information, government services and transactions. It enhances efficiency and effectiveness in the government system through three main elements; improving government processes (e-administration); connecting citizens (e-citizens and e-services) and building external relations (e-society). The global political arena is witnessing an increasing number of leaders expressing their ideas, policies, and sentiments through social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp etc. In this vein, the US President Donald Trump stands out among most world leaders because of his excessive use of Twitter for the domestic as well as international relations. Ever since taking over the office, President has handled thousands of tweets, with many of these influencing the US relations with foreign governments. To this end, this paper is an analysis of Trump's one year (June 2017 to June 2018) tweets, relating to Pakistan, and how they have affected the already deteriorating US-Pakistan relations and broader peace-building process within Pakistan

### **Key Words**

E-Governance, twitter, Trump, Pakistan-US relations, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), social media

### **Introduction**

The Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have spread extensively in 21<sup>st</sup> Century owing to significant vitality and accessibility. With the emergence of the internet and world-wide-web (WWW), the rise of online communication has become a prerequisite of globalized world as it developed newer forms of communication. The systematic online communication opened new ways through social media and online forums which provide complete novel social interactions.

Fifty years ago, no one could have imagined the internet or social media, however the world has caught up with this change as fast as it arrived. Kietzmann et al., (2011) argue that, social media services were first developed in 1978 when the first Bulletin Board System (BBS) was developed. Subsequently, in 1997 the early version of social media was introduced, and 1999 was the year of online live journals

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and blogging. The turn of the century witnessed the introduction of multiple social networking sites, with development of *Myspace*, *Word Press*, *Facebook*, *YouTube*, and *Twitter* etc.

With the passage of time, social media channels have expanded everywhere, people share and exchange their thoughts, views, and ideas. These platforms are growing fast, and have taken social sites, chat apps, microblogs, business network, online forums, and photo/video sharing under one umbrella. The introduction of Apple version of Smart Phones by Steve Jobs, quite literally revolutionized social interactions (Weinberger, 2017). The influence of social media is expanding, and every year the number of social media users is rising. Similarly, Aichner and Jacob (2015), explain that social media users have increased intensely between 2015 and 2017. They further revealed that the penetration of social networking has expanded in North America, Europe and some parts of Asia Pacific. The number of social media users is growing fast. The ease of sharing innovative ideas, information and knowledge, is likely to benefit an increasing number of individuals. Social networking has become a platform that is easily accessible to anyone. These technologies essentially impact the large conglomerates, individuals, political figures and world leaders who interact with each other. The dynamism of social media goes beyond connecting, sharing and learning, since it has completely substituted the 'communication practices', modified 'balance of power' and foremost 'social leadership traits' (Sulaiman, 2014).

Facebook is the most popular social networking site, and Twitter is the most powerful micro blogging platform (Osepashvili, 2014). Twitter claims allowing 300 million monthly active users to compose 280-character messages and convey information to the people (Tumasjan et al., 2010). It is the most visited social media platform and has more than 319 million active users (Molina, 2017). These figures are not fixed and are increasing every day. Twitter has now become an open social media platform for politicians, where they spread their opinions and promote electoral campaigns and political strategies.

Twitter has gained more traction as a platform for real time political debates, with very high profile officials discussing matters of national and international interest openly. World leaders have exceedingly opted to use this platform to interact with their clientele domestically, and with foreign leaders in real time. Strauß et al. (2015) contended that twitter provides a diplomatic platform where top world leaders such as Donald Trump, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Sushma Swaraj, Queen Rania, Pope Francis and many other are actively participating and interacting with millions of followers. In the same way, Wauters (2014) states that Barack Obama has the most followers on Twitter (approx. 43.7 million), Joko Widodo president of Indonesia; (approx. 5 million). Similarly, Pope Francis, the ex-pope of the Catholic Church, has more than 14 million followers across multiple accounts (for different languages).

More recently President Trump stands out among most world leaders because of his excessive use of Twitter for the domestic as well as international relations, and political affairs. Ever since taking over the office, he has handled thousands of tweets, with many of these influencing the US relations with foreign governments. Trump entered the Office in January 2017 and made novel use of twitter ever since. His excessive usage of Twitter, sometimes negatively impacted the US relations with many of its erstwhile allies such as Pakistan. Tracing the usage of twitter by Trump for one year (June 2017-June 2018), this paper endeavors to

understand Trump's obsession with this platform as a governance tool. This research also looks at the ingenious use of an open platform for conducting diplomacy, revealing policy statements and their subsequent impact on international relations and US foreign policy.

### **The Concept of Twitter Governance**

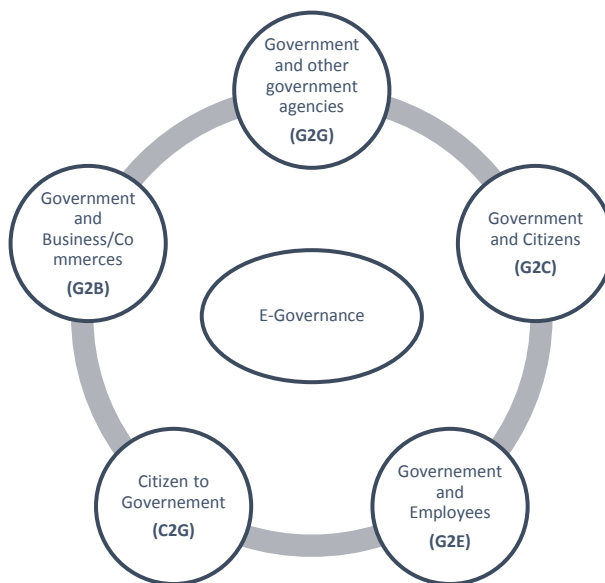
Twitter is a powerful and open social media tool for enhancing modern communications between online users. The platform provides alerts and notifications for different events that may interest a particular user. Bertot et al. (2010) argues the strength of Twitter Governance lies in the ability to unite users with one another and thus promote their activities through electronic means. The growing practice of Twitter depends on how they are combined into networks of citizens and how they interact to spur their participation in public services and administration. This online networking is becoming increasingly influential and making progress in connecting the world. A study by Weeks et al. (2017) shows that worldwide leaders embrace online channels continue to bring new ways of openness through e-governance, that never functioned before. This new trend presents a platform for free communication, and has become a powerful weapon. Twitter has become a prime social media site for top world leaders/politicians, where they prefer to communicate directly with people. They share their daily activities, news policies, press releases, live political debates and important announcements to discuss substantive issues. Palmer et al. (2018) contend that almost 276 heads of state and government, and foreign ministers, in 178 countries, representing 92 percent of all United Nations (UN) member states are active on Twitter.

It further exhibits the intense involvement of world leaders and governments facilitating policy promotion and advancing political objectives. Barack Obama was the first leader who showed his presence on Twitter. His 2008 innovative presidential campaign initiated the idea of e-governance through Twitter, drawing a lot of traction (Tumasjan et al., 2010). Other world leaders who enjoy Twitter popularity include Modi from India, Xi Jinping from China and Putin from Russia to name just a few. Twitter-based e-governance is involved in supporting and promoting top-down connections in a more innovative manner. It is a powerful tool for social mobilization, accountability and promoting all thoughts through tweets. It has proven to be the quickest tool for reporting news, as it is a double-edged sword in creating opportunities and bridging gaps.

Twitter based governance has progressed rapidly in the recent years. It is routinely used by politicians to reach out to the masses; their tweets not only become viral but are also shown on TV as a breaking news. The concept of twitter based governance is not a new trend in either political or academic discourse, as it gained momentum in terms of its meaning? It has now become a useful mechanism in day to day worldly affairs.

### **Theoretical Framework of E-Governance**

The theory of e-government postulates the use of electronic services to integrate ICT for delivering information, government services, and activities to the people through electronic transactions. With the growing trends of ICT, the paradigm has transformed from traditional government system, to an electronic government system.



**Figure 1:** E-Governance Sectors

Figure 1 above shows that the communication in e-governance is sustained through multiple channels and varying degrees of interactions, such as government to government, government to citizen, government to commercial and businesses, government to civil society organizations, and citizens to citizens (Meijer, 2015). The wide range of e-government services emphasize on information technologies to retrieve, transmit and manipulate information, which is beneficial for different sectors. Each e-government sector provides an improved capability of information and services for online communication. The intention is to improve the services of e-governance sectors in different directions and to adopt new technologies of e-governance through trust and utilize potential strengths of citizens (Banday & Mattoo, 2013).

Gupta et al. (2008) in their study explains that e-governance is an innovative system of governance, and many governments have started implementing this because of its speed, efficiency and uninterrupted communication through ICTs. Twitter also acts as a tool for promoting knowledge-based information electronically between citizens and government officials.

E-governance allows for the direct participation of the people, and entails five different sectors of delivering government services: exchange of digital information and accountability between Government to Government (G2G), Government and Citizens (G2C), Government and Employees (G2E), Citizen and Government (C2G), and Government and Business/Commences (G2B). E-governance model introduces new information of communication that makes an important contribution to accomplish good governance goals and reforms, by fostering transparency and by empowering people. The e-governance model has long term plans that impact the democratic governance system by employing ICTs. The ICT supports and transforms governance processes by advanced digital technologies (Kolachalam, 2002). The integration of ICT ensures the delivery of services to the Government and Citizens (G2C). It facilitates people to access information and make

the governments more efficient by playing a crucial role in speeding up the flow of intercommunication between government and citizens (Heeks, 2001). The citizens and the government are the backbone of any form of e-governance, followed by a robust G2B channel that is the commercial communication in terms of sale/purchase of products and services. In the G2C initiative, citizens are facilitated for their interactions with the government and this has been termed 'citizen-centric' (Kolachalam, 2002).

From the above discussion an idea emerges that e-governance is a new development framework that expands the governance. It is fast, secure, and allows social interactions between the government and the public. It permits citizens to communicate with the government, connect with government officials, and decision-making processes (Ghayur, 2006). The potentials of e-governance strategies provide citizens a platform where they get connected with different world leaders, share personal opinions, experiences, and ideas on various matters, *albeit* it has some limitations that restrict its development. One of the major challenges of implementing e-governance is dependence upon four linear stages. Layne and Lee (2001) postulate that these stages include presence, interaction, transaction, and transformation. The entire process is completely transformed and redefined, through interactions between various sectors. Moreover, it addresses policies, political and foreign affairs on the basis of inclusion.

### **Perils of the Twitter E-Governance**

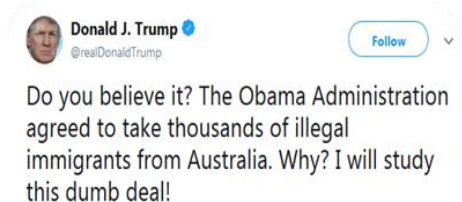
In the light of above discussion on e-governance sectors, the new face of digital governance has been studied by multiple scholars examining the major challenges of e-governance that transform digital services into new dimensions of communication. The new dimensions develop potential prospects for online users through G2C relationship (Perez et al., 2018). The application of ICT in e-governance has been identified by Sarrayrih and Sriram (2015) as a development and deployment regularity platform which helps in the building and re-building of a knowledge based society. The advanced ICT tools in e-governance provide widespread information and services that face many risks, issues and challenges. One of the major issues in the transformation of government from the traditional to electronic approach is that it is not only about the transformation of e-governance but also about introducing new models and processes.

The frequent use of twitter by President Donald Trump of US has introduced a new ominous phase in the history of Twitter E-governance. He uses twitter as a platform to sustain and express his political power and communication. President Trump expresses such strategies that constructs a 'positive image' of Trump and 'negative image' of others (Jackson, 2016). Twitter is the fastest tool for reporting news.

Donald Trump decided to use this platform through his account @realDonaldTrump and became active in March 2009, accumulating 53.2 million followers, making him the 18th most popular account on the social media (Piksar, 2018). Trump uses twitter as a platform where he declares most of his political discourses. His tweets mostly criticize politicians, media persons and world leaders. Many media conglomerates like CNN, CBC, and BBC routinely rebroadcast his tweets. On January 3, 2018, Zanotti (2018) noted that "It's not only Pakistan that we pay billions of dollars for nothing, but also many other countries, and others ..... As

an example, we pay the Palestinians Hundreds of Millions of Dollars a year and get no appreciation or respect.” Similarly, Zanotti also reacted to Trump’s tweet and stated, “will someone from his depleted and food starved regime please inform him that I too have a Nuclear Button, but it is a much bigger & more powerful one than his, and my Button works!”

Twitter based e-Governance is a vital form of communication from the perspectives of Trump, he knows very well about the role of media strategies in his politics. Lecher (2018) argues that according to the Drudge Report, Brad Parscale who was the digital director of his election campaigns in 2016, handled Trump’s online campaigns, acted as a ghost writer for his tweets and built a website for him as well. Kentish (2017) on the other hand, contends that Dan Scavino, Director of social media and Trump’s assistant, manages his social media accounts and shared content that depicts conspiracy, false agendas and allegations. He admitted that with Trump’s consent he promotes fake stories on twitter. Trump has Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts which are controlled by his managers. He surprises many domestic/global leaders, the traditional media, and the public through his tweets. As a President, his Tweets have targeted international allies most recently Australia, Mexico, Pakistan and prowled the international arena which is clearly recognized as the abuse of power (Anderson, 2017). His online engagements and personal attacks of messages exhaust Twitter moments, and amplify his personal grievances against those who are against his administration’s priorities. The Washington Post reported about Trump’s criticism on the deal of the resettlement issues of refugees in the US between Canberra and former president Barack Obama (Solomon, 2017). He reported that it a dumb deal in which Obama’s administration decided to take 1,250 asylum seekers from Australian-run detention centers on the Pacific islands of Manus and Nauru (Solomon, 2017). After his Twitter post Sean Spicer, the 28<sup>th</sup> Press Secretary stated about Trump’s consent to honor the agreement between the former President and Australia over refugee’s issues. It shows the drawbacks of e-governance, on the face of it he honored the deals while on twitter he called it the worst deal (Solomon, 2017).



**Figure 2:** Image of Trump’s Tweet at Time Newspaper (Solomon, 2017)

Gutsche (2018) noted that Trump’s administration faced serious criticism on the policies of separating immigrant children from their parents. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) noted 429 different cases where parents were separated from their children, ranging from toddlers to young teenagers. Trump levelled his unconfirmed claim by stating that many of the immigrants from Central America were gang members, and linked them to ‘animals’. According to Sonnad (2017) his offensive language and tone could be an effort to achieve a certain political goal. In the initial days of his Oval Office, no one paid attention to his tweeting habits. But gradually his tweets were noticed as offensive. Undoubtedly, Twitter is a powerful online forum, a modern and an influential way of communication for many leaders.

The e-governance theory also postulates a huge potential in pursuing an innovative way to reach out to the people.

### **US-Pakistan Relations (Historical Context)**

Historically the relationship between two countries has never been smooth, and has always been marred by many ups and downs. The nature of US-Pak relationship is multifaceted and tenuous, and Jaffrelot (2016) has identified the relationship as 'clientelism'. By 1955, Pakistan aligned itself with the US in SEATO (South-East Asia Treaty Organization) and CENTO (Central Treaty Organization). This connection was further boosted during the Afghanistan Saur Revolution in December 1979 (Kronstadt, 2004). The invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union and the role played by the Pakistan military was decisive. Resultantly, by the end of 2001, there were four million Afghan refugees; UNHCR reported in 2017, that 1.3 million registered Afghan citizens still remain in Pakistan (Piyasiri & Eisazadeh, 2006).

In 1989, USA left the region leaving behind the burden of millions of Afghan refugees, and more importantly the burden of Taliban, born out of the Russo-Afghan War. Refugees spread across the country and many of them got involved in several delinquencies (Hussain, 2005). On the other hand, the emergence of Taliban as the rulers of Kabul provided another prospect to the foreign militants, as well as Pakistani religious militants to enter Afghanistan. These militants' intensified terrorist activities in Pakistan and it became a major victim of terrorism. After the 9/11 attacks, the Bush administration coerced Pakistan into US-Afghan war or Pakistan would be "bombed back to stone age" (Musharraf, 2006, p. 201). During the past almost two decades, Pakistan has been fighting against terrorists, it helped US in the Soviet war; faced criticism and got labeled as terrorist, even though it had been supporting the USA in its global war on terrorism.

During Hillary Clinton's tenure, she also gave a direct warning to Pakistan "you can't keep snakes in your backyard and expect them only to bite your neighbors"(Myers, 2011). Similarly, the Obama administration also warned Pakistan and its security, because he wanted to bring a change in the traditional American approach. Robert Gates, the defense secretary between 2006 to 2011, explained a dismal picture of the US-Pakistan relationship with a serious trust deficit (Armitage et al., 2010). The Former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton and CIA Director David Petraeus, visited Pakistan and interpreted their concerns to stop giving support to the terrorists in Afghanistan (Jenkins & Godges, 2011). In the same way, US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta used harsh words against Pakistan (Cobb, 2011). In such circumstances, Pakistan suffered enormously in the war against terrorists. Soon after Trump's assumption of office, his tone was different but it changed in a short span of time (Taylor, 2017).

### **Impacts of Trump's Tweets on Pakistan**

After the 9/11 attacks, Pakistan was confronted with a plethora of problems, the unremitting and callous struggle between the terrorists and the state of Pakistan, caused immense losses. Pakistan suffered physically, economically and socially since 9/11, and its intensity increased in the first decade of 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Fani, 2005). President Trump's provoking tweet, after such a protracted conflict and immense losses, mischaracterized the contributions of Pakistan. Trump (2018) on his Twitter account stated,

‘The US has foolishly given Pakistan more than 33 billion dollars in aid over the last 15 years, and they have given us nothing but lies and deceit, thinking of our leaders as fools. They give safe heaven to the terrorists we hunt in Afghanistan, with little help, No more!’

Despite the fact that Pakistan started several military operations and took actions against terrorist organizations, it hardly received any appreciation from USA. Even the attitude of America’s new administration towards Pakistan’s image and perception is full of anti-Pakistan rhetoric. ‘Since becoming president, Trump made a mockery of Pakistan in an Islamic summit in Riyadh’, delivered a critical Afghanistan policy, and proclaimed that Washington has placed Pakistan ‘on notice’ (Shahid, 2018). His tweets against Pakistan deteriorated the Pakistan-US relations as he claimed that Pakistan had given safe haven to the terrorists.

On Twitter, he began with the war of words instead of establishing peace. Reich (2018) claims that his tweets deliver a unique insight as they are an inevitable part of his presidency, he resorts to the war of words. He recently stated, “My use of twitter is not Presidential it is modern day presidential” (Ott, 2017). In January 2018, Trump’s first tweet criticized Pakistan that exposed drawbacks of e-governance. Sampath Kumar (2018) stated that the Defense Minister Khurram Dastgir-Khan reacted as well, he said, “Pakistan is an anti-terror ally of the US and provided the American military with land & air communication, military bases that decimated Al-Qaeda”.

His tweets sparked criticism and created unrest in the country. Pakistan summoned the US Ambassador and called an emergency meeting of its national security team. The tweet also ignited protests from hundreds of members of the Difa-e-Pakistan Council, a coalition of Islamist parties in Karachi (Sampathkumar, 2018). Wit (2016) said, “Pakistan has now become a new North Korea for the US, the outburst of tweets from Trump’s twitter account sounded like war bugles”.

Prior to the twitter analysis phase, an informal canvassing of tweets was conducted to examine different patterns of Trump’s tweets. For this, Twitonomy, a subscription-based service was used to download the datasets for openly accessible tweets. Twitonomy is a useful tool to analyze the number of retweets and likes per tweet. The number of responses on Trump’s tweets regularly changed making it difficult to get an accurate number because of large number of replies and participants. Twitonomy has some limitations to measure the number of people who reply to the tweets, and have not been incorporated in this analysis. The staff members of Trump are the ones who have access to his twitter handle. In 2017 Trump endorsed Pakistan and its forces over the rescue of a Canadian-American family who was held hostage by the Taliban (Kassam & Janjua, 2017). He immediately took to the twitter, and praised the Pakistani authorities for their cooperation.

However, after four months, at the beginning of 2018, Trump started the New Year by setting a more offensive tone of relationship between Pakistan and USA. His first tweet on Pakistan was shocking as, he used threatening words and challenged the role Pakistan has played in Afghanistan. Growing pressure, criticism, blame games, and a threatening environment, all reduce the chances of any improvement in bilateral relations. Former U.S. President Barack Obama, in his major 2009 speech on Afghanistan policy, had used harsher words against Pakistan, as



compared to Trump (Ahmad, 2010). But over his years in office, Pakistan-US relations remained fairly well.

Through an analysis of Trump's tweets, this paper highlighted the key perils of e-governance which criticize governments, organizations, and media. Trump tweets about a number of subjects including policy making, self-praising, criticism and personal attacks. On the basis of existing research, this paper contends that e-governance through the social networking platform plays a prominent role in shaping peoples' political attitudes. The general perception of e-governance is multifaceted, because it is not about networking or a website for information access, rather it is about transforming the fundamental relationship between the government and the public.

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