

# Analyzing the Role of Hashtags and Trends as Digital Rhetoric in Pakistani Political Discourse on Twitter: A Study of Top Trends

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## Abstract

Twitter has become a sensation in the political discourse in recent times. It has become a source of controversies regarding misinformation, polarization, and molding public opinion. These controversies usually arise during elections in different countries, including the U.S., Australia, Brazil, and Russia. An episode of a similar nature was detected in Pakistani politics as well when the sitting prime minister, Imran Khan, was ousted by a no-confidence vote in April 2022. Following this development, a trend (Imported Government, unacceptable) broke all records. It lasted over ten days as the top Twitter trend and was used in millions of tweets from Pakistanis worldwide. A similar hashtag (Desecration of Masjid-e-Nabavi, Unacceptable) received plenty of attention as well. These hashtags and trends proved vital in swaying public opinion and portrayed qualities of a genre with a communicative purpose, participants, context, limitations, and rhetorical structure. This paper analyses hashtags and trends as a genre using steps and design published in Amy Devitt, Mary Jo Reiff, and Anis Bawarshi's textbook, *Scenes of Writing: Strategies for Composing with Genres* (2004). The data used for this qualitative study is taken in tweets with the concerned hashtags using purposive sampling.

**Keyword:** Pakistani Politics, Role of Hashtags, Digital World, Twitter Trends

## Introduction

In Pakistan, recent political events have led to a surge in Twitter hashtag wars between political parties. This phenomenon is relatively new in the country, as Twitter is less prevalent than platforms like Facebook and Instagram. Twitter primarily serves politicians, celebrities, and significant political figures, allowing them to engage with their followers and maintain a specific public image. Other social media outlets serve similar purposes, but Twitter is the primary platform where political figures directly share their views. The staff of these leaders manages some of these political accounts, but primarily, they are operated by the politicians themselves. Twitter has become an essential tool for politicians during election campaigns. The most controversial political drama on Twitter surfaced with the suspension of former U.S. President Donald Trump's account. The account was suspended after some of his tweets were removed due to accusations of misinformation and presenting opinions as facts. The subjects of these tweets ranged from misinformation about COVID-19 to the Capitol riots in New York and encouraging violence

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through his tweets, which mobilized his followers. After suspending his account, Trump established his own social media platform, which he named 'Truth-social.' All of this occurred after he lost the 2018 election to his Democrat opponent, Joe Biden. He alleged rigging and foreign interference, which further incited his fervent supporters. These supporters organized protests nationwide and stormed the Capitol building, resulting in violent riots nationwide.

### Objective

1. To examine hashtags and trends as digital rhetoric in Pakistani political discourse on Twitter.
2. To analyze the role of imported government and the desecration of Masjid-e-Nabavi in shaping the narrative and discourse on Twitter.
3. To understand the communicative purpose, contribution, and limitations of this Genre in the political discourse of Pakistan.

### Background

In Pakistan, a situation akin to this arose after the sitting Prime Minister of the ruling party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Imran Khan, was removed via a no-confidence motion in the national assembly. This motion was backed by a coalition comprising the majority of political parties in Pakistan, including the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML N), Pakistan People's Party (PPP), Jamiat-e-Ulama Islam (JUI), Mutahida Qoumi Movement (MQM), and several smaller parties, along with independent members of the assembly. Before his ousting, Imran Khan held various public gatherings addressing supportive crowds. These gatherings were organized in response to the opposition's narrative on inflation, fuel prices, and his decision to visit Russia on the day it attacked Ukraine, which drew criticism from the European Union and the U.S. This discontent escalated when Pakistan chose to remain neutral and not condemn the Russian attack in the United Nations resolution against Russia's Invasion.

In the subsequent days, Imran Khan continued his public addresses while the opposition accelerated efforts to mobilize the coalition parties and secure enough votes for the no-confidence motion. On March 27th, Imran Khan unveiled an envelope purportedly containing a confidential diplomatic message. It claimed that if the no-confidence motion failed, Pakistan would face consequences for its neutrality in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. This disclosure sparked a public controversy, with some accepting the Prime Minister's statement while others, including seasoned journalists and opposition parties, contested the existence of such a letter. Initially, Imran Khan did not disclose the sender's identity, but later, in a televised address, he unintentionally mentioned the United States of America as the source of the diplomatic message. A few days later, the no-confidence motion succeeded, leading to Imran Khan's removal as Prime Minister, with Shehbaz Sharif from PML (N) taking his place.

Imran Khan vowed to uncover the foreign conspiracy he believed had brought this government to power. He accused coalition parties and members of his party who voted against him in the no-confidence motion of horse-trading and conspiracy. He labelled the government as "imported" due to alleged foreign interference. Following this address, social media, particularly Twitter, was inundated with posts and tweets featuring the hashtag "نامنظور\_حکومت\_امپورٹڈ" which translates to "Imported government, Unacceptable." This hashtag trended for over ten days, an unprecedented phenomenon in Pakistan where trends typically fade away and may resurface based on the situation.

According to Twitter sources, the hashtag was used 34.9 million times from April 9th to April 16th, followed by 45.2 million tweets from April 16th to April 21st in 2022. Before Imran Khan's

removal, public sentiment regarding his leadership and competence was at an all-time low. Aside from a few staunch supporters, most had lost faith in him and were eager to give other leaders a chance. However, as soon as Imran Khan adopted an anti-US narrative, his popularity surged. Twitter users who had previously criticized his policies and perceived inability to control inflation suddenly embraced the hashtag *نامنظور\_حکومت\_امپورٹڈ*, and his support base proliferated. This narrative attracted new followers, as accusations of U.S. interference in sovereign nations like Pakistan were not new. Imran Khan positioned himself as the underdog, garnering even more sympathy and support. *"نامنظور\_حکومت\_امپورٹڈ"* became a nightmare for opposition parties, dominating social media comments sections. PTI was accused of using bots to maintain the trend, leading to a countertrend where PTI supporters and journalists affirmed their authenticity with "Not a Bot."

Similar hashtags were introduced with slight modifications to counter the trend, but PTI's social media team exposed this tactic. These trends, with only one character different from the original, such as *نامنظور\_حکومت\_امپورٹڈ*, and the English version "#Imported\_Hukoomat\_Namanzoor," aimed to dilute the original hashtag's usage. The emergence of *#نامنظور\_حکومت\_امپورٹڈ* was followed by other hashtags like *#نامنظور\_نبوی\_مسجد\_توپین*, sparked by alleged PTI supporters chanting slogans of "chor (thief)" in Masjid-e-Nabavi. It was disowned by PTI leadership and Imran Khan. This hashtag war among political parties was unprecedented in its scale.

This article explores the dimensions, members, content, purpose, and limitations of this newly emerged hashtag genre in Pakistan's political discourse. The data analysis will focus on tweets featuring various hashtags from political leaders and party supporters involved in this hashtag war. The selected tweets will be gathered through purposive sampling, encompassing three different facets of this discourse.

1. *#نامنظور\_حکومت\_امپورٹڈ* used by PTI leaders and supporters
2. The variants of *#نامنظور\_حکومت\_امپورٹڈ* propagated by the opposition.
3. "Not a Bot" tweets in response to PTI followers' accusation of using bots for the trend.

Counter hashtags by the opposition, including *#نامنظور\_نبوی\_مسجد\_توپین*. This qualitative Study aims to analyze this Genre's communicative purpose and its communicative purposes. The research questions that stimulated this research are the following.

Question 1: What is the communicative purpose of this Genre in the political discourse of Pakistan?

Question 2: Who are the members of this Genre, and what do they contribute?

Question 3: What are the limitations of this Genre?

## Literature Review

The use of social media for political gain has developed and evolved in the last decade. All social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and the rest, were created for socializing. Hashtags were also a part of that domain and still exist for socializing purposes on various platforms. However, somewhere along the way, politicians and strategists started recognizing the potential of social media for polarizing the masses on controversial topics. Political slogans used by political parties back when the internet was in its birthing phase turned into hashtags. It ranges from global hashtags like #metoo, #Blacklivesmatter, and pro-life to local ones, as discussed earlier in the introduction.

Regarding social media, polarization refers to divergence in a more general context around assorted topics, though politics is central (Bakshy et al., 2015). The researchers took the labor-intensive and time-consuming route to label the popular hashtags. In this context, Romero et al.

manually classified hashtags into eight predefined categories to investigate information distribution trends. Following their subject categorization, Jeon et al. experimented with creating a hashtag recommendation system. In addition to creating communities of common interest through simple content filtering and sorting, hashtags are considered in the context of group polarization in online political communication (Sunstein, 2017), and recently, an intense effort has been devoted to shedding light on the relationship between hashtags and political polarization. Political polarization, fake news-producing journalists, hate-mongering citizen journalism, and unregulated social media activity are all examples of post-truth settings where individuals no longer respect the truth. According to previous studies, social media prioritizes sensationalist information, regardless of whether it has been fact-checked or comes from a reputable source. Political actors have a potent set of instruments for computational propaganda when junk news is backed by automation, whether through dissemination algorithms that platform administrators cannot fully explain or through political bots that push the material in a preprogrammed fashion. During the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election, computational propaganda proliferated. Countless instances of disinformation were spread online to deceive voters or profit. Several media publications have examined how "fake news" may have helped Donald J. Trump win. Bulut and Yörük (2017) found that political division in Turkey is exacerbated by Twitter trolling (which they said was orchestrated by the government). Lai et al. (2015) explored political division by focusing on the "Le Mariage Pour Tous" reform in France and conducted a data analysis among the recovered tweets using #mariagepourtous. The use of social media by governments and politicians is also explored in the context of political division and extremism (Hong & Kim, 2016; Hong et al., 2019). Yurtcicek Ozaydin and Nishida (2021) studied Turkey's political fragmentation and echo chamber dynamics by focusing on political youth groups on Twitter. Twitter alone cannot be used to represent the media or public opinion; instead, it is necessary to understand how social media, such as Twitter, interacts with the larger media ecosystem (Chadwick, 2017). Bot detection is a prominent research issue because of its widespread use and influence on social media content. For instance, supervised machine learning algorithms have been proposed using user-based information such as account age, user verification, and the number of followers and followed. The geo-location element was the most useful for identifying bot users among the user-based features. For identification on Twitter, Anwar et al. utilized an unsupervised learning strategy. The feature set, including the number of daily tweets, retweet percentage, and daily favorite count, was used to construct k-means clustering using data from the 2019 Canadian elections.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The researchers made use of the Mediatization theory to accomplish this Study. Mediatization theory has its roots in communication and media studies, with scholars attempting to understand the increasing influence of media in various aspects of society. The development of mediatization theory can be traced back to the 1970s and 1980s. It originated from scholars like McLuhan and Innis and has developed through works by German theorists like Kittler. The concept gained prominence with Lundby's book, arguing that media have become autonomous institutions shaping social processes. Scholars also explore media logic, the mediatization of politics, and the impact of media on everyday life. This theoretical framework analyzes the intersection of mediatization theory, digital rhetoric, and political discourse on Twitter in Pakistan. The research explores the role of hashtags and trends as catalysts for shaping discourses and public opinion. By drawing on mediatization theory, which emphasizes the influence of media on social and political processes, and digital rhetoric, which focuses on persuasive communication in digital spaces, this framework

provides insights into how hashtags and trends impact political discourse on Twitter in Pakistan. *Mediatization theory* is the process through which media become central to the functioning and organization of social life, influencing and transforming multiple aspects of society and individuals (Krotz, 2007). It is a comprehensive framework investigating the reciprocal relationship between media and culture, exploring how media technologies, practices, and discourses shape social, cultural, and political structures and vice versa (Lundby, 2014).

### **Mediatization Theory and Digital Rhetoric**

Mediatization theory offers a lens to understand the influence of media in political processes. This framework posits that social media platforms like Twitter have become autonomous media institutions, playing a critical role in shaping political discourse through the dissemination of content, networking possibilities, and the amplification of voices (Lundby, 2009). Digital rhetoric encompasses the study of persuasive communication strategies in digital environments, including social media platforms (Charland, 2006). The convergence of mediatization theory and digital rhetoric allows for a comprehensive analysis of how hashtags and trends function as digital rhetoric in political discourse on Twitter.

### **Hashtags and Trends as Catalysts of Discourse**

Hashtags play a pivotal role in organizing and mobilizing discussions on Twitter. They are digital tools that aggregate and connect content related to a specific topic or issue. Trends, on the other hand, represent the most popular and widely discussed topics at a given time. Hashtags and trends can shape political discourse by focusing attention, framing issues, and influencing public opinion (Tandoc, 2020).

### **Digital Rhetoric and Persuasive Strategies**

Digital rhetoric employs various persuasive strategies to influence public opinion and shape discourse. Regarding political discourse on Twitter, these strategies can include emotion, humor, storytelling, and appeals to identity and values (Kennedy & Karr, 2018). Hashtags and trends facilitate the dissemination and propagation of persuasive messages, allowing political actors to engage in digital rhetoric by strategically crafting and promoting certain narratives.

### **Mediatization and Political Communication**

The mediatization of politics has transformed the nature of political communication. Politicians now navigate the media landscape, employing various communication strategies to engage voters and secure their support (Esser & D'Angelo, 2019). Mediatization theory enables researchers to analyze how political messages are framed, constructed, and disseminated in the media, as well as the influence of media logic on the overall political narrative.

### **Trends in Political Discourse and Agenda**

Trends, as popular topics on Twitter, have the potential to shape political discourse by setting the political agenda. When a particular hashtag or topic becomes trending, it captures the attention of a broader audience, including media outlets, thereby amplifying its reach and influence. By leveraging these trends, politicians can frame and shape political narratives, creating a sense of urgency or importance around specific issues (Larsson & Moe, 2012).

## Media Logic in Politics

Mediatization theory suggests that media have inherent logic that shapes and structures political processes. Media-centric practices, such as soundbite journalism, image-based political campaigns, and 24/7 news coverage, have increasingly become integral components of contemporary politics (Stromback, 2008). Media logic in politics refers to how media influences political communication and decision-making, impacting the agenda-setting power of politicians and shaping public opinion.

## Methodology

Hashtags and trends are communicative events that serve a purpose. It can become an individual genre with its participants, readers, writers, structure, content, rhetoric, and limitations. Recent events in Pakistani political discourse and the worldwide use of hashtags and trends on Twitter have increased the scope of this feature to become a genre. The steps and design published in Amy Devitt, Mary Jo Reiff, and Anis Bawarshi's textbook, *Scenes of Writing: Strategies for Composing with Genres* (2004), were used to elaborate on this statement and to develop hashtags and trends as a separate genre. A thorough analysis of the recent tweet war between PTI and the opposition parties is conducted. The purposive sampling technique was used to gather data from tweets published by the leaders of various Pakistani political parties, their representatives, and their supporters on social media with hashtags. This technique was used because millions of tweets with the same hashtags were published, and the purpose of this article was to analyze the structure and communicative function of this hashtag genre. For that purpose, 40 tweets were selected as data with the concerned hashtags. Ten tweets per hashtag were selected based on the categories of tweets that will be analyzed. Those four categories are:

1. #نامنظور\_حکومت\_امپورٹڈ used by PTI leaders and supporters
2. The variants of #نامنظور\_حکومت\_امپورٹڈ were propagated by the opposition allegedly.
3. "Not a Bot" tweets in response to PTI followers' accusation of using bots for the trend.
4. Counter hashtags by the opposition, including #نامنظور\_نبوی\_مسجد\_توبین.

This study is qualitative as it concerns public opinion regarding the political discourse and molding it, which is subjective. This subjectivity allows the political party to put forward a strategic narrative that aids in campaigning and coming to power. Allenby (2017) posits, "Narratives, often implicit, are the core of identity, and construct and validate meaning for the individual." Imran Khan and his party pushed their Anti-US narrative, and #نامنظور\_حکومت\_امپورٹڈ was one of the tools that were used to garner this narrative in the masses. PML(N) and their coalition parties countered this narrative by portraying PTI and its supporters as anti-Islam as they accused PTI and its followers of not being respectful of the holy place, so they pushed this narrative by using the hashtag #نامنظور\_نبوی\_مسجد\_توبین which translates to (Desecration of Masjid-e-Nabavi, Unacceptable). The opposition also tried to counter the hashtag #نامنظور\_حکومت\_امپورٹڈ by launching similar hashtags like #نامنظور\_حکومت\_امپورٹڈ which has one different alphabet if compared to the original trend and the same trend in English alphabets, "#Imported\_Hukoomat\_Namanzoor," was introduced as a variant as well.

## Analysis

### Hashtags and trends as a genre

A genre is a communicative event with a purpose and a structure. Genre analysis is a method of analyzing a kind or style of writing to learn more about its norms, expectations, purpose, and intended audience. Genre analysis is a tool for understanding the expectations and responses of members of a discourse community, identifying certain genre norms, and determining their rhetorical consequences. The steps below were adapted from Amy Devitt, Mary Jo Reiff, and Anis Bawarshi's textbook, *Scenes of Writing: Strategies for Composing with Genres* (2004), to study this Genre of hashtags and trends.

- 1: Collect Samples of the Genre
- 2: Describe the Rhetorical Situation of the Genre
- 3: Identify the Patterns of the Genre
- 4: Analyze the Meaning of the Patterns

This Genre will be analyzed by the parameters of this design and judged upon these four steps.

### Sampling

Samples of the given Genre were collected from Twitter as tweets and added to each section individually. These samples include tweets with hashtags and trends that are the subject matter of this paper. These tweets were published by members of the affiliated political parties, journalists, and ordinary people who support these parties. These four sections contain ten tweets with the hashtag and trend.

### Describe the Rhetorical Situation

This step comprises four elements in the form of questions and statements:

- Settings: Where does the genre show up? When and how do you utilize it? How does this genre relate to other genres?

Answer: This genre is linked to social media like Facebook, Instagram, and especially Twitter, which is a platform that provides people the opportunity to communicate with users of all kinds, including politicians, celebrities, journalists, writers, and people from every social class. Hashtags and trends are generated for support or opposition to an event that interest users of these social media platforms. This genre is a communicative event to inform and persuade the masses, like a newspaper, op-ed, news headlines, and other communicative events.

- Subject: What issues, themes, concepts, and so forth does this genre address? What exactly are people talking about when they utilize this genre?

Answer: Hashtags and trends are generated by every kind of news, which might be a debate on social media or a calamity that urges people to express their opinions. The topics range from leaked videos to invasions of a country like the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, new diseases like the coronavirus and monkey pocks, social events like the Oscars or Met Gala, political events like the US elections, or anything that is happening around the world. Trends are local and international, and both of these trends show up on these platforms, depending upon the interests of the users and the attention they get. People express their views and criticism and take sides on controversial issues by publishing their tweets with hashtags.

- Participants: Who is familiar with the genre?

The users of these social media platforms are the most familiar with the genre, as they see and use hashtags and trends to communicate their thoughts. When a particular trend or hashtag garners

extraordinary attention from users, it sometimes gets published as news on different channels, websites, and newspapers, which informs the recipients of that news about this genre.

*Writers:* Who are the authors of the writings in this genre? Is it possible to have several authors? What are their responsibilities? What qualities do writers in this genre need to have? What are the conditions under which writers create the genre (e.g., in groups, on a computer, in a rush)?

*Answer:* The authors of these tweets and trends are the users of these social media platforms. A piece of writing becomes a trend when multiple people use the hashtag, and the number of those people determines its spot on the trends list. The responsibilities of these users vary from hashtag to hashtag. Some hashtags are created to spread misinformation, which the Trump Campaign was accused of; some are created and propagated for defamation, like the ones used by actress Amber, who heard followers malign her husband Johnny Depp as a wife-beater; and some are created to celebrate or mourn an occasion like the New Year or terrorist attacks. Some are created to push a political agenda. The writers need to use the trend in their tweets along with their thoughts, which requires them to have a social media account and a device with internet access to connect them to the platform. This genre is created with computers and devices like smartphones.

*Readers:* Who are the readers of this genre's texts? Is this a genre with several types of readers? What are their responsibilities? What qualities do readers of this genre need to have? When do readers read the genre (for example, at their leisure, on the go, or in waiting rooms)?

*Answer:* The readers of this genre's text are social media users with accounts on these platforms. This genre has every kind of reader, as the world is a global village now, and it is almost impossible to survive without a social media presence in this day and age. The responsibilities of these readers depend on their proclivities; they decide whether they want to promote the trend by giving their opinions on the matter or ignoring it. The readers must understand the concept of hashtags and trends to comprehend this genre. Since the arrival of smartphones, texts of this genre can be created, read, and promoted from anywhere with an internet connection.

• *Purposes:* Why do people write in this genre, and why do people read it? What are the goals of the genre for the individuals that utilize it?

*Answer:* This genre aims to create a discourse by introducing a topic as a hashtag. They use this genre if the discourse engages and the participants want to share their thoughts and opinions on the trend. People read the texts in this genre because that is one of the purposes of creating a social media account. It connects people worldwide and engages them in a discourse that makes them a community.

### **Identify the Patterns**

What characteristics do the genre's samples have in common? For instance:

• What kind of content is usually included? What is not allowed? What happens to the content? What kinds of illustrations are used? What evidence is acceptable (personal testimony, facts, Etc.)?

*Answer:* Content related to the current hot topics is usually included in this genre. The topics can be of any nature, as discussed above, regarding the writers of this genre. Everything is allowed in this genre as long as it engages multiple people in meaningful discourse. Trends are usually in the form of phrases like #metoo, #نامنظور\_حکومت\_امپورٹڈ, or in the form of entire sentences like #I\_stand\_with\_pak\_army. The words are usually separated using the underscore "\_" symbol or written as complete sentences with no spaces. Evidence of all kinds is presented, some of which is true, while others are published to spread misinformation. That includes pictures, videos, written statements, and all other forms of digital evidence, but they are not a part of the hashtag or the trend; they are a part of the tweets that publish that information along with the hashtag.



- What rhetorical devices are employed? What appears to appeal to logos, pathos, and ethos?

Answer: All rhetorical devices are used in the tweets, along with the hashtag. It includes advertising a solid moral character appealing to emotions, logic, and reasoning. PTI initiated [#نامنظور\\_حکومت\\_امپورٹ](#) over its accusations of conspiracy and interference. This hashtag was used in numerous tweets by his supporters and his party members that were praising the moral compass and dignity of Imran Khan (ethos), his contributions to the nation in the form of the World Cup victory, and building a welfare hospital in his mother's name (pathos), and logical reasoning that included the incompetency of his opponents and his speech at the UN against Islamophobia (logos). These rhetorical devices are used in the rest of the hashtags to promote an issue, raise awareness, and persuade people towards favorable decisions by the trend makers.

- What is the structure of the genre's texts? What are the components, and how are they arranged?

Answer: The trends comprise the topic words the trend makers want to promote. These topic words are initiated with the hashtag symbol '#,' and the words are combined by using the underscore '\_' sign instead of spaces or no spaces at all like #metoo and [#نامنظور\\_حکومت\\_امپورٹ](#).

- What are the most common sentence types in the genre? How long have they been there? Are they straightforward or intricate, passive or active? Do the sentences differ? Do they have something in common?

Answer: The trends are complete sentences, phrases, and topic words from various contemporary issues upon which the discourse is built. It has always been that way on Twitter. They are primarily straightforward, as they want other users to have clarity about the subject matter. The trends used by the users in their tweets are identical, but the contents of the tweets are different, depending on the proclivities of the users.

### Analyze the Meaning of the Patterns

What can we learn about the genre and its context from these rhetorical patterns?

What significance do these patterns have? What can you learn about the acts in the genre by looking at the patterns? What counterarguments do you have to the patterns?

- What must participants know, believe, or comprehend to enjoy the genre?

Answer: Participants must have a basic understanding of the nature of hashtags, trends, and tweets. Upon reading all the trends in the trends list, the participants can share their opinions and beliefs regarding the trend they want to use in their tweets, making their experience on the social media platform more meaningful and wholesome.

- Who is allowed to participate in the genre, and who is not?

Answer: Every social media platform user can only participate in the genre if Twitter authorities find the tweets concerning the hashtag against their policy.

- What roles does the genre encourage or discourage for authors and readers?

Answer: The genre encourages Twitter users to share their thoughts on the trends and become a part of the discourse, and it allows the readers to see all the tweets regarding the topic under that specific trend. The discouraging role of this genre is the irrelevant tweets published by authors to reach a larger audience with the popular trend.

- How do the genre patterns convey values, beliefs, aspirations, and assumptions?

Answer: The number of tweets with the concerned hashtag gives people an idea of the issue's magnitude. [#نامنظور\\_حکومت\\_امپورٹ](#) broke all records with millions of tweets for more than ten days, which showed the outrage of the people regarding the issue. It also displayed the beliefs of Twitter users regarding the controversy and shed light on the assumptions and aspirations of Pakistanis worldwide.

← Thread

**Shireen Mazari** @ShireenMazari1 · Apr 21  
U r having a memory lapse - we had 5 women in our cabinet too & 3 were directly elected - 1 from Balochistan, Zubaida, 1 from sindh Fehmida & 1 from DGK who beat the Leghari tumandar, Zartaj, Senator Sania & myself on reserved seat! So why excitement only now suddenly except bias

**Nighat Dad** @nighatdad · Apr 19  
After seeing 5 intelligent women in the cabinet, many Pakistani men have been manipulating hysterically what women empowerment should look like while ridiculing the ones who made it to the cabinet. Little do they know, their stature is larger than this petty commentary of yours.

251 2,757 6,380

**Shireen Mazari** @ShireenMazari1  
#امپورٹڈ\_حکومت\_نامنظور

2:33 AM · Apr 21, 2022 · Twitter for Android

1,637 Retweets 41 Quote Tweets 2,231 Likes

**PTI** @PTIofficial  
Karachi walon, you've outdone yourself! Today the Nation has proved they stand with their leader @ImranKhanPTI! #امپورٹڈ\_حکومت\_نامنظور #RevolutionBlackedOut

Watch on Twitter

11:57 AM · Apr 10, 2022

9.6K Reply Share

### Analysis of top twitter trends in Pakistani political discourse after the ousting of Imran Khan #امپورٹڈ\_حکومت\_نامنظور

← Tweet

**Arshad Sharif** @arsched  
میرے بیارے پاکستان کی شناخت سی این این پر دوبارہ کرپشن اور موروثی سیاست کے حوالے سے کروانی گئی اور نئی حکومت کو سیلیکٹرز کی سپر سیکینڈ حکومت کہا گیا۔  
پاکستانی قوم غیرت مند ہے مگر شرم تم کو نہیں آتی۔۔۔

#امپورٹڈ\_حکومت\_نامنظور

#ImportedGovtNotAcceptable

Translate Tweet

← Tweet

**All Muhammad Khan** @All\_MuhammadPTI  
علی تو آخر تک کھڑا رہا کی کیونکہ " علی " کا کام ہی آخر تک کھڑے رہنا ہے!  
آپ بتائیں کیا آپ بھی پاکستان کی خاطر @ImranKhanPTI کیساتھ آخر تک کھڑے رہیں گے  
??????

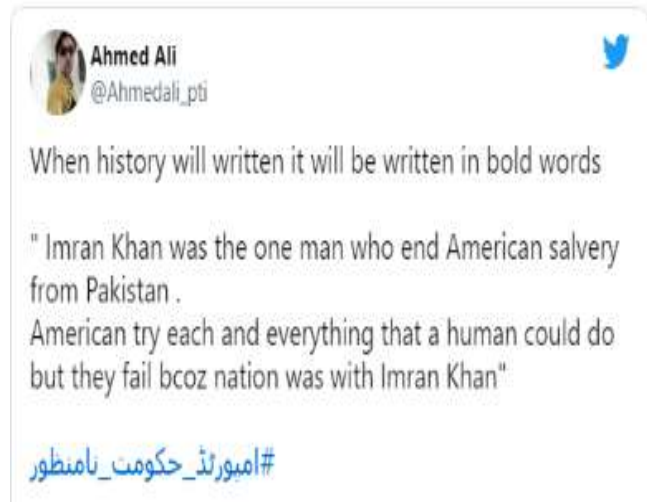
Mianwali Jalsa

#امپورٹڈ\_حکومت\_نامنظور

Translate Tweet



Following Pakistan's no-confidence vote and the ousting of ex-Prime Minister Imran Khan, a hashtag was created on all social media platforms criticizing the existing administration and how it came to power. According to the Twitter binder, 106,433,419 tweets were posted with this hashtag, which makes it the most significant trend in Twitter's history. Foreign participation in Pakistani affairs began to be mocked. It was first intended to criticize the present government, but



it is currently being used to debate various issues such as democracy, the legal system, and governance. This trend was seen in 25 nations, making it one of the most popular. The trend was popular on many social media platforms but got the most attention on Twitter. This hashtag was not merely used for propagating the party's narrative; it became a mission, a slogan that has to be chanted to claim that you are a free Pakistani. The tweet may have been mundane, like professing love for their leader or taking on the political scenario in Pakistan. The trend stayed at the top of the chart for over ten days, which made the opposition parties uneasy as they thought they were losing the social media war. All the opposition parties mobilized their social media cells to develop strategies against this hashtag, but nothing could break the momentum of this trend. People who were not even posting about political situations started using this hashtag as it brought their tweets more audience, which is the goal for most social media users.

### Variants of #امپورٹڈ\_حکومت\_نامنظور



AR Rahman @SERahman95 · May 21

How on earth you can arrest her for this stupid charges, how you will justify this and you will find no place to hide and don't run away now.

We are right behind @ShireenMazari

@ImaanZHazir

#ReleaseShireenMazari

#امپورٹڈ\_حکومت\_نامنظور



Syed Ansar Ali @SyedansarPTI · May 20

Mariam Nawaz hints at dissolving the assemblies in coming days while addressing to Sargodha jalsa.

Kiya hua #khanshab ka pressure bardasht nhi horaha? 🤔

#ImranKhanForPakistan

#امپورٹڈ\_حکومت\_نامنظور





Raza Olakh @RazaOlakh · 5h

"Yes they are puppts"

#امپورٹڈ\_حکومت\_نامنظور #حقیقی\_آزادی\_مارچ



Amir Khan @amirkhann05 · Apr 12

#Imported hukoomat Namanzoor



Moin Uddin @MoinUdd02177958 · Apr 14

#imported hukoomat namanzoor



Moin Uddin @MoinUdd02177958 · May 7

Amreeka ny Pakistani qaum ko Pakistani army chief ke zariye shakast de di

#IMPORTED HUKOOMAT NAMANZOOR #



Farah L Baloch @FarahL.Baloch1 · Apr 23

Replying to @AnwarLodhi

Adliya andhi, behri hai awam ki nahi sunti sirf Shareefs ko sunti , dekhti aur Un k liye "kuchh bhi " ker sakti hai, phir" Aaeen qanoon " jae bhaara me.

#imported\_hukoomat\_namanzoor



Ali Khan @iam\_Ali\_Khan · May 20

Unbelievable crowd Yarr multan has made it's decision that they are with their. #Captain #ملتان\_جلسہ #امپورٹڈ\_حکومت\_نامنظور



Khadija Mir @KhadijaMir11 · Apr 27

#Imported\_hukoomat\_namanzoor



Ch Fawad Hussain @fawadchaudhry · Apr 26

مریم نواز کے لاہور کے جلسے میں تین سے پانچ ہزار لوگ شریک ہیں، اور باتیں ایسے کر رہی ہیں جیسے مینار پاکستان کا جلسہ ہے؛) مانگے ناگے کی حکومت کتنی دیر چلے گی؟ عدالت سے مغرور، پاکستان سے مغرور اور اب الیکشن سے مغرور لیڈر صرف بھگوڑا ہی کہلاتے گا  
#امپورٹڈ\_حکومت\_نامنظور



As #امپورٹڈ\_حکومت\_نامنظور kept growing, a few strategists from the opposition parties, mainly PML(N), produced a unique solution to send down a few duplicates into the hashtag warzone to neutralize the number of tweets with the original trend. This was a wise strategy as many people copied the duplicate trends and pasted them in their tweets instead of writing them or confirming them before publishing the tweet. The PTI social team noticed a decrease in the tweets with hashtags, and awareness tweets were released by the official sources of PTI and some journalists and social media activists on Imran Khan's side in this digital battle. The duplicate tweets and their

recognizing characteristics were propagated throughout the internet, which stopped the opposition's strategy in its initial steps.

These duplicate trends slightly changed the Urdu alphabet of the original tweets. One example of these trends is [#امپورٹڈ\\_حکومت\\_نامنظور](#) in which the /z/ sound is replaced with a soft /t/ sound by substituting the second last alphabet of the last word in the hashtag. Another example of these duplicate trends was the English Alphabet version of the same trend; “#Imported\_Hukoomat\_Namanzoor.” These two and a few other versions substantially decreased the number of tweets with the original hashtag that broke all records.



“Not a bot” Tweets After the governing PML-N alleged that the PTI is utilizing Botnets to produce coordinated spam activity to artificially enhance their trends against the government led by newly elected Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, I am "Not a BOT" became one of the top trends on Twitter. Following Imran Khan's departure from power, PML-N Vice-President Maryam Nawaz said that the PTI's "criminal ring" led by former Prime Minister Imran Khan was conducting a smear campaign on social media against state institutions. In a series of tweets, the ruling party leader said that a small group of individuals propagated the damaging campaign and "lies" about a foreign plot using hundreds of false accounts and bots. PTI officials and supporters resorted to Twitter to

dismiss the PML-N leader's suggestion that their social media reaction to the government was



unnatural. PTI supporters from all occupations, including journalists, actors, PTI members, the leadership, and the official account handles of PTI, trolled the leadership of PML-N over the accusation and published tweets, confessing that they are not bots and they protested Imran Khan and the arrival of the imported government.

### #توبین\_مسجد\_نبوی\_نامنظور



On 28<sup>th</sup> April 2022, At the invitation of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Miftah Ismail, Shahzain Bugti, Marriyum Aurangzeb, Khawaja Asif, Chaudhry Salik



Hussain, Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, and Mohsin Dawar went to Saudi Arabia, led by the. The current prime minister of Pakistan, Shehbaz Sharif. During their visit to Masjid-e-Nabavi, a group



of Pakistanis started chanting 'Chor (thieves)' at a few delegation members, including Maryam Aurangzeb and Shahzain Bugti. The members were rushed out of the situation, but it pushed PTI and its allies into deeper waters. Before the visit, Sheikh Rasheed Ahmad, the head of the Awami Muslim League and a staunch ally of Imran Khan, warned the opposition that they would be welcomed with insults everywhere they go, including Saudi Arabia.



On the premise of this statement and the occurrence of similar incidents with the members of the opposition on different occasions, PTI was accused of orchestrating this incident at the holiest of



places for Muslims all around the world, which gave rise to the hashtag *#نامنظور\_نبوی\_مسجد\_توبین* (Desecration of Masjid-e-Nabavi, Unacceptable). PTI leadership blamed the incident on the people's frustration, which the imported government caused, the conspiracy, inflation, corruption cases on the leadership, and horse-trading, along with a brief condemnation through which they disowned the incident and its perpetrators. The trend was used excessively by members of opposition parties, leaders, and their followers, which finally broke the momentum of *#نامنظور\_حکومت\_امپورٹڈ* because PTI could not make tall claims about morality and decency in the wake of the events that transpired. The incident became controversial later as the people shown in the video circulated excessively throughout social media with the hashtag *#نامنظور\_نبوی\_مسجد\_توبین*, chanting slogans, were claimed to be insiders from PML (N) by some sources. However, the hashtag had proven its purpose, and the long-standing hashtag, *#نامنظور\_حکومت\_امپورٹڈ*, was no longer the top trend.

## Conclusion

The analysis of various trends within the current Pakistani political discourse on Twitter reveals a profound transformation in the use of hashtags. No longer confined to mere social media trends, they have become potent tools for political parties to shape public opinion. The allegations surrounding the manipulation of trends, such as *#نامنظور\_حکومت\_امپورٹڈ* and *#نامنظور\_نبوی\_مسجد\_توبین*, underscore the recognition of their potential by political strategists. The emergence of countertrends further emphasizes the significance attached to this facet of Twitter, once considered a platform for casual online engagement.

The "Not a Bot" declarations from prominent figures across various spheres reflect the gravity with which the Pakistani populace perceives these hashtags. This discourse, observed globally in events like Trump's campaign, Australian elections, Brazilian politics, and even within the Kremlin, highlights the strategic use of hashtags and trends to influence public sentiment. This nascent communication genre holds immense promise, potentially evolving into a significant force in the field. However, it carries inherent risks, as it can be harnessed to spread misinformation and divert attention from critical issues. The prospect of its misuse in the future remains a looming concern. To fully unlock its potential, it must be employed for its original purpose: fostering unity and enabling constructive discourse on diverse issues. With responsible usage, this genre stands poised for substantial growth and a positive impact on communication.

## Recommendations

The research conclusion could be informative, based on the research study, it is recommended to further analyze the use of hashtags and trends in Pakistani political discourse on Twitter, specifically focusing on the topics of "Imported Government" and "Desecration of Masjid-e-Nabavi." This will provide valuable insights into the role of digital rhetoric in shaping public opinion and discourse in this context.

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