

**FROM MEMES TO MOVEMENTS: HOW TIKTOK ALGORITHMS
AMPLIFY YOUTH ACTIVISM IN PAKISTAN'S 2024 ELECTIONS****Shabir Solangi****Shabir Solangi**

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Email: solangi808@yahoo.com**Abstract**

In 2024, the unprecedented rise in youth political activism was observed in the country as the elections became more political than ever as the youth took to TikTok. This working paper will look at this by discussing what Auer et al. refer to as the affordances of algorithms in regard to the promotion of youth-centered activism through TikTok as a means of transforming the discourse around digital politics. Based on the literature on media ecology theory and algorithmic activism (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Gillespie, 2018), the proposed research investigates the collective action of youth content producers who co-opted the aesthetic formats on social media (memes, lip-synchs, duets) to present issue awareness, voter registration, and protest messages. An ethnographic study was done on 2,000 politically-marked videos of TikTok videos shared in January-July 2024, and 40 semi-structured interviews were done with the youth creators aged 18-29 who had been sharing political content on TikTok in Lahore, Karachi, and Peshawar. Due to quantitative findings, a powerful connection with algorithms (likes, shares, completion rate) and contents that combine humor and civic messaging may be drawn. Qualitative knowledge shows how content creators bend platform rules to find a way to make a statement without being censored. In our discussion, it is discovered that TikTok is more than a content-delivery platform, as we have found that it is also a political arena where users, mainly the young activities are vested with authority in determining stories, visibility, and energy. The results pose severe concerns to digital political communication in the spaces mediated by algorithms, and they demand more accountability by the platforms on election days (Tureck, 2015; Freelon et al., 2020).

Keywords: TikTok, underage activism, Twitter-as-Politics, and the Pakistani election, Internet activism, meme-based culture, and control on platforms

Introduction

The digital space has become a critical politics and civics arena through the effect of generational and technological changes on democracies located in the Global Souths. These changes are especially evident in such countries as Pakistan where political agenda is becoming consequently influenced by young citizens who use mobile first technologies and participatory media environments. The number of young citizens of Pakistan under 30 is more than 64% (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics [PBS], 2023) of the overall population, which means that the impact that young population can shape outcomes in the political arena is immense, which is nowadays redirected toward such a digital application as Tik Tok.

The TikTok which is viewed as a platform of entertainment and the various trends of dancing has grown into a powerful political platform, a way of educating the masses, and a platform of activism. The political content generated during the 2024 general elections in Pakistan on the platform grew in terms of youth involvement and a majority of the content was created in the localized idioms, vernacular humor, and aesthetic forms that are unique to the platform. The viral hashtags such as Vote2024, YouthForChange, and NaYaPakistan appeared on the users of the platform in their “For You” Pages (FYP), which gives us a sense of a particular mix of the meme culture and mobilization (Shahbaz & Funk, 2021). This latter element is particularly important as TikTok is open to more emotional and expressive engagements, unlike more text-based media platforms like Twitter, whose algorithmic curation, visual forms of storytelling, and remix culture on YouTube allow more expressive forms of communication and thus suits a young and frustrated electorate that has been fed up with old-order politics and is creatively savvy to navigate the internet.

The affordances of participation that include lip-syncing, duets, and viral challenges of TikTok allow young people to repackage political content in exciting forms. These phenomena are useful in conveying a civic message because they are more non-aggressive and striking than a protest or a comment (Zulli & Zulli, 2022). In addition, the focus on engagement instead of follower number in the algorithm perspective creates a kind of perceived meritocracy system in which relatively unknown creators can gain a lot of reach-which gives politically conscious young individuals tools to shape discourses beyond the traditional gatekeeping structure of the media sphere (Burgess & Green, 2018). This interaction does not only redefine how the media producers and consumers relate, but also replaces the logic of political persuasion and mobilization through media.

This is the case in the context of Pakistan and Pakistani society where mainstream media are commonly subject to censorship and press restrictions (Freedom House, 2023). TikTok enables young people to express themselves in the civic sphere in a comparatively fluid and decentralized manner. As opposed to Facebook and Twitter, which can be more monitored and incorporated into elite representations, Tik Tok is a platform where its mobile-first, fleeting content enables expressing subtle, coded dissatisfaction, which is more difficult to notice and silence (Tufekci, 2017). Because of that, young activists often resort to platform-native aesthetics, which allows them to cipher their political critique in culturally specific, algorithmically advantageous terms, i.e., through satire, parody, and visual metaphors. In one example, rather than openly condemn the political elite, creators can present comical sketches that, without mentioning inflation rates, unemployment rates, or voter suppression, still manage to refer to these issues, being both topical and safe at the same time.

Academic coverage of TikTok in Pakistan has not gained adequate scholarly coverage, in spite of previous research having discussed the role of Facebook and Twitter in elections, protests and issue-based campaigns in Pakistan thoroughly (Ali & Fahmy, 2013; Hassan, 2021; Qayyum & Mahmood, 2022). The world has also witnessed the emergence of a small literature that starts to consider how TikTok facilitates the practice of a kind of algorithmic activism (Medina Serrano et al., 2020; Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2019), especially in the United States and Southeast Asia, yet knowledge on this topic is very limited in South Asia. This is a serious gap considering the fact

that the platform is fast growing in the region and any thing central to youth culture.

This paper aims at filling that empirical and theoretical gap by investigating the role that TikTok played in influencing the participation of youth in the Pakistan elections of 2024. Particularly, it considers the way young people leverage the affordances of platforms to create civic awareness, inspire their peers to action, and circumvent a growing number of prohibitions against digital free speech through: remixing trending sound, adapting viral formatting, collaborating with micro-influencers, etc. With mixing of algorithmic rationality and localized politically inclined messages, Pakistan youth have shown that there are creative methods of circumventing digital and institutional limitations on free expression.

Literature Review

In the last ten years, the concept of algorithmic mediation has become the theme of the political communication studies. Researchers have been questioning more and more how social media algorithms determine what people view and how it is shared and whose opinions are promoted (Gillespie, 2018). This has been the case in relation to platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, especially on the topic of electoral interference, echo chambers, and false information (Tufekci, 2015; Tucker et al., 2018). Nevertheless, TikTok with its, by now, explosive worldwide expansion and its large following among youth audiences now, only recently has started to attract academic scrutiny in terms of its political usage.

The approach taken by TikTok is unlike the previous social networks. Instead of content being spread through followers, TikTok has an obscure algorithm in determining what to promote on the For You Page, using engagement indicators like completion rate, comments, likes, and shares to drive the content promotion (Cotter, 2021). The shift towards a system of digital influence is the fundamental reconfiguration of the networked virality to algorithmic virality (Kaye, 2022). Consequently, it can be very practical and allows also low-followership users to reach a great amount of people day, provided that their content fits within the logic of the platform algorithm-wise, therefore being an attractive environment to be active in by young activists.

Tik Tok has become a very important source of youth-related civic engagement on the global level. In the United States, the platform caused havoc during the 2020 Tulsa rally of Trump via a mass organizing activity of ticket reservations and satirical videos (Lorenz, 2020). Thailand and Philippines youths have also utilised TikTok to initiate anti-corruption at the political front and campaign and spread awareness on elections in Southeast Asia (Cruz & Dizon, 2023). Although they are criticized in terms of misinformation and surveillance, such examples illuminate the ability of the platform to provide a ground of decentralized and creative types of activism that could break innovative circles of political expression (Medina Serrano et al., 2020).

In this piece of work, two closely connected theoretical frameworks were mainly used, which are Media Ecology Theory and Connective Action Theory. The concept of Media Ecology, put forward by Neil Postman (1970), stresses the point that media and its contexts define how people perceive things, act, and are organized into a society. When applied to the case of TikTok, this theory aids in cognizing how the technical and aesthetic affordances have predisposed the

character of the political expression on TikTok in favor of the short, visual, emotionally captivating formats rather than deliberative or argumentative discourse.

That is complemented with the Logic of Connective Action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013) that introduces a framework with which the contemporary activism with the use of digital tools operates beyond the borders of conventional organizational frameworks. Whereas collective identities were achieved through the joint leadership (in the case of previous social movements), connective action is personalized with a dominant focus on content coupling, which is made possible by digital platforms. This theory will be very applicable when considering Pakistani youth activism in TikTok as individuals generate salient discourse on the platform using meme culture, satire, and short storytelling as the central frameworks of discourse, not formal political groups.

Political engagement on TikTok Methodologically, the research on political engagement on TikTok is in its early stages and has been developing quickly. One of the first investigations of video material on Tik Tok during elections in Indian states was by Raj and Mandal (2022). The authors made a video content analysis to follow the pattern of political discourse, aesthetic tactics, and response to political communicators on Tik Tok. Similarly, Cruz and Dizon (2023) used a mixed-methods design in the Philippines, involving the fusion of digital ethnography with semi-structured interviews of youth activists on how political messaging and strategizing are appropriated to fit platform conventions. Medina Serrano et al. (2020) used computation in the study of political hashtags and user activities in TikTok in Western settings and therefore focusing on the role of attention metrics in the spreading of content. The findings indicate that often creators tailor their content to address both their viewers, and the algorithm, i.e. they use trends of popular sounds, edits with quick cuts, and jokes to get more attention.

As much as the research about the political affordances of TikTok has gained increased attention, there is still a lot to fill regarding the field, especially in South Asia and Pakistan. The political communication in Pakistan has been mostly focused on Twitter and Facebook (Ali & Fahmy, 2013; Hassan, 2021; Qayyum & Mahmood, 2022), namely elite language and discourse, political party plans and actions, and state supervision. TikTok has been dismissed extensively as an arena of levity or nonpolitical entertainment, even though it is already becoming politically relevant. This academic blind spot is helpful especially because the platform was able to find an audience with the lower and middle-income young people- who have been mostly disadvantaged in the mainstream politics. In addition, very minimal studies have considered the algorithmic character of content dissemination in TikTok within the socio-political context of Pakistan (particularly during the occurrence of sensitive times such as elections). As demonstrated by some studies (Saeed, 2019), youth political behavior was discussed in general and little has been written on how young Pakistanis use platform logic to their fullest political potential by undermining censorship mechanisms.

This includes the description of trends in video communication, type of content, and digitalizations of algorithms. It also contributes to the international research by providing empirical evidence of a non-Western, technologically repressive environment, therefore, filling the gaps of geographically diverse explanations of algorithmic activism.

Research Objectives

Within the framework of the study, the following goals are followed by:

1. To understand how the algorithm of TikTok affects the existence of the youth activism content in Pakistan. What is the impact of the TikTok algorithms on the agenda, coverage and success of the youth activism on elections in Pakistan 2024?
2. To find out the content approaches of Pakistani youth activists on Tik Tok and how they modify to the conventions of the platform, use humor, maneuver beyond the blocks, and interacts with other creators.
3. To analyze the perceived effects of TikTok-based activism on the electoral participation in the structure, specifically its perception by creators and viewers of the intersection of online presence and offline political action.

The need to fill the gap between technical analysis of algorithmic-based systems and having qualitative knowledge on youthful manifestations in politics inform these aims.

Research Question

1. How do structural and strategic relations between Connective Action Theory and Algorithmic Gatekeeping influence civic participation?
2. In what ways do algorithms determine the visibility of content, and how does this impact civic engagement?
3. How do users adapt to or leverage algorithmic mechanisms to enhance their participation in civic activities?

Theoretical Framework

The current research paper provides a multi-theoretic background that combines the Connective Action Theory and Algorithmic Gatekeeping. The Connective Action Theory (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013) can be applied to describe the behavior of individuals who are digitally networked and involved in loosely organized campaigns that create personalized content to distribute in order to communicate collective political issues. Such a manner is particularly applicable to such platforms as TikTok, where group orchestration occurs very infrequently and many virulent instances evolve due to the personal creativity of individuals and cannot be planned out as the result of institutional campaigns.

This is supported by the theory of Algorithmic Gatekeeping (Napoli, 2019) that focuses on the design of a platform that determines whether content is exposed or not. It questions the effect of the obscure machinery of algorithmic curation on who talks, who listens and whose activism is important. The combination of these two frames makes it possible to discuss the process of searching and bargaining for algorithmic restrictions that Pakistani youth exercise by claiming political power in a nuanced way.

Methodology

This research article has exploited the convergent mixed-methods research design because it

includes both quantitative video analytics and the qualitative narrative of interviews. The triangulation of macro-level trends in engagement patterns with how content creators feel about the process would add to both the validity and context of the results, as advocated by mixed-methods approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). This design is especially applicable in the studies of social media as these areas lie in the intersection of digital trails and the experiences of humans (Marres, 2017).

The reason to select this design is based on the recent studies related to political expression through the TikTok app, especially regarding the similarity between the Global South contexts to India and the Philippines (Raj & Mandal, 2022; Cruz & Dizon, 2023), where these authors applied content and interview analyses to study the intersection between digital culture and political action. Since the content on TikTok is evolving and can be momentary, the combined methodological perspective allows better comprehension of the interplay between algorithmically increased visibility with strategic content production.

The sampling of mandatory 2,000 TikTok videos that are publicly available on the Internet was conducted between January and July of the year 2024. The choice of videos was made due to the political hashtag of the Word Vote2024, Youth for Change, Naya Pakistan, and Election Humari Bhi. The hashtags were identified by conducting a frequency analysis of trending hashtags on the discovery page of TikTok and confirmed their trend using third party trend following tools including Tokboard and Trendinalia.

To facilitate the element of representativeness, the stratified sampling methodology was employed to allow representation of the content at various stages of the election cycle, pre-campaign (January- March), campaign peak (April- June), and election aftermath (July). The videos of only 18-29-year-old users (on the basis of profiles publicly declared or preconditioned by bio and content clues) were used in the final sample. The age group was a preferred priority since it has a direct connection with youth activism.

In order to fill the gap of the quantitative analysis, 40 semi-structured interviews of participants who create content on TikTok (aged between 18 to 29) were conducted. Snowball and purposive sampling were used to invite the interviewees based on their accessibility and aligned with the views on political engagement and the need to post videos using the hashtags identified. Lahore (Lahore 15Up12),

Analysis

Data collection through scraping was maintained on ethical basis and information of private parties was avoided. The metadata of TikTok was scraped by use of Python 3.11 scripts with the help of unofficial APIs and open-source library TikTok. Theme coding of qualitative data was by the use of NVivo 14. Data were analyzed with the assistance of SPSS (v29) and descriptive and inferential statistical analysis including Pearson Correlation, Regression Analysis and Cluster Analysis to identify which type of content (e.g., humor, protest footage, explainer videos) bore the strongest correlation with hypothesized virality.

The first 10 transcripts were (initially) developed in an inductive mode and the result was a first set of codebooks that was revised in further operations. The analysis of each transcript by the two independent coders has resulted in the establishment of intercoder reliability (kappa value of kappa > 0.80). Plan of analysis 5.4 Cross-referencing of themes across interviews and quantitative measures was able to provide the triangulation. Indicatively, when a producer narrated that they were purposefully adding sad background music or a trendy dancing format to get the attention of the audience, it was confirmed by real-time performances data.

Quantitative data exploration started with descriptive statistics in order to give a spotlight of the dataset- frequency of hashtags, average rates of completion and engagement rates. Thereafter, bivariate correlation was employed in measuring the connections between format of contents (e.g., meme-based, testimonial, educational) and viral measures. Multiple regression analysis was used to investigate further the predictors of videos success with a consideration to control variables, length and time of posting of the videos.

Evaluation and Result

The quantitative data of the 2,000 TikTok videos showed that there were notable tendencies in the ways in which political activism was carried out and received: Such observation can be linked to the current research on the area of political communication via TikTok since humor and clever presentation of aesthetic allure are highly effective when it comes to augmenting interest (Medina Serrano et al., 2020; Le Compte & Klug, 2021). Around 63 percent of videos watched over a million times were matched with some elements of humor and civic messaging, i.e., comedic sketches relating voter ID, satire on inflation, memes commanding individuals to cast ballots. Danish Helsinki court of Hart. The analysis of data that was carried out on the SPSS indicated that these trends were significant.

The lip-sync/parody-type of videos were completed at about 15 per cent higher rates as compared to those that had direct commentaries on the political situation or lectures. These formats were more prominently featured, especially because TikTok values completion rate as one of the most important indicators (Cotter, 2021; Zhao, 2022). Catchy hashtags like SceneOnVote or VoteSeatPak were always more popular than traditional hashtags like YouthForChange or PakistanElections because of the views, shares, and comments. The content examined under high-tagged terms of slang exhibited 30-40 percent engagement benefits. This reflects larger trends where a peer-centric version of language and in-group vernacular are used to generate better programming performance and viewers identify with the programming (Literat & Kligler Vilenchik, 2019).

The bivariate correlations demonstrated that the highly significant association existed between the completion rate and the engagement measurements ($r = .62$ with the likes; $r = .57$ with shares). When regressed against view count, humor had a strong positive effect (+0.56 coefficient, $p < .01$) and use of slang hashtags also had a positive effect (+0.43 coefficient, $p < .05$), after the models controlled variables of video length and time of posting. The interviews with youth creators' content were also in form of 40 semi-structured interviews and helped to contextualize quantitative findings:

Such quantitative outcomes indicate that algorithmic incentives on TikTok are biased towards visual engagement, emotional appeal, and alignment to trends in the activism content. This assumption also aligns with research on worldwide algorithm-mediated civic communication (Jiang et al., 2022; Bandy & Diakopoulos, 2020). As common as it was to ignore terminologies such as protest, march and rights to avoid takedowns across interviews. When one designer in Lahore writes the word protest, that is immediate deletion. is not going to be "censorship" - This aligns with reported methods of censorship on TikTok in Pakistan and other such cases, censorship by moderation algorithm or human content review to block politically sensitive words (Dawn News, 2024) (Wikipedia, arXiv, arXiv, ResearchGate, arXiv).

Most artists explained that they use satellite and parody to express political messages in encrypted forms: "When I post with a meme, it is not banned." According to creators, satire on economic or political policies and depicting political figures tended to attract less enforcement but still earned them notice. This method is consistent with the results of the literature review of lip-sync protest music and satire as one of the ways of hidden activism (Kusnadi & Annisa, 2023; Jiang et al., 2022) (ResearchGate, arXiv). It was often noted by interviewees that they collaborate with local micro-influencers to use networks to their advantage. Explained one Karachi maker, on collaboration with a dancing influencer, she said, "They have thousands of followers and my goal is to deliver a civic message in the caption of our duet." This approach similarly resembles the development of political scouting houses and micro-influencer activism being reported at the international level (Literat & Kligler Vilenchik, 2023) (NUQ Views).

prohibits will be branded as censorship, The Form of favorites Algorithmic determines Activism Style Creators observed the higher rates of completion and reach rates by placing political messages in viral challenges or trending music. In a number of instances, an artist would post a non-political video where its views were modest but a remix of the same content but using a trending sound acquired viral status. It is also supported by international proofs that algorithmic cultures value the adherence to a certain style or style that is 'in fashion' but regardless of political context (Medina serano et al., 2020; le compte et al. klug, 2021).

The synthesis of quantitative and qualitative results shows that the algorithmic design of TikTok predetermines the fact that youth activism on this platform takes the form of aestheticized civic engagement, in which the logic of engagement and the content plan are closely interconnected. The conjunction of these findings indicates that while youth political expression on Tik Tok in Pakistan is not random or organic, it is also not spontaneous but mediated by the affordances of the algorithm and restrictions of the platform in minimizing the space to youth political action. The completion rate and virality of the formats of parody and lip-sync prove that TikTok favors emotionally appealing and visually appealing content-even the political one. The designers adopt the patterns by incorporating the civic messages into the form that is easy to imbue with memes, proving on both Medina Serrano et al. (2020) and Jiang et al. (2022) that the aesthetic trick increases the visibility of political messages composing. Artificial and/or manual moderation can be avoided at the expense of deliberate aesthetic codes of disclosure-in-use, such as satire and indirect critique, by certain creators. This approach is to convert political activism into coded performance where methodical opposition is still possible within a governance framework of

platforms (Tufekci, 2017; Dawn News, 2024).

The aggregation of these findings leads to the idea that political expression performed by youth on TikTok in Pakistan is not a natural or spontaneous activity but is rather a conditioned one by the algorithmic capacities and the limitations inscribed within the platform to narrow down the space of youthful political action.

The reputation of the slang hashtag and shared cultural references point to the importance of this peer-based language as one that creates affective response and artificial reward. Such a dynamic is crucial in the case where the youth can feel disengaged by formal political language or discourse (Literat & Kligler Vilenchik, 2019). The engagement-based algorithm that Tik Tok uses favors the rewarding of civic engagement expressed through creativities, humorous styles and content that go viral, essentially equaling meme-based formulations of civic life. In creative adaptation to prevent censorship, creators find ways to talk about political critique even though they change the form of the content significantly, showing that a nuanced negotiation exists within the governance of the platform. Youth activism on TikTok is extremely responsive, using trends and collaborations along with vernacular culture to increase the impact, implying that a new politics of stylization appears in the digital-mediated protest.

Political mobilization cannot be reduced to digital outreach, but aesthetic engineering by creators that rely on their knowledge of the social rules and algorithmic behavior patterns. On the whole, the findings confirm that TikTok is not merely a tool of dissemination but a highly interactive political platform where algorithmic rationality and creativity of young people interactively develop narratives and make people visible. and momentum.

Discussion

The Pakistan political communication environment has been under the consistent control of the state-led censorship, regulatory pressures and censorship-based media reportage (Hussain, 2018; Shah, 2019). The conventional channels tend to shy away voices that do not conform, whereas the internet has been traditionally defined as a space of contestation where political speaking is restricted as much as it is facilitated. TikTok with its specific visual and sonic possibilities, the speed of content spread and the ability to be decentralized in participation are all features that provide a strategic space within the field of youth activism.

The identified results show that the artists used parody and remix culture, mainstream formats (lip-sync, popular memes), etc., to express their political message without the government paying much attention to their manners. It connects with prior studies on so-called strategic ambiguity when it comes to digital political speech (and spoken word) in authoritarian regimes or semi-authoritarian regimes (Tufekci, 2017; Poell, 2021). As a Lahore-based participant pointed out, when they say it with a meme, it can be published without being banned. This is echoed by what Saurwein and Spencer-Smith (2020) refer to as content cloaking the act of disguising an important message in platform-native forms that make the messages easier to accept by both audiences and moderating systems.

TikTok enables the proliferation of counter-narratives in countries where political communication is punishable as a national security or cybercrime-related offense; Tik Tok creates an efficient combination of being both emotionally relatable and concise as well as being computationally advantaged. By using the completion percentages and engagement rates as the criteria of amplifying its content instead of following, its user-focused feed (the For You Page) allows the creators who have less than 200 followers to impact the discourse across the country (Cotter, 2021; Zulli & Zulli, 2022). This is a strategic battlefield game changer, especially in the cities, where young people have access to digital training and smartphones.

Tik Tok is a disturbing phenomenon in Pakistan, especially as a means to communicate about politics, and this trend has an ominous regulatory and policy outcome. Independent government agencies such as the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), which are used to utilize advisories on televisions and newspapers, need to broaden their activities and presence on algorithmic platforms (Rehman, 2024). With the shift of electoral messaging (which consists of both official and unofficial messaging), as shown in our research, towards more digitally-first channels where the direct action of a platform has literally become the seat of the political process itself.

It is much more interesting that algorithmic moderation is untransparent. Researchers such as Gillespie (2018) and Napoli (2019) have pointed to the modifying of politically charged posts by automated moderation systems to be categorized in a way that enables the post to face shadow bans or removals (i.e., qualified as sensitive or violative). In the Pakistani case scenario this has adverse repercussions to the opposition of views, particularly during sensitive political times such as the elections. This trend was paralleled by several interviewees who cited self-censoring of such keywords as protest, march, or rigging.

Furthermore, memes or satire based on the political issues in Pakistan will be filtered out because the content moderation infrastructure used by the company lacks localization (Rahman, 2023). Policymakers must insist on increased level of algorithmic transparency and participatory forms of governance measures as enshrined in frameworks such as the Santa Clara Principles (Electronic Frontier Foundation, 2021).

Besides that, civic education programs, voter outreach campaigns, and electoral literacy informational programs should be adapted to micro-video format on Tik Tok. The analysis revealed that those hashtags that used localized slang (e.g., SceneOnVote) were highly effective, compared to formal messages on civil engagement. This means that authenticity, familiarity and emotive appeals of messages are important, to connect to young voters.

Although this study is important in advancing the understanding on digital activism in Pakistan in terms of empirical studies based on the literature on this topic, it has various methodological and scope-related limitations. To begin with, the sample only includes age 18-29 urban TikTok creators living in three major cities, i.e., Lahore, Karachi, and Peshawar. It therefore fails to reflect the opinion of rural folks as well as the role of the youth beyond the metropolitan digital environments. As over 60 per open of Pakistani people live in rural areas (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2023), it should be established in future research how exactly the rural type of digital activism is affected

by the inequality of access to connectivity, homogeneity of language, and local power structures. Second, the algorithmic structure of the platform has the status of a „black box”, and due to this fact, it is impossible to assert the absolute truth about the causes of the video becoming viral or blocked (Bishop, 2019; Caplan & Gillespie, 2020). Though we applied the correlation analysis and thematic analysis, causality is difficult to draw based on in data in the backend.

Third, the sample excluded creators below 18 years, who make up a large percentage of TikTok users in different parts of the world. Since political socialization typically starts in adolescence, gaining an insight with regards to the way younger users are exposed to the content related to civics could bring an additional layer of information regarding the changes in politics across the generational boundaries.

Finally, despite the well-developed data collection and coding mechanism offered by the platform-specific tools, including NVivo and TikTok API metadata scraping, biases expressed by the participants during interviews and volatile fashion of TikTok trends restrict the possibility of generalization. The material considered between January and July 2024 might not be indicative of the behavior pattern in the long term or after the election process.

Conclusion

This paper has noted the role played by TikTok algorithmic framework and a culture of participation that allowed the Pakistani youth to become active participants in the process of constructing a political discourse in the 2024 elections. As opposed to content consuming, these artists were very strategic and used humor, satire, remix culture, and trending audio to avoid censorship and make their message more viral. The practice of using localized hashtags, the cooperation with micro-influencers, and avoidance of keywords that can come into conflict with the regulations point to their detailed knowledge of digital affordances and sociopolitical limitations, as a recent study in this field referred to as algorithmic activism (Zulli & Zulli, 2022; Poell & van Dijck, 2021).

Notably, the personalized feed structure of TikTok does not indicate the user-preference-only prompting; the college of tastes is rather selective, presenting the personally consumed more emotionally appealing and visually stimulating materials and showing less of a blatant political statement (Bishop, 2019; Cotter, 2021). This constitutes opportunities and constraints. On the one hand, it democratizes power, and the voices of the marginalized groups, even though it is temporary, are in a position to influence political discourses. On the one hand, it leads to a reward of style and avoidance of content and may be reduced to feature activism of singularity (Abidin, 2020).

Another trend is that TikTok has served as a haven and a megaphone in tightly controlled media in Pakistan and an outlet which allows young people to envision a new politics through the power of creative expression. Such online habits are an indicator of a shift in understanding what it entails to be civically engaged, a shift that represents more of an informal, unstructured process that relies on emotions (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Tufekci, 2017).

Empirical studies in the future should look at the platform synergies (e.g., the movement of content in TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter) and also determine whether this and subsequent engagements result in long-term civic participation and forms policymaking power. Surrounded by the development of digital activism, it is important to identify the localized forms of this behavioral trend as a matter of academic interest as well as of policymaking in Global South countries.

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