Persuasive Strategies in Political Discourse:
A Study of a Political Party’s Official Face Book Pages

Qamar Khushi
Assistant Professor, Department of English,
Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan

Sana Ilyas
M.Phil Scholar
Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi

Abstract:
The current study endeavors to contribute to the understanding of political discourse on social media in the Pakistani context. It will focus on how Social Networking Sites like Facebook are acting as tools for public participation. The study aims at examining the persuasive language in the political discourse. The techniques are selected from a list of persuasive strategies provided by the Media Literacy Project, USA. It is hoped that the research would help in understanding the communicative process of the Political pages on the internet as well as the different persuasive strategies employed by the social media teams to convey their message.

Key words: Communication; Political discourse; Persuasion; Social media

I. Introduction
Communication technologies have no doubt changed the way people connect and communicate with one another. The influence of social media in mobilizing the people for active participation in the political process like getting the votes registered and asking the people to stand up for corrupt practices cannot be ignored. Websites like YouTube and Facebook are promoting what is called a ‘participatory culture’. Not only can the common public consume what is presented by the different political parties but can also interact by giving their comments and also by producing political content as in the case of blogging and micro-blogging.

The participation of different political parties in Pakistan on social media is relatively a new phenomenon as compared to countries around the world. Gradually the political parties are starting to feel a need to develop their information systems to attract the youth and the educated segment of the society through social media. This process of using social media for political purposes is called ‘Virtual Politics.’ In Pakistan virtual politics is an emerging phenomenon and an interesting area of research not only for communication analysts but also linguistics and political campaigns strategy managers.

II. Politics and Social Media: A brief history

At first news and views related to politics were limited to television, newspapers and the radio, in which the owners and the sponsors had the monopoly as to what would be showed, what type of information the audience will consume. With the introduction of internet and afterwards the evolution of the social media things not only have started to change for the media producers but the media consumers. The passive audience of before became the active audience who participated in the media production in the form of blogs, comments and websites on the internet. Political landscape also changed especially with the introduction of social media (Dewdney & Ride, 2006).

Howard Dean, Governor Vermont for his Presidential Nomination in 2004 made use of the social media for the first time. Trippli was the campaign manager and had worked with LUNIX beforehand and thought that they needed a blog ‘where people could comment, where there was interaction and where there was community building’ (Ryan, 2010, pp. 166-7). The blog was successful as it allowed people to share their concerns on various issues from health and education to immigration policies. The American Presidential campaign of 2008 changed the political communication landscape because Obama for the first time made use of all the social media platforms available to promote his nomination.

Obama’s success in elections was attributed to his social media campaigning. Many politicians around the world started harnessing the power of social media for their advantage. The French Presidential elections in which Hollande won by a very small margin and his success is attributed to his use of social media to attract a vote bank. Sifry and Raseji (2007) explain the potential of Internet for political arena in these words:

Over time, online strategies that shift power to networks of ordinary citizens may well lead to a new generation of voters more engaged in the political process. That, in turn, could make politicians more accountable, creating a virtuous circle where elected officials who are more open and supportive of lateral constituent interaction, and less top-down, are rewarded with greater voter trust and support.

2.1 Facebook and Pakistani Political Parties

Pakistani politics is catching up with the social media storm. One can these days find all of the active political parties and their members having their pages on Facebook, encouraging the public to connect to them through these forums. This is a two way process in which not only the politicians are connecting to people but now people can communicate with them directly.

Previously, in order to attract a vote bank, different political parties used to hold conventions and advertise their achievements through advertisement in the television or the newspapers. The gap between the common public and the politicians and their respective parties was quite large. The public did not have many platforms to get their voices raised on different issues. The public could either talk to the representatives of the party in their respective areas and even that was difficult.

With the advent of the social media wave in the country and especially in the domain of politics, the situation is changing. Now Pakistani political parties are adopting new media technologies not only to promote their political ideology but also to attract a
new vote bank. The concept of Virtual Politics in Pakistan was introduced by *Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf* (PTI). The party understood the power of the social media in the political sphere and looked at different ways as to how they could use technology to attract the youth in the democratic process and thus enlarging their vote bank. ‘PTI is there on the social networking sites since the last 3-4 years, whereas PML (N) launched their Facebook page in November 2011 (Taimoor, 2012).

After what has seen to be Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf’s success in the different conventions held in different cities which was attributed to their social media campaigning on different forums, the other political parties have also started to make their presence known in this sphere.

Nowadays one can find Official political pages of all the parties and Party individuals on Facebook, Twitter and MySpace. Social media forums not only provide the political parties to promote their parties but their supporters also get a chance to comment on their policies and strategies for different projects (Hills, 2009).

### 2.2. Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf: Social Media

Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf has made its presence known on the social media for the last four years. PTI understood early on that through social media not only can they attract the youth and the older vote bank but they can give the public as the audience a chance to be a part of the party through different means like comments, polls and asking people’s views on different issues. Rizwan (2012) briefly discusses the party’s social media success as,

> More than 30 volunteers work round-the-clock to keep the PTI afloat on the waves. The official website gets more than 100,000 hits daily from across the country and abroad. Its ongoing membership campaign conducted through SMS, web and manual forms boasts of more than a million members to date. PTI’s official Facebook page ‘Imran the next prime minister’ has 500,000 members while PTI’s official party page has 400,000 members so far.

### 2.3 Facets of Page Content

Through status updates people achieve a variety of functions. In the different political pages status updates are used to let the followers know about different upcoming events being organized by the party. Through status updates political parties also share their views on the different ongoing issues. Different events and their live streaming are also communicated through status updates by letting people know the time and the respective links.

The Political Parties post pictures of different events which are organized by the party. The pictures help in reinforce the positive image of the party by letting the people know what the party members are doing and how they are working towards the betterment of the society.

The pages also upload links to different news posts. These can be links from local and international newspapers. The posted links can also be about the party manifesto on

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2 Movement for Justice
any ongoing issue and the link would open in the party’s official website. The news links shows the party’s stance on different issues like corruption, energy crisis and in recent cases the manipulation of judiciary and media.

**III. Research Methodology**

The objective of the present study is:
- To explore the different persuasive techniques employed for effective communication.

For the current study, Facebook was chosen because it is the most popular Social Networking Site website in Pakistan with 6 million users\(^3\). Only one political party’s official Facebook page will be studied and analyzed. The status updates were collected for fifteen days from 2\(^{nd}\) June to 17\(^{th}\) June, 2012.

On 26\(^{th}\) June, 2012 there were about 3.5 lakh people following the official page and the age group among which the page was most popular was 18-24\(^4\). The point that PTI makes several times on its page also points that they are targeting the youth and the impact is spot on as most of the people who are members of this page are the youth.

The research is based on the Qualitative research paradigm. It aims at examining the persuasive language in the political discourse. The techniques are selected from a list of persuasive strategies provided by the Media Literacy Project\(^5\), USA. The different persuasive techniques will be looked at and the data will be analyzed according to the different techniques discussed below. The selected techniques will be discussed on the basis of the data which are the status updates.

**Association**

This technique connects or ‘links’ an idea, product or something that is already ‘liked or desired’ by the audience like ‘fun, security, success, intimacy and wealth etc.’ The message does not imply whether people would be able to achieve all the things but the connection at times is just implied.

**Bandwagon**

Through this persuasive tactic message and advertisement developers try to show people that a lot of other people are supporting the idea and using the product. Here what works is that people believe and go after the things and products which other people are using or are a part of.

**Bribery**

The persuasive technique, urges the public to buy a product or an idea by ‘promising them a benefit’ like a ‘discount, a rebate, or a free gift.’ Through this persuasive technique a product or anything is advertised by getting them endorsed by professionals of the respective fields. This persuasion works in the way that

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\(^4\) Statistics from Official Facebook Page.

at times people think that because the respective expert in the field has endorsed the product or an idea so it is safe to use and also adds credibility.

Rhetorical Questions
This persuasive tactic sells different things to the audience by asking questions whose answer is quite obvious. These questions are arranged and asked in such a way that the audience has to agree with what the producer of the massage has said.

Simple Solution
Through this persuasive technique the message (advertisement, product, idea) is presented to the public in the form of simple solutions. Thus tactic works in this way that at times people do not do certain things like getting themselves registered for voting because they think that the process is very complex. But political organizations tell them different simple solutions which will solve their problems.

Ad homoinem
This is used to associate the rival group/product with a negative symbol so the people will get discouraged and not use that product but will use the one they are promoting. In the case of politics this technique is used often by the politicians to throw mud at their opposing parties.

Analogy
An analogy compares one situation with the other by comparing it and in turn making connections between different situations. A ‘good analogy’ can have strong persuasive impact on the audience and in contrast a ‘weak analogy’ may not be able to produce an impact.

Cause vs. Correlation
In this persuasive technique a cause is put forth to the audience along with a correlative element which can highlight the negative or positive things related to the cause. The cause can be a social issue related to poverty, child abuse and health care etc.

Group dynamics
People are influenced by what other people are doing and can be inspired to join a cause. This persuasive technique shows that people can be persuaded by tempting them with the idea or the image that other people are doing it and you can also be a part of the group.

Timing
At certain points a media message is ‘effective’ and ‘persuasive’ because of the time at which it was produced and published. This persuasion can work at simple levels by placing advertisements for mother’s day so that people would buy gifts for their mothers. In the political avenue this tactic can work by different political parties giving out timely views about their stance on different ongoing issues.

IV. Analysis
This section deals with analyzing the Status Updates which will be categorized in terms of the persuasive strategies present in them.
a) **Status Updates**

The status updates on the PTI’s official FB page serve various proposes which are discussed below.

- To let the followers know about any upcoming rally or convention being help by the party.
- To inform on which channels and on which political show will the different members of PTI can be seen on that day.
- On the day of the rally, the frequent status updates let people know who is giving the speech at that moment, when Imran Khan arrives at the rally and his words are quoted in the status updates on that day.
  - Central President PTI Javed Hashmi expected to arrive the Jalsa Gah shortly, along with Sindh President Nadir Akmal Leghari and other senior leaders.
- For letting people know about the different news links which highlight governments failure and PTI’s achievement.
  - Imran Khan to speak at All Pakistan Ulema conference today. Event will be LIVE STREAMED at [https://www.facebook.com/PTIOfficial/app_142371818162](https://www.facebook.com/PTIOfficial/app_142371818162)
- To let their followers know what is their stance on the different ongoing issues so that the members are aware that how the party is dealing with the issue.
  - We stand with the judiciary of Pakistan. This government has made joke of the judiciary, says Javed Hashmi

Here one can see that the status updates on this political party page is used for all of these purposes. As all of the data that is posted on the page is public, anyone at any moment can look at the different status updates anytime they want. For this project the status updates are going to be looked at from the point of view of the different persuasive techniques present in the message. The analysis will be done on the basis of each category defined in the third section.

i) **Association**

This persuasion technique links the party’s stance or any of the party member’s views with any positive idea that is already liked by the audience.

A1. We stand by Judiciary & the courageous Chief Justice who took suo moto notice of Malik Raiz-Arsalan affair - began the judicial process and then rescued himself from case.6

Here PTI is telling its followers who they are with on the case of Arslan Iftikhar. PTI here is associating them with the idea of Justice. Public had also appreciated Chief Justice’s action which he took against his own son, which showed that he is an honest person with integrity for whom justice comes first and then his family. So PTI in this way also shows its supporters that they are with the judiciary and Chief Justice in this issue. PTI’s stance also reinforces their manifesto which at first establishes that they are the upholders of ‘Justice. Humanity, Self Esteem.’ The followers of PTI will also side with

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6 These status Updates can be found in the appendix.
the party on this issue and they will also know that the party delivers what it promises by upholding justice.

ii) Cause vs. Correlation

This persuasion technique highlights the fact that there is an issue which is the cause and foretells its effects in the present or for the future. It is an interesting technique, mostly used by politicians to let people know that if they were elected, the future holds bright promises for the common man.

C1. Imran Khan promises that if PTI comes in power, he will ensure that Pakistan will become an Islami Filaahi Riyasat Insha Allah and for this he has asked ulemas to come forward and support PTI

Here Imran Khan, is promising the religious sects which had been invited on a forum organized by PTI, that if his party gets elected in the next elections they would do their best to make the country an Islamic republic. Here a cause has been presented which shows that this is a concern which the religious scholars and the PTI share. So the solution and the correlation presented with is that the ‘Ulema’ have to support PTI, as if no other party is concerned about the Islamic ideals and the state and PTI is the only party who is not only aware of the issue but will take different steps to ensure that Pakistan becomes an Islamic republic when they get elected. Here the interesting dynamic to notice is that how Khan is associating his party ideal with that of the ‘Ulema’ and asks for their support for his cause.

C2. "Firqa Bandee is destroying the Muslims in Pakistan. Our war is at two fronts 1) Firqa Bandee kay naam pay killings karnay walon sey 2) US so called war on terror which is killing innocent Muslims“ Imran Khan

This is also one of the statements made by Khan in ‘All Pakistan Ulema and Mashaikh Conference’. This also highlights one of the concerns of the PTI and ulemas. A cause is presented which is the disintegration of the Pakistani society that people are not united anymore; everyone is selfish and is only thinking about themselves. This is the reason that Muslims are not a force to be reckoned with anymore and are associated with terrorism around the world. Khan in this statement is also presenting a cause which is the ‘war’ which the PTI and the Pakistani society has to fight together to overcome all these issues. With the cause the two correlations in terms of issues on which the war is going to be fought against are presented.

iii) Bribery

Bribery is a persuasive technique which sells the idea on the basis of providing a benefit for the person who is availing the idea. In the case of politics, the politicians promise something irresistible to the public so that they would support the party.

B1. Watch this video and sms PTI to 9900 to become part of Imran Khan's Tsunami Challenge Team and get invited to a Lunch with Chairman Imran Khan.

This status update is a part of the membership campaign and the goal was to add as many members as one could. Here the message producer has asked the members to be a part of the Tsunami Challenge and the bribe is that they can get a chance to win a lunch
with Khan. For the public this is an event they would not want to miss that is they would get a chance to meet their leader and the visionary who wants to take Pakistan in the right direction. This is an interesting persuasive technique that not only the political party gains from their initiative but people also get a benefit in this respect.

iv) Analogy

An analogy simply compares one situation to another. In the political context the situation can be a historical event or any of the party’s achievement which its representative would like to highlight. A good analogy brings out good and positive results and a weak analogy may not be able to produce strong connections and associations.

AN1. “Just as an individual becomes independent after embracing Islam, similarly a Nation should become independent if it calls itself an Islamic Country” Imran Khan

This status update links a connection between an independent person and an independent country. This statement had been given by Khan on the event of the conference. Here the party leader for persuading the audience and showing the ulema and the party supporters that he has not forgotten the Islamic ideology but knows that Islam, which is one of the basis on which the country was made is the way which can lead to success. He has produced a connection at two levels one is at the level of the individual and the second is at the state level. His analogy shows the strong connection between embracing true Islam and being independent.

v) Experts

This persuasive technique tries to make people like the idea by showing that the experts of that field are endorsing it. In the case of political persuasion this technique would show experts endorsing the party’s manifesto and ideals.

E1. Mr. Asad Umar, Senior Vice President speaking at IPF Seminar on Federal Budget - Watch LIVE Stream at: http://insaf.pk/live

In the above status update one can see that PTI is looking at the problems related to budgets, this also reinforces their promise that the party is working for the betterment and the progress of Pakistan. Here the expert is Asad Umar who is a part of the PTI Think tank and he will discuss the issues and their solutions relating to Federal budget. In some of the cases the persuasion has two main goals that are short term goal achievement and long term goal achievement. In this case, the short term goal is to tell people to come and be part of the enlightened discussion. In addition, the long term goal is to reinforce in its members minds that PTI is working for the betterment and progress of Pakistan and the different forums they arrange are a small part of what they are capable of achieving.

vi) Ad-hominem

Ad-hominem is a persuasive technique in which people attack the opponent and their policies. This technique is akin to the name calling persuasive technique and politicians most of the times use these techniques to show that their policies and their point of views are better than their rivals.

AD1. PPP, PML-N, MQM, ANP and all others, have always given fake hopes and promises; and delivered nothing to people: Javed Hashmi
Here Hashmi is talking about all of the corrupt political parties and their policies. He is highlighting the fact that all of the mentioned parties had been in power one time or the other but instead of working towards the betterment of the country they had looted the country. He points the fact that their ‘promises’ were ‘fake’ as they did nothing to make Pakistan a better state. In representing PTI his stance is symbolic in the sense that he has stood up against all the forces which threatened to bring this country down. So he is not only pointing to the facts about other parties but is also letting the people know that this what the parties track record is and now the people as responsible citizens have to make an important decision by choosing people who would stand up for truth and progress of the country.

AD2. Don’t say Go Zardari Go. We have to catch them to bring the looted money back in Pakistan: Javed Hashmi

In this status Hashmi is at one level pointing at the President being a corrupt politician who has looted the country clean. During his government the energy crisis, inflation and the law and order situation has deteriorated so much that at times it is just commented on that Pakistan is literally moving on a prayer. Hashmi here points that we cannot just ask that corrupt person to get out of Pakistan but first we have to get all the money back which belongs to the people of Pakistan, so that money can be in the long term used for the betterment and welfare of the country and its people. At times politicians outright blame the other politicians sometimes as in the case of this example the name calling is subtle.

vii) Group Dynamics

Group dynamics is the persuasive technique which tries to persuade the people by showing that most of the people believe in something so there must be an element of truth in it. In politics the political parties use this technique to show support or protest against any idea and policy.

G1: All Steering Committee Conveners, Office Bearers where they exist, and members are being requested to organize demonstrations in every district and major city in front of Press Clubs or any other appropriate place on Monday 18th June 2012. Party Chairman Mr Imran Khan will lead the protest in Islamabad.

The issues to be highlighted during the protests are as follows:
1. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf stands by the Judiciary and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in the current blackmailing attempt by Malik Riaz.
2. Malik Riaz has been prompted by the Zardari-Gilani government in their attempt to degrade and destroy the superior judiciary which has been the primary roadblock in their corruption and efforts to rig the future election process.
3. Malik Riaz should name the politicians and media people who have been bought by him in cash and kind, regarding some of whom he has also made claims.
4. Arsalan Iftikhar has to contest his case and if found guilty he should be punished as directed in the Supreme Court order.

The above example shows how PTI is using the social media to protest against the conspiracy which threatens to undermine the judiciary. Here the party has asked all of its members to stand up against the corrupt government and support the judiciary. This
example not only highlights PTI’s use of social media but also lets the audience know that want are the different facets that they will be discussing. This is one of the ways of uniting the members around Pakistan for a single cause, so that people may also get to know that the party believes in staying united and standing up against the issues which are also a part of their mission which is upholding justice. This persuasion technique highlights that many people are in the favor of this positive idea and want all of the people who stand up for the independence of judiciary and against the corrupt politicians in this country should come and join them.

viii) Simple Solution

This persuasion technique offers people simple solutions to their problems. In the case of politics the solutions may seem simple but behind the solution a whole complicated process going on. By offering people simple solutions the political parties show that the things are not as difficult as people deem them to be but sometimes the solutions are very simple like casting a vote and making your voice heard.

S1. "Allah has given me everything and I don’t need anything more... All I want is a better Pakistan and for this I want people to support our cause"...Imran Khan

This status update is the part of the speech that Imran Khan made in Lahore at the event of the Ulema Conference. In this update Imran Khan shows his humbleness by telling that Allah has given him everything that he ever wanted and has no desire for any other thing except a new and better Pakistan. The simple solution he presents for his case is that he only needs peoples support to take his mission one step further. Here the first step is joining the part and then afterwards the results of the next elections will show whether Imran Khan comes in power or not.

S2. Please think before you vote next time.

In the above status update, the party wants its members and the general public to think about who they are going to vote for in the next elections. Now the responsibility of choosing a leader for the country is in the hands of the common people, they can decide their own fate but they have to make the decision responsibly that do they want a change in this country or do they want the same corrupt politicians back who are not going to do anything for the progress and development for Pakistan. So the solution in this case is simple that people just have to make responsible decisions when they vote.

ix) Timing

A message may be persuasive because of the time at which it was given. In the area of politics the political parties arrange press conferences and statement releases on the different ongoing issues because if they will not do it the media and the public will start asking them different questions as to why they did not do it. Most of the political parties are at times in a race as to who is the first one who supports or condemns an issue or practice.

T1. We will win not by blaming others, but with real votes from the real people of Pakistan: Javed Hashmi

The status update is a statement given by Mr. Hashmi. It is evident from it that how all the people instead of calling each other with bad names should take the
responsibility of changing the country’s fate by voting for the right person. Here by ‘real people’ Mr. Hashmi is asking people to get their votes registered so that they are able to vote in the next elections and have a chance to change their fate. This also is a reference to the fake electoral lists in which many people who are dead vote, so here Hashmi is pointing towards the corrupt practices. He wants people to participate in nation building by having a say by casting their vote.

T3. Happening now: PTI press conference along with CNG association representatives in Karachi

The above status update shows that PTI is concerned about the energy crisis situation in Pakistan. This update is from the days in which CNG association around Pakistan went on a strike so that the government would decrease the price of CNG and also the days of gas load shedding due to which the owners are having different types of problems. This status update shows that PTI is with the CNG association and is concerned about the issues that the CNG association has raised to the government. This also lets the common public know that PTI is supporting them.

V. Conclusion

There is no doubt that social media has played a central role in providing forums for debate, making the domain of politics in this case a form of digital democracy, whereby the increased ‘democratization’ of the new media can be compared to the old. In Pakistan, for most of the political parties the adoption of social media for interacting with the commons is fairly new, as most of them previously believed that social media cannot help one win an election. Now the politicians have started to realize that social media tools can help them in promoting their manifestos and attracting a vote bank. Thus, in many ways today’s digital technologies provide variety of forums for participation to take place. Kamalipour (2010) had very well summarized the potential of the new media digital technologies in these words, ‘…the power of new digital technologies bypasses altogether the physical, geographical and governmental restrictions and censorship. New digital media have empowered the traditionally voiceless and marginalized people.’

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