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Analysis of Quality of Relationship Cultivated by Politicians of Pakistan through Facebook and Twitter

Abstract

Citizens can use social media for the purposes of participation and democracy (Stieglitz, Brockman and Dang-Xuan, 2012). Politicians and political parties need social media as a tool to endorse their reputations and create interactive, real-time interaction with their voters and potential supporters and these platforms have also turned out as necessary assets to reinforce their visibility. Social media have made it accessible for the politicians to connect directly to the supporter by not having to go through the profoundly interceded connections that exists by conventional media (Hallahan, Holtzhausen, Van Ruler, Verčič, & Sriramesh, 2007). These mediums if used in a strategic way by the politicians, can help them to cultivate quality relationship with their audience to generate more social capital, which would strengthen democracy. So, it is imperative to study the kind of relations are cultivated between the politicians and the audience. For the said reason, the survey was carried out from 40 members of National Assembly (MNAs) to measure three markers of quality of relationship cultivation including trust, satisfaction and responsiveness. It was revealed in the findings that most of the MNAs were posting the content after verification but they weren't very much responsive when it comes to share their response on some issue thus undermining the interactive aspect of social media which is its unique trait. Interestingly, they were satisfied with their use of Facebook and Twitter.

Introduction

Politicians and political parties have started using social media as an important method to approach their audience without any gatekeeper or barrier and to form direct relationship with them. Social media is also considered as the perfect place to find out public perception about politicians, their parties and government strategies (Steiglitz, Brockmann, & Xuan, 2012). Consequently, it makes social media an ideal platform for both the politicians and their public to communicate with each other, share their opinions and participate in political discussions both privately or publicly.

There exists plenty of studies which talk about politicians use social media for sharing, communicating and engaging with public by receiving feedback. The feedback that the politicians receive, help them understand what the public likes and dislikes, and also helps them understand their public image. Hence, based on the feedback the political actors work on their relationship with the public. The said idea was tested by Graham, Jackson and Broersma (2016), they compared the practice of Twitter by British and Dutch parliamentary contenders. They carried out a hand-coded content analysis of the way British and Dutch Parliamentary contenders used Twitter throughout the 2010 general elections and discovered that Dutch politicians as compared to the UK candidates were extra likely in using Twitter. They tweeted about two-fold the amount their British counterparts, also that the Dutch contenders were extra disposed to embrace the communicating potential and it appeared that their public responded to this by entrancing in more discussion, hence making their relationship better with the public.

Research supports that politicians use social media not only to communicate with their public and to share information about their policies etc. but also to build relationship with their public. Seltzer and Zhang (2010) in one of their studies examined the role of social media in cultivating relations between the citizens and their political parties. He conducted a research on 2008 presidential general, and using the method of telephonic survey, collected data of registered voters. It was also concluded that the interaction among the politically weighty association, relationship-farming strategies engaged by political parties and

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consequences of the relations to test a model of political organization- public relationships (POPRs) were all implemented through social media, making it an important platform for relationship cultivation.

Furthermore, Karlsson, Clerwall and Buskqvist (2013) describe the scarcity of scholarship on the topics related to relations management in digital political PR. The scholar's study examines if the political parties and their leaders use social media as a method from the point of view of long-term obligation and exchange during the campaign of 2010 Swedish election. The findings explain that social media is utilized by the politicians at the time of the election and also before it, but the interaction among the voters and parties was blur and weak. Despite having a high level of commitment over time, due to a small number of voters who follow political parties, the voter reachability was limited. In essence, this shows that social media still lacks when it comes to using it as a political public relations platform as compared to more conventional and similar approaches. The politicians are using it more in a linear manner ignoring the benefit of its interactive nature.

Likewise, Walker, Baines, Dimitri and Macdonald (2017) describe that retweeting on Twitter aids in spreading word-of-mouth but hasn't gained much attention. In order to find out why one tweet is more popular and retweeted more than the other, the researcher used a well-known chi-squared programmed communication detection (CHAID) decision tree prediction technique to encode the voluntarily available data. The researcher then physically coded sentiments and content to figure the reason of one tweet being more shared in a political marketing sphere than the other. The combined predictive model categorized retweeting with a success proportion of 76.7%. There are multiple criteria that determine the magnitude by which a tweet gets retweeted, with some of these being the number of followers of the original twitter handle along with the emotion of the tweet. Surprisingly, negative emotional tweets spread more as compared to their counterparts which is in contrast to the preceding work (East, Hammond, & Wright, 2007; Wu, 2013). Furthermore, tweets that include originator's personal life also don't attract much retweeting. In essence, content about fear or expressing support for others get relatively more retweeted.

Highlighting the reluctance of politicians in using social media, Hoffmann and Suphan (2017) explained the ways in which it exposes new avenues for political actors. These actors engage with communities with specific interest in addition to broadcasting personalized messages. Surprisingly, despite the presence of potential advantages, there is a hesitation manifested by politicians when it comes to engaging users online. The author, in this scholarship, examined the impact and power that the politicians' online boundary usage can have on the practice of social platforms. The acquaintances made by social media could be rooted in variety of social backgrounds. There are complications faced by expert communicators in managing the dissection between their professional and private online self-presentation. The author, with the help of a study of 106 German parliamentarians, explained the four different types of boundary management schemes. The author further analyzed its effect on the use of social media by the politicians to understand their online engagement better.

Furthermore, Stanyer (2008) debates about the online ways that politicians use to portray their image to the public. The scholarship delineates multiple tools used by the in-office government officials for their own publicity. The scholar digs into two modern industrial democracies, US and UK to determine that if individual personality traits such as virtues are critical for an elected government official and whether there are any differences between these regions based on different electoral cultures. The author summarizes the results by deducing the experimental study, explaining that how different nationwide voting cultures have an impact on persona of different elected government officers

Koop and Marland (2012) discuss how elected representatives work on their persona and self-image to appeal to their voters so that they can get elected again. The discussion highlights the gaps amid the elected legislatures and their voters by making a comparison amongst Canadian parliamentary newsletter, which is more of conventional medium as compared to the website of the parliament which contains the protest of people by Canadian members of Parliaments (MPs). Purposely, the question that raised were (1) how MPs presented themselves online, (2) if the presentation is in contrast to what is presented in the newsletters, and (3) what aspects are presented or ignored by MP's only for online purposes. The scholarship studies that, on their websites, MPs usually display themselves as outsiders. This is different from presentation arrangements made in newsletters. Further, online self-presentation is largely driven by party association.

There are several research holes and untapped research areas that should be investigated which are not covered in the existing literature. While there are studies that have emphasized the use of social media for political communication and PR there is a clear lack of studies analyzing the use of social media for relationship cultivation and reputation management. This study is focused on Pakistani political actors' use of social networks like Facebook and Twitter. This study looks at the quality of relationship being cultivated by the politicians specifically the members of National Assembly (MNAs) of Pakistan with their audience considering three indicators, trust, satisfaction and responsiveness of Relationship Cultivation theory. The uniqueness of the study lies in the fact that it has not been done before in Pakistan and that it has now

become essential to analyze and discuss the usage patterns of social media, which is a significant and straight mean of communication, by political actors. There appears to be a direct correlation between the constructive usage of social media and the strengthening of democratic values in Pakistan.

Conceptual Framework: Relationship Cultivation

The theory of Relationship cultivation is established in the framework of public relations theory. It is verified by organizational study that behavior of any association can influence the its relationship with its premeditated publics. Apart from just maintaining relationships with publics, organizations should also invest time, energy and resources in improving their relationships and in fact, should go a step further to restore any damage relationships. There is a variety of different association cultivation strategies that can be used in daily interaction by organization/publics to properly cultivate their relationships.

Interpersonal relations (Canary & Stafford, 1994) and especially romantic relationships (Stafford, Dainton & Hass, 2000) were the originator of relationship cultivation strategies. Public relation experts (e.g., Grunig & Huang, 2000) “malformed the idea of relationship cultivation policies in interpersonal interaction and pertained the strategies to Public Relations” (Hon & Grunig, 1999). In order to enhance the quality of its relations with different voters or stakeholders, organizations/public employ relationship cultivation tactics in their day-to-day communication happenings. These are measured as proactive attitudes of building good quality and long-term meaningful relationships.

The most effective strategies to harvest positive relationship results (Grunig & Huang, 2000), are to study the positivity, honesty, sharing tasks, interacting, and declarations. (Hung-Baesecke & Chen, 2013; Ki & Hon, 2009). Seltzer and Zhang (2010) explored in a study of U.S. presidential election of 2008, the influence of the relationship maintenance policies of arbitrated interaction, social activities, interpersonal interaction, and online communiqué on relations quality with political parties alongside the magnitudes of belief, gratification, promise, control mutuality, and supportive conducts.

Hon and Grunig (1999) described five different pointers for public relations: pledge, gratification, relationship quality, belief and mutual control. Along the same lines, Ledingham (2011) likewise recognized access, openness, trust, satisfaction, access, mutual control, and receptiveness as the most critical indicators in evaluating the value of a political public relationship. In this approach, political public relations definition is expanded beyond interaction to involve actions and conducts. Political candidates and parties expect favorable attitudes towards themselves as a result of strategic political communication. These favorable attitudes include but are not limited to legislation support, vote choice and aim, volunteering, donating, attending events, joining an organization, declaring, or enchanting in activism (Strömbäck & Kioussis 2011).

There have been few researches to determine how organizations integrate their relationship cultivation and maintenance policies into their online presence policies, specifically when it comes to religious networks. This is the case regardless of whether tools to measure scale and effectiveness of relationship cultivation plans are being developed or not. According to the viewpoint of relationship management, PR experts primary goal is to cultivate, maintain, and endorse long-term bond among stakeholders and its group, regardless of who they are. This concept is an important deviation from the one in which public views exploitation are used to unify the moral and well-adjusted two-way interaction and it took nearly 15 years for public relation scholars to accept it. Due to its emphasis on relationship management, this developing model has gained significant interest among the academic and professional groups. Broom, Casey and Ritchey (2000) added that public relations practitioners have now fully embraced this new dimension and as a result the field is now recognized as relationship management rather than strategic communications.

In addition to public relations, corporate and integrated marketing communications programs have also comprehensively combined relationship management. Morgan and Hunt (1994) explain the idea of creating trust and communication with intended people. SERVQUAL scales from marketing discipline is one of the early and initial attempts to gauge the level of relations according to Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988). The said tiers quantify the statements offered to shareholders’ uncertainties and the party’s bend to backing or disapprove them. Keeping in view the summary of these tiers, Bull (2003) claimed that relationship management academics anticipated examination of diverse features of the public relationship from management and society (Eagle & Kitchen, 2000) to message building (Duncan & Moriarity, 1998) and interactivity (Grönroos, 2004). The cultivation and conservation of public and organizational relations is impacted by all of these features. Tilson and Venkateswaran (2006) reaffirmed that the devotional-promotional interaction’ and added goals to create and foster healthy clergy-congregant/ supporter relations as well as motivate devoutness to the faith. It is observed that organizations create relations with specific public in ways that are akin in process as between two persons despite the availability of different communication channels.

According to Grunig & Huang (2000), there has already been work done by public relations researchers on one on one interaction for beginnings that can be altered or transformed for an organization-public relationships theory. Hon & Grunig (1999) based on interpersonal interaction theory claimed that the

consistent tiers have been established for assessing organizational relationships. These tiers mainly put emphasis on the quantity of the four magnitudes of relationships promise, power balance, gratification, and trust.

Hoping that it could be functional to the organizational backgrounds, following a rapid appreciation of cultivation tactics by Hon and Grunig (1999) requested for additional explorations of relationship management and comprehensive clarification of the one on one methods. The purpose of communication in building relations positive is segment of the perception of Dialogic Theory (Kent and Taylor, 2002), where such relations among an organization and its stakeholders are constructed with the assistance of public relation experts (Ledingham, 2003) through communication. IT is also said that the generation that is informed socially pleases for and expects discourse as governments change their opinions of voters from customers to allowing people to supply online to the growth of government” (Azyan, 2012). A noteworthy benefit of using social media networks in public relations experts is their integral aptitude of enchanting various people in a bi-directional two-way interaction at a very little price (Duggan, 2010). In addition, Bruning (2002) stated that in order to efficiently manage relations, it is analytical that experts intellectualize interaction with major public members, and practice communication to help an ongoing relationship.

Research Questions:

In the light of literature review and conceptual framework, the following research questions have been formulated:

R.Q. 1. What is the quality of relationship of MNAs with the audience?

R.Q. 2. Do MNAs feel satisfied with their use of Facebook and Twitter?

R.Q. 3. Do MNAs verify the information before posting it on Facebook and Twitter?

R.Q. 4. Do they post any information immediately on Facebook and Twitter as soon as they get it?

R.Q. 5. How efficient they are in responding to various political issues on Facebook and Twitter?

Methodology:

Survey method is used in this study to collect data from the members of National Assembly. To conduct the study, it was essential to know that what percentage of members are using Facebook and twitter both to fulfil the research objectives, so the survey was conducted in multi stages. At first stage, a request was made to the research cell of National Assembly to provide the data about the members (from constitutional tenure of Parliament from 2013 to 2018) who use both Facebook and Twitter. As per list provided by the research cell of National Assembly only 84 out of 342 members were using Facebook and Twitter both at that time. Further, the accounts of the members who claimed that they use Facebook and Twitter were checked to make sure that they are the frequent users of social media. On the basis of that, 45 members were selected who were the active users, all those members were then contacted but 40 agreed to fill the questionnaire while five members didn't give their consent so they were dropped from the study. To collect the data, a brief, to the point, 5-scale questionnaire was constructed in English keeping the target population in mind. Almost all the questions were kept close ended purposefully.

Operationalization of Indicators of Relationship Cultivation

In this study, three indicators of relationship cultivation theory has been studied, which are as follows:

- i. **Satisfaction:** The one indicator which is studied is 'satisfaction' which means whether MNAs think that Facebook and Twitter fulfil their purpose, considering the fact that if they were of the view that Facebook and Twitter is fulfilling their purpose that means they are satisfied.
- ii. **Trust:** Trust is another important indicator as the quality of relationship is highly dependent on the trust between the producer and the consumer of the message. And to develop a trust, it is necessary to provide true, verified information to their audience. So in this study, trust is related to the verification of the information posted by MNAs on Facebook and Twitter.
- iii. **Responsiveness:** Third indicator of relationship quality measured in this study is "responsiveness", the audience usually want to hear from the politicians (they follow), on different issues to know their stance and form the opinion. If some relevant person does not respond on issues it creates frustration and mistrust among the audience which ultimately affect the quality of relationship. Therefore, in study responsiveness means how instantly MNAs post any information and how active they are in responding to any political issue on social media.

Findings and Results:

In order to measure the indicators for quality of relationship cultivation with the audience, it is important to see that where MNAs share their information first, either Facebook or Twitter. The results shown in *Figure 1* indicates that 34.5 % said that they share the information on Facebook first and 65.5 % said that they share the information on Twitter first. This means that MNAs prefer Twitter to share any information first with their audience. This provides strength to the observation that these days government

officials, ministers, ISPR and political parties prefer to convey their message through Twitter to the audience, may be because they consider it more authentic or reliable means of communication.

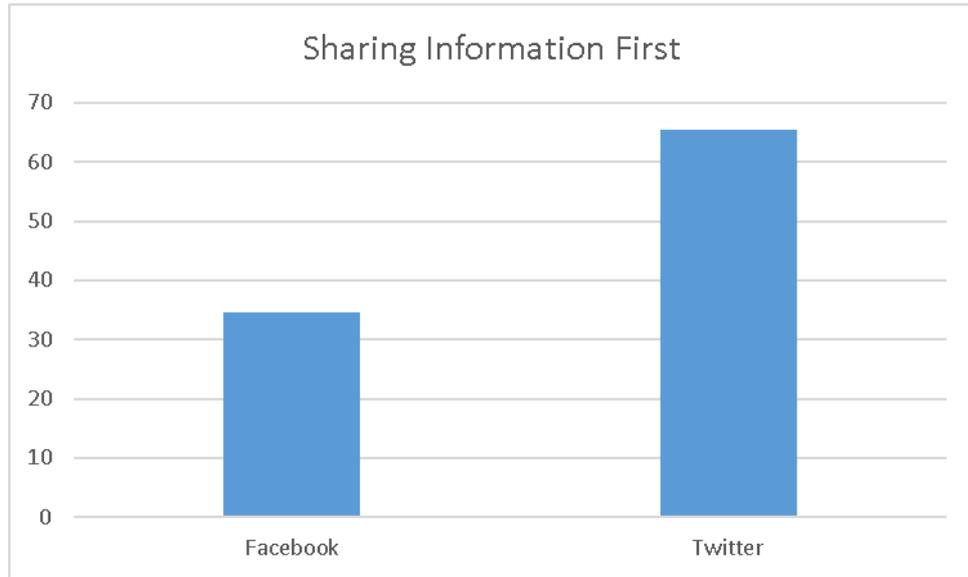


Figure 1. *Where MNAs Share Information First*

To measure the variable of satisfaction of relationship quality, the drive of using Facebook and Twitter, achieved or not, is also studied. The opinion of MNAs about the purpose fulfilled on Twitter and Facebook is shown in **Figure 2** and according to the results 46.4 % agreed that Twitter is fulfilling their purpose of using it whereas 32.1% of the respondents strongly agree with this notion and pungently approved that Twitter is fulfilling their purpose, if we combine both the degree of agreement the total is 78.50 %, which is quite high. On the contrary, there was nobody who disagreed with it while the remainder 21.4% of the respondents were neutral. Similarly, based on the results, 46.2 % agreed that Facebook is fulfilling their aim which are almost equivalent to Twitter, while only 11.5 % of the responded strongly agreed with it and if we combine them both it becomes 57.7 %. It is worthy to mention that there is a big difference between combined percentage, it shows that MNAs were much more satisfied with their usage of Twitter as compared to Facebook. A mere 3.8 % respondents claimed that their purpose was not being fulfilled by Facebook while nobody disagreed in case of Twitter and 38.5 % of the remaining respondents remained neutral. These results show that MNAs using Twitter were more satisfied, as the number of participants agreed are more in case of Twitter and no body disagreed that Twitter is not fulfilling their purpose, on the other hand though the percentage is really low, but still there are MNAs who were not satisfied with the use of Facebook.

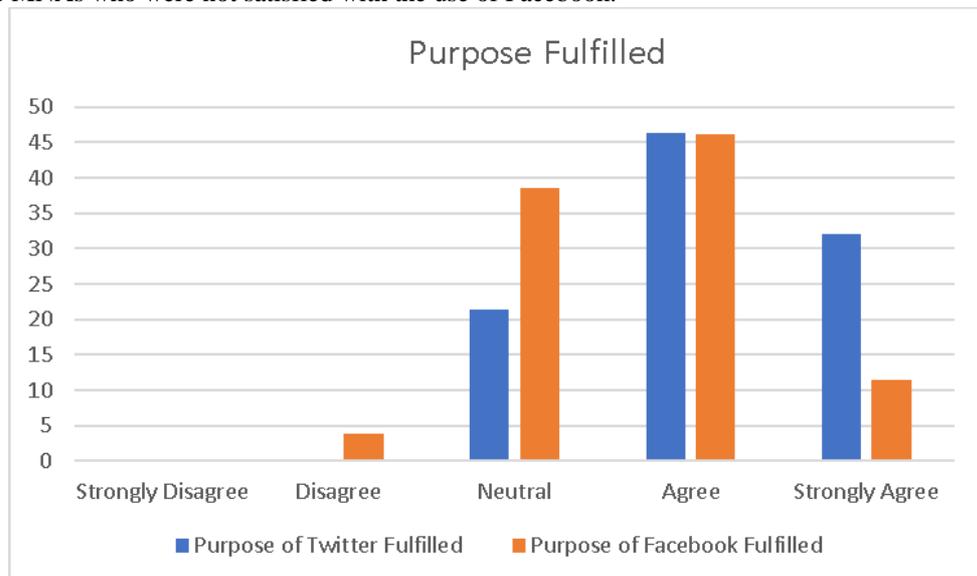


Figure 2: *Purpose of Using Facebook and Twitter Fulfilled*

The results in *Figure 2* indicates that MNAs are more satisfied with their usage of Twitter and think that it fulfils their purpose in a better manner and that can be a reason why they prefer Twitter more to share the information.

It is key to verify the content before it is posted on Twitter or Facebook, an unverified post can create disinformation and misunderstanding among the voters hence can create trust deficit. The questions related to verification of news were asked from the politicians to understand their behavior and measure their seriousness in disseminating verified information. The actual number of respondents who verify the content before posting or sharing on Twitter is shown in *Figure 3*. Almost two-thirds of the respondents i.e. 65.4%, claim that they verify the information each time before posting it on Twitter, 34.6% of the respondents claimed that their information is verified most of the times followed by 19.2% who claim that they do not verify it each time rather their verification happens sometimes whereas 7.7 % hardly verify. *Figure 3* also depicts the percentage of MNAs who actually verify any kind of content before sharing it on Facebook. As similar to Twitter, almost two-thirds of the participants i.e. 64.3% claim that they always actually verify the content before they post. This is followed by 35.8% of the population which is divided in half (17.9%) in saying that they either verify it most of the times or they do it sometimes.

These results show that majority of MNAs share verified information for the audience, which is a smart move in order to keep good relations with their audience. It also supports the fact that they want to increase trust between them and their audiences.

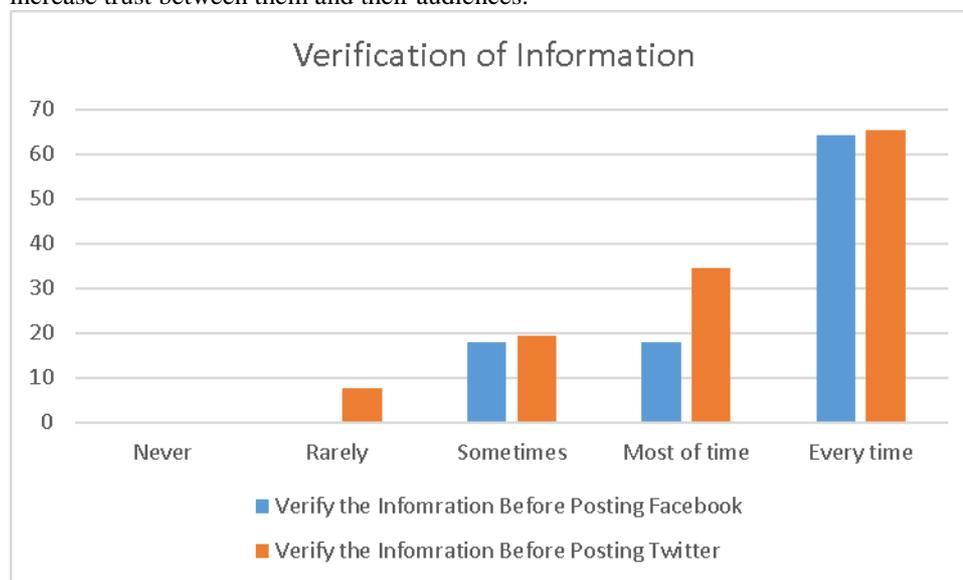


Figure 3: Verification of News/Information before posting on Twitter and Facebook

Figure 4 elaborates on how quickly politicians post any material or news on Twitter and/or Facebook. So, based on the results, only 6.9% of the respondents post any information they get immediately on Facebook and Twitter, which is the lowest percentage. 10.3% of the respondents post the information immediately not most of the times, post any information immediately, 17.2 % of MNAs said that they rarely post any information immediately while 13.8 % said that they never post any information immediately, they post it whenever they feel like posting. The highest share 51.7% is of the respondents who share the information immediately most of the times, means as soon as they get any information they post it on social media platform.

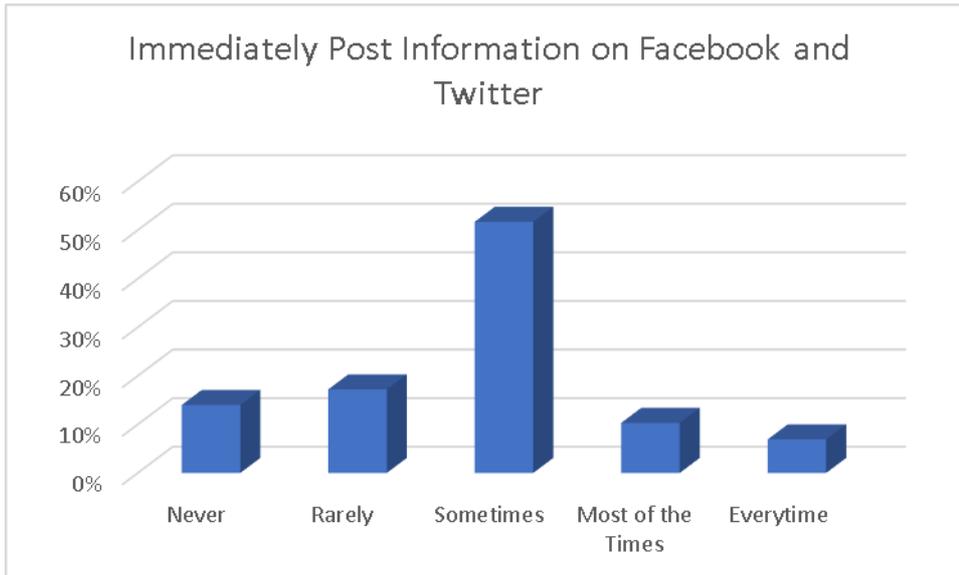


Figure 4: *Immediately Post Information on Facebook and Twitter*

Moreover, **Figure 5** depicts the urgency with which the politicians respond to tweets against them or their party. According to the findings, only 13.8% of the respondents said that they respond each time while 37.9% claimed that they respond sometimes, 20.7% said that they replied most of the times, while 24.1% replied rarely and lastly, 3.4 % said that they don't respond at all. It is worthy to mention there that highest share is of responding sometimes, which can be a good strategy as responding to everything is not necessary, but normally the audience want to know the stance of MNAs on any particular issue and if MNAs fail to respond in a desired manner, it creates frustration among their audience. Consequently, MNAs fail to cultivate good relationship with their audience which will also become barrier in managing their reputation.

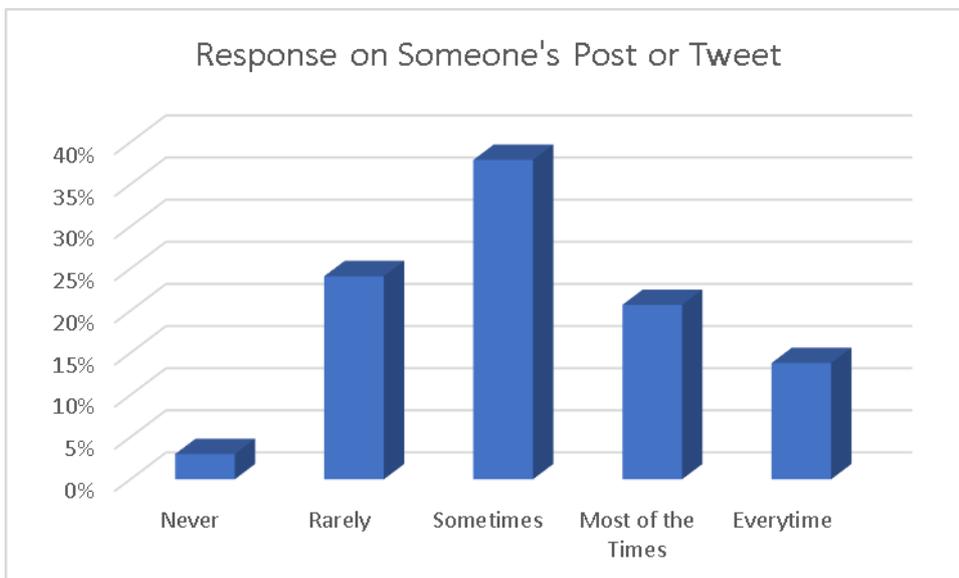


Figure 5: *Responsiveness on Tweets and Posts*

Conclusion:

Based on the findings of the survey, it can be concluded that MNAs are relying on Facebook and Twitter to cultivate their relationship with the audience.

Satisfaction:

Majority of MNAs are satisfied with their use of Facebook and Twitter and feel that it has increased their popularity, they can access the target audience easily and disseminate the information to achieve their political agendas in a better manner, hence the purpose is fulfilled.

Verification:

As far as verification of the information is concerned, they do verify the information which means they are aware of the fact that they must share true and factual information if they want to have trust worthy

relationship with the audience but when it comes to immediately give any information they are reluctant to post it as soon as they get it. May be because they feel their responsibility and want to share it after verification, this is a good strategy to cultivate good quality relationship but in some cases it can affect their relationship also.

Responsiveness:

When it comes to give response on some issue, they don't respond much. Majority of the respondents sometimes give their response and second highest percentage is of the respondents who rarely response. This means that here, MNAs need to work more on their strategy. This can be perceived as flaw as far as quality of relationship is concerned because if they are not responding or not giving their opinion, actually they are undermining the interactive nature of social media.

Hence it can be concluded that overall, MNAs are cultivating relationship with their audience, they are trying to develop quality relationship and it can be improved if they start responding to the issues as well.

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