

Social Media in Shaping Political Engagement of Pakistani Youth

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ABSTRACT

The basic tool used for political engagement and awareness growth among Pakistani youth is social media. The effects rely on three factors which are gender, education level and the frequency of social media use. Research about digital political participation continues its expansion because these outcomes provide essential data for people who want to increase democratic youth participation through social media policies. The study investigates how Facebook together with Twitter (X) and TikTok influence Pakistani youth participation by affecting their political consciousness while shaping their content intake practices. The research project surveyed 342 participants between 18 to 60 years who came from different educational backgrounds and included men and women. The investigation measured social media activity along with political content and participation through descriptive and inferential statistical models which consisted of reliability testing and Pearson correlations and ANOVA and Tukey HSD post hoc tests. Social media users the research indicates heavier users take part more frequently in political activities than less frequent users. People who use social media heavily develop intricate connections with their political engagement. The research data established that how much time participants spent on social media remained disconnected from their knowledge of political content. Male users show greater political activity levels compared to females who spend their time mainly on consuming political content according to education level differences. The study showed that academic achievements drive women to become more politically active yet do not influence men equally.

Keywords: Social Media, Political Engagement, Pakistani Youth, Political Content Consumption, Political Participation, Gender Differences, Education Levels, Digital Activism, Uses and Gratifications Theory, Quantitative Research

INTRODUCTION

Changes occurred in the political dialogue during the twenty-first century because of social media platforms. The traditional political communication sphere has always been controlled by mainstream channels including radio and television alongside newspapers. The emergence of social media platforms delivered democracy in political engagement while people now freely share their ideas and gather multiple sources of information without traditional media channels. Social media functions as an essential tool to advance communication among the public because people can take part through real-time interaction. Social media creates online town halls which enable unrestricted exchange of political notions because it lets individuals from any location interact with one another. Social media plays a fundamental role in developing political consciousness in

Pakistan because traditional media faces restrictions and regulations. The platform allows political parties together with activists and citizens to demonstrate by defining plans and gain backing for different causes. The political communication provided by Facebook and YouTube and Twitter along with other social media sites has created opportunities for unheard groups to rise up while promoting democracy.

Research about social media's worldwide influence on political beliefs has multiplied significantly throughout the recent decade because it transformed political relationship dynamics for users. Users obtain instant access to news content along with opinion leader and political material available on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram and Twitter. Through these digital platforms politically motivated content continues to spread thus it shapes public sentiments and foster improved political involvement among citizens.

Through their internet connections with social media users people have acquired political beliefs and likewise shifted institutional power to citizen authority. Social media projects major changes to political participation rates mostly within the youth demographic. The platforms enhance political participation frequencies because they make politically relevant content straightforward to access. Shifts in political participation show a positive connection with social media usage when users take part in online campaigns while distributing political content along with participating in online debates. Social media tools enable political activism by letting people form organizing committees to participate in new and traditional political activities. (Shahzad, 2014).

Social networking represents the process of information exchange between individuals and groups of people and institutions as it develops productive relationships for any reason according to another definition. Social networking sites started their development at the beginning of the twenty-first century to enable user connections and allow sharing of information along with videos and photos along with music and movies as well as other content types. (Scheijter & Tirosh 2015; Kaplan & Andreas, 2012). This sharing has negatively affected Pakistani adolescents who invest most of their time inside educational institutions and strive to attract others towards them. (Safdar & Abbasi, 2020). The variety of content types exists on social media because users produce materials they find interesting. Social networking sites sharing user-generated content are available to public access throughout the internet. The practice of managing social media content leads managers to post many types of content along with substantial acquisition of knowledge about multiple subjects (de Zuniga et al., 2014). Multiple famous social media applications serve as the preference of users in almost every country. People base their selection of social networks on how widely different demographics and nations use them. (Statista.com).

The media presents an overview of how social media gives Pakistani citizens a shared space where they can express their frustration about corruption and energy shortages as well as their dissatisfaction regarding leadership competency. According to Latif (2013) the future of Pakistan is shaped through effects of social media. The author demonstrates the vast importance of social media by presenting multiple Supreme Court suo moto rulings. Multiple political organizations such as the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) and Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) together with Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI) employed social media systems to promote their various political positions while promoting younger voter turnout in the 2013 elections. Facebook and Twitter alongside blogs were classified as social media by the researcher in this research project.

The political lives of modern teenagers demonstrate marked effects from their involvement in youth participatory politics. Research indicates that participatory politics would give daily concerns of young people the power to speak more effectively. According to this research's definition of youth participatory politics includes the formation of political groups while also

spreading political manifesto details and expressing political issue concerns and advocating political party choices or leadership standings as well as establishing personal agendas. (Ahmad & Sajjad Sheikh, 2013).

SNSs and Youth

Present-day society functions as a worldwide network of connected people. The Internet has established a massive interconnected network comprising all users actively linked to each other. Social media provides an exciting new platform because they steadily attract more users among children today. Social media adoption receives strong interest from young populations all across the world. A "social networking site" (SNS) term applies to all computer-mediated communication together with social media tools like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn and WeChat. The interchangeability of terms occurs because social media and social network sites share the same definition. Web-based services named social network sites allow users to create profiles while simultaneously showing their affiliations between members and facilitating member searches and list explorations (Llison et al., 2007). (Ocansey, Ametepe, & Oduro, 2016).

Understanding modern young people's political ideas requires the exploration of shifting meanings behind "news" and "participation". A sizable number of present-day young people serve as producers and distributors of content they present as news through online platforms. The definition of news for social media users has shifted from its source creator to the individual who shares content based on peer-sharing value. Social media platforms provide news to the majority of present-day young people while Facebook alongside YouTube with SnapChat represent their most frequent news sources according to research on those between 18 and 29 years old. (API, 2015; Pew Research Center, 2015; Shearer and Gottfried, 2017).

The youth population of Pakistan actively utilizes social media because it serves as a platform to share political viewpoints and grows their political understanding. Common people together with students and leaders as well as political parties use social media during recent years to express their views about national and international topics while seeking support from the public. Owen explains that digital communication technology together with the internet introduction activated a higher participation rate among young people on social media. Young people become attracted to social media because the platform enables them to maintain connections with family and express their political views. Social networks provide young people with a fundamental political teaching platform that makes them an essential and dynamic force. Social media growth at a fast pace in Pakistan has attracted numerous young Pakistanis who now have better political awareness. (Muzaffar, Chodhry, & Afzal, 2019).

Social networking services have obtained status as platforms which support personal relationship building. Social media creates particularly strong interpersonal relationships among people who share recreational activities or personal histories along with friendships. Youth users now access social networking sites more frequently because of the availability of internet access. Social media usage has dramatically increased since people began incorporating technology into their everyday lives during the recent years. The study aims to create substantial knowledge for youth users of social networking sites by focusing on their behavior. Results from site usage studies will demonstrate both positive and negative impacts on young people while providing them with effective operation methods.

Social media and new media have risen as political activity platforms following their widespread adoption and this phenomenon becomes a topic frequently addressed in academic literature. DiMaggio et al. (Xenos dan Moy, 2007) state that scholarly investigations which evaluate media effects on civic and political life mainly exist as either optimistic or pessimistic research approaches. Social media receives optimistic assessment because it shows several different

characteristics from traditional media while enabling people to take new political actions. In contrast to radio and television traditional media, new media enable their users to create messages containing news updates as well as information alongside personal expressions. Non-restricted social connections together with immediate information spread enable users to acquire different types of information and opinions at reduced costs. A larger group of people can be organized through new media channels according to current evidence. (Azis & Agung Setyawan, 2020).

The population segment of young people makes substantial social contributions to modern societies. The historical record shows that young people have actively helped advance major political transformations as well as economic prospective development and power system evolution. People equipped with social media have access to power that helps them create new innovations and function as a creative force. Social media provides access to affordable technological tools which enable people to obtain essential information in a straightforward manner. Social media serves as a tool for activists to execute their organizational activities. The present-day Pakistan political environment stands significantly shaped by social media websites. Through political discussions on digital platforms Pakistani youth establish their identities while sharing their perspectives about politics as a way to participate in political processes.

According to Ahn (2011) the ability of social media to establish peer relationships and knowledge exchange makes it vital for young people when developing their identities and social connections. Lenhart et al. (2015) demonstrate how young people use social media to gain political knowledge and engage in civic activities together with seeking pleasure. Social media platforms provide easy access to users through interactive interfaces that facilitate young people to share their concerns while building social change movements. (Xenos et al., 2014).

Young people describe social media as a virtual space which gives them ways to mingle with others online while sharing their opinions about political questions. The widespread presence of social media serves as a key platform for sparking Pakistani youth political participation by providing three essential functions: activist activities combined with citizen involvement and information distributions. Through social media platforms young Pakistani citizens can discover multiple perspectives and challenge official statements before directly joining political discussions instead of being restricted by traditional media controlled by corporate powers or government agencies. (Ahmed & Skoric, 2014).

Political Engagement of Youth

Individuals participate in political events through voting together with protesting and campaigning which also includes discussing political matters according to Verba Schlozman and Brady (1995).

According to Norris (2002) political engagement includes three elements which are citizens' psychological orientations as well as their behaviors and activities related to voting and activism and civic participation in the political process.

The extent to which people stay involved with political matters and share discussion about politics and participate in political activities offline and online represents the concept of political engagement according to Ekström and Shehata (2018).

The process through which people and organizations take part in actions to shape political results makes up political engagement as a broad definition. Verba and others (1995:341) wrote in their definition of political engagement that activities will fall under this category if their purpose amounts to influencing government action directly or indirectly. The definition specifies that political engagement requires intentional action while targeting the shaping of government policy decisions.

There are various activities available for political involvement starting with standard political practices moving towards non-traditional methods. Traditional political involvement includes casting votes while getting in touch with government members and being part of parties and assisting with electoral campaigns. Participation in these activities obtains social recognition as official political contribution types within democratic political systems according to Dalton (2008).

The activities of unconventional political engagement involve people who participate in protests and boycotts and strikes together with those who take part in online activism and social media campaigns. People who experience marginalization from traditional political systems use these confrontation-based methods because they do not find conventional processes acceptable (Norris, 2002).

The involvement of citizens through acts and events and political activities which determine political representative selections and their actions makes up political participation. More than one approach exists for individuals to express their rights and voice their opinions and produce political outcomes. For any democratic system the act which modifies political outcomes functions as a civic duty and stands as a vital requirement. The definition of political engagement describes it as multiple citizen actions which have the objective of steering organizational policies or governmental authorities.

Political action enables voters to select representatives who establish beneficial policies that support both their representatives along with the social welfare program beneficiaries. Supporting discussions regarding socio-political and economic matters used for selecting future leaders represents an additional component of political participation. The evaluation of leadership capabilities must combine with promoting social problem solutions in order to build a prosperous nation. Fluctuating from participating in political campaigns to voting and performing public consultations and collaborating with interest groups and monitoring election procedures are categorized as political participation. (Funmilola & B. Folorunso, 2020).

Political activities refer to the diverse actions which people or groups carry out to change political decisions as well as to voice their opinions or defend particular matters. Various political actions help citizens actively participate in democracy yet their specific forms shift based on political systems together with social environments. Among all political activities voting stands as both the most elementary and vital practice. People use voting to elect their political leaders and select public policy decisions that achieve democratic legitimacy and maintain political leader accountability. Verba, Scholzman and Brady (1995) establish that voting stands as the fundamental element of democratic involvement because it offers citizens a straightforward way to take part in political procedures.

The critical political activity of protesting involves collective action that people use to demonstrate their resistance against government policies and social issues. Social movements together with protests have consistently acted as important factors behind political changes throughout history. The Civil Rights Movement in the United States alongside the Arab Spring in the Middle East show how protests effectively drive political as well as social transformations (Tilly, 2004). Social movements originating from grassroots organizations work towards achieving particular political economic or social modifications. To build public backing for their reasons several movements implement different methods that range from demonstrations to advocacy campaigns.

Social media has transformed political outreach during the twenty-first century because it enables new ways for people to interact with politics while seeking information along with taking part in civic life. Political dialogue through Facebook along with Twitter and Instagram and TikTok has established itself as essential in current political discussions while youth play a dominant role in this transformation. Social media functions as an essential platform in Pakistan because it activates

young citizens while making their views louder and developing political understanding in the country's youth-oriented population and expanding internet accessibility base. Social media produces diverse effects on political involvement because it brings together both positive and negative elements. The evaluation analyzes the ways social media platforms shape the political involvement of Pakistani youth as it affects their political consciousness and their collective activist and participatory habits.

The nation of Pakistan hosts above 240 million citizens with the fourth largest demographic of youth worldwide. Replacing the UNDP data from 2020 reveals the United Nations Development Programme analyzed Pakistan and discovered 64% of its residents are younger than thirty years old. The large young population of Pakistan generates a wealth of political potential but also brings numerous complex political issues for the nation. Youth participation in traditional political institutions remains low and voting rates are low in Pakistan according to Khan & Khan (2020). Young Pakistanis now have access to social media which allows them to bypass traditional gatekeepers and become direct participants in political discourse while accomplishing political participation. Twitter together with Instagram act as powerful vehicles which help run digital demonstrations and promote voter involvement and spread political initiatives across online networks.

Young Pakistani voters during the 2018 general elections deployed social media platforms to share political manifestos and discuss candidates and promote voting participation (Raza et al., 2020). Youth in Pakistan obtain justice through law enforcement accountability through the social media use of hashtags such as #JusticeForZainab and #ReleaseImranRiaz (Aslam & Asghar, 2023).

Several major political movements in Pakistan can be attributed to the role of social media platforms. The 2014 "Azadi March" along with the 2018 general elections earned their momentum from heavy youth mobilization that occurred through Facebook and Twitter services (Yousaf, 2019). The social media application TikTok shows remarkable capabilities in helping users express politics because its primary users belong to younger and less educated segments (Abbas, 2021). Social media networks boost political consciousness and enable youth communities to gather online for discussing subjects, exchanging ideas and taking joint action.

The positive aspects of social media involvement in politics do not eliminate the debates that surround its participation in political activism. The problems associated with false information and isolated information bubbles together with digital access barriers create doubts about how accessible beneficial political dialogue remains online (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012). During political disturbances the Pakistani government has sometimes cut off social media platform access to demonstrate its control over digital activism activities (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Pakistani youth need an advanced comprehension about how social media features modify their political participation because of these complicated elements.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The structured framework known as research methodology provides the necessary framework to ensure legitimate trustworthy ethical data collection analysis and interpretation of research problems. The study provides a basis for its methodology selection and approach decisions (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed) that will fulfill its study goals. The quantitative research methodology includes survey research selected by the researcher to conduct a described method for this study. The study will implement survey methodology through questionnaire distribution to gather opinions from young participants. Researchers can easily learn about social media and Pakistani youth and political participation because of this investigation.

Research Design

The research design comprises the fundamental structure that guides research by identifying data gathering methods and evaluation approaches to fulfill objectives. This design system ensures all three qualities of valid, reliable and systematized research outputs. The researcher employed descriptive research to gather survey data as part of their study procedure. For this study we will rely on quantitative methods of research. The research data will be obtained from the urban Pakistani youths. A mixture of data from professionals and college students along with the identified group of youth contributes to the information collection.

Population

A population represents every element which matches the characteristics of the study subject and research field. The research data came from all Pakistani youth across the nation. All participants belong to an age group from 18 to 60 years old. 3.4 Sampling Technique Scientists use sampling strategies to determine which subset of members from a big population will serve as relevant representatives of their entire community for research studies. For data collection from Pakistani youth in the general population who were between 18 and 60 years old the researcher adopted probability sampling with simple random technique (SMP).

Sample Size

Survey participants took from Pakistan's general population amounted to 342 individuals which the researcher chose for the research.

Define Variables of the study

Independent Variable (Social Media)

Social networking sites allow social media to function as groups of digital tools which provide users with the capability to create and share information and ideas and multimedia content. Users can maintain real-time interactions through these platforms which also enable them to perform various interactive functions like liking content and leaving comments and sharing posts.

Dependent Variable (Political Engagement)

The act of governing authoritatively comes through techniques which are supported by laws that determine official control of executive power or influence political choices. A group achieves decisions which impact its members through this process unless it links to public administration or power dynamics or governance. (Heywood, 2019).

Politics according to Aristotle represents the dominant science which explores societal structures for reaching collective welfare while maintaining equal access to justice. (Aristotle, 1996).

Easton (1971) describes politics as "the authoritative allocation of values in a society. Similarly, political systems determine how people and organizations receive resources and duties as well as rights. The process of collective decision-making through which group members continually create enforceable public policies stands as the definition of Politics according to Hague and Harrop (2021).

The research presents two tables containing reliability analysis results which measure Political Content Consumption on social media and Political Participation respectively. The value of Cronbach's Alpha for the Political Content Consumption scale stands at .545 according to Table 1 indicating poor internal consistency. The results indicate insufficient item correlations in this scale possibly requiring reforms to improve its measurement precision. The Political Participation scale

achieves good internal consistency evident through its Cronbach's Alpha value of .827 (Table 2). The items on this scale demonstrate effective measurement of the intended construct because they display strong alignment. The reliability scores of the Political Participation scale enhance the validity of research findings which study political involvement.

Table 1 Scale Reliability Analysis for Items Related to Political Content Consumption on social media.

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.545	6

Table 2 Scale Reliability Analysis for Items Related to Political Participation

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.827	10

To test the hypothesis that "H1₀: There is no meaningful relationship between the intensity of the use of social media and the consumption of political information on social networks" Pearson's correlation was conducted between the two variables: daily time spent on social media and consumption of political content on social media.

The results, presented in table 3, indicate that the Pearson correlation coefficient (r) is -0.066, suggesting a very weak negative relationship between the two variables. However, this correlation is not statistically significant ($p = .223$, which is greater than the conventional threshold of 0.05).

Since $p > 0.05$, we cannot reject the null hypothesis, that is, there is no significant relationship between time spent on social networks and consumption of political content.

The low negative correlation (-0.066) suggests that increased social media use is not related to increased use of political content and may even be decreasing slightly, but this trend is not statistically significant.

Table 3. Correlations between social media use intensity and consumption of political information

		Consumption of political content on social media	How much time daily do you spend on social media
Consumption of political content on social media	Pearson Correlation	1	-.066

	Sig. (2-tailed)		.223
How much time daily do you spend on social media	Pearson Correlation	-.066	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.223	

Table 4 presents a descriptive analysis of political participation across various categories of social media users. The results indicate that heavy social media users have the highest level of political participation, with a mean score of 2.81, followed by moderate users with a mean score of 2.52. Light social media users exhibit the lowest political participation, with a mean of 2.45. The overall mean political participation across all participants (N = 342) is 2.56.

Table 4 Descriptive analysis of political participation over social media use

Social Media Users Category	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Light Social Media Users	95	2.45	.853
Moderate Social Media Users	176	2.52	.849
Heavy Social Media Users	71	2.81	1.021
Total	342	2.56	.895

To evaluate differences in political participation among different social media users (H2) ANOVA test was performed. Data in Table 5 shows the ANOVA test as:

- The Between-Groups row shows a sum of squares of 5.868, degrees of freedom (df) of 2, and a mean square value of 2.934. This represents the variation in political participation that is explained by differences in social media usage categories.
- The Within-Groups row shows a sum of squares of 267.547, with 339 degrees of freedom and a mean square of 0.789. This represents the variation in political participation within each group.
- The Total sum of squares is 273.415, with 341 total degrees of freedom.
- The F-statistic is 3.718, and the p-value (Sig.) is 0.025, which is less than 0.05.

Table 5 ANOVA political participation among light, moderate, and heavy social media users

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	5.868	2	2.934	3.718	.025
Within Groups	267.547	339	.789		

Total	273.415	341
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In Table 5 the p-value is statistically significant, we reject the null hypothesis (H_{20}), indicating that there is a significant difference in political participation among the three social media usage groups.

Table 6 Multiple Comparisons (Tukey HSD) political participation among light, moderate, and heavy social media users

				95% Confidence Interval		
		Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Light Users	Moderate Users	-.071	.113	.805	-.34	.20
	Heavy Users	-.360*	.139	.027	-.69	-.03
Moderate Users	Light Users	.071	.113	.805	-.20	.34
	Heavy Users	-.289	.125	.055	-.58	.00
Heavy Users	Light Users	.360*	.139	.027	.03	.69
	Moderate Users	.289	.125	.055	.00	.58

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 6 presents the results of the Tukey HSD post hoc test, which examines pairwise comparisons of political participation among light, moderate, and heavy social media users. The mean difference (I-J) column shows the difference in political participation scores between groups, while the significance (Sig.) column indicates whether the difference is statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

- **Light Users vs. Moderate Users:** The mean difference is -0.071 ($p = 0.805$), indicating no significant difference in political participation between these two groups.
- **Light Users vs. Heavy Users:** The mean difference is -0.360 ($p = 0.027$), which is statistically significant. This suggests that heavy social media users have significantly

higher political participation than light users.

- **Moderate Users vs. Heavy Users:** The mean difference is -0.289 ($p = 0.055$), which is marginally significant (remarkably close to 0.05), suggesting that heavy users tend to have higher political participation than moderate users, but the difference is not strongly significant.

In summary, political participations are significantly different only within light and heavy social media users, hence hypothesis H2b is accepted. The other two pairwise comparison hypotheses (H2a and H2c) are rejected.

Table 7 Correlation between political content consumption and political participation

		Political content consumption		Political participation
Political content consumption	Pearson	1		.228**
	Correlation			
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.000
Political participation	Pearson	.228**		1
	Correlation			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The findings in Table 7 suggest that individuals who consume more political content tend to be more politically engaged. This relation is significantly strong because the p-value (Sig.) is 0.00, which is less than 0.05. Considering this result, hypothesis H3 is accepted.

CONCLUSION

The research adds to the knowledge of how social media promotes political engagement among young Pakistani citizens. Members of society who use social media intensely sometimes show better political engagement but the relationship between social media time and actual political information use is relatively weak. More targeted campaigns for digital political mobilization become necessary after considering the combined impact of gender together with educational background on patterns of engagement. The discoveries from this study present important guidelines which benefit academic research and social media-based efforts to boost political citizenship among users.

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