

SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM AMONG YOUTH

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Abstract

Social media allows people to interact with each other across the globe. With the advancement in technology, social media has become an important for communication. This research paper analyzes how social media has changed the political landscape in mobilizing youth and creating political awareness among youth. In this advance era of technology almost everyone has an access to the social networking sites. This research intends to know does political participation over social media occurs with substantially more frequency than the traditional media. This research investigates how news ingestion patterns have been changed among youth. Survey method was opted for collecting data from university students. The research concludes that there is a positive relationship between social media and political awareness but social media doesn't contribute to political mobilization or political activism among youth. The research highlights that youth considers social media an important tool for sharing their views so in this way they can ensure their participation. But it doesn't always contribute towards political activism.

Keywords: Political activism, Political awareness, Political landscape, Political participation and social networking sites

INTRODUCTION

Social media usage has been tremendously increased among youth. With the emergence of social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, You tube etc. communication patterns have been modified. Users of social media can socialize with anyone from the world. They can share information and opinion of their own. It reduces communication gap for the people who cannot be physically in contact with one another, technology connects them. Social media is influencing almost every field of life. With the modification of communication patterns, all domains of life have been affected and same is the case with politics, political parties have started online campaigns, politicians also use social media for updating their followers. Hence any individual who wants to know about their favorite political party or politician can easily find a way to connect them through social media.

Since youth are the active members of social networking sites so this research is concerned with youth political participation and political activism over social media. It is assumed that social networking sites such as Facebook are enabler for political participation. So basically this study assessed the role of internet on political behavior.

According to different researches, in Pakistan social media has changed the political landscape by proving to be more engaging medium of communication than the traditional mediums. It allows the citizens to be the administrator and consumer of the information at the same time. It serves as a platform for unification of people for social and political movements. It is important to know how social media performs political tasks for political parties by mobilizing voters. Political parties in Pakistan for example Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf (PTI), Pakistan Muslim League N, Pakistan People's Party manage their own official social media accounts for gaining support of masses. It has been regarded that social media is best platform for measuring public opinion (Steiglitz, Brockmann, & Xuan 2012). Because it influences political opinions (Gionis, Terzi, & Tsaparas, 2013).

The educated youth of Pakistan engaged in social networking sites always finds it more convenient to get updates from social media than newspaper, television or radio. In the present era, social media usage has become a trend among youth. Keeping this in mind, the current study examines how political activism among youth of Pakistan is related to social media. It could be interesting to examine how politicized the social media in Pakistan is in comparison to other countries. The developing countries or countries with similar internet penetration rate can be investigated. It tells how communication patterns among youth is changing and similarly political landscape has also been changed.

It is important to know at which pace we are progressing in terms of positive use of technology. Research indicates that in Pakistan successful use of social media can be traced back to the Lawyers 'movement of 2007-09 and after that in general elections of 2013 PTI was very much active on social media and after that almost all parties are trying to have more followers on social media. Moreover there were some other cases too such as NICL, Steel Mills, and Hajj Scam in which online networking provided great support (Karamat & Farooq, 2016). Thus the current study also examines that what is the role of Social media sites in raising awareness regarding politics among Pakistani youth and to what extent social media sites provided the impetus to youth for taking part in Political activities.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

So the research questions for the present study are:

- To know about the increased usage of social media and its relation to political awareness among youth of Pakistan
- To know the impact of excessive usage of social media on political awareness among students

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to (Michaelsen, 2011), the basic advantage of online communication for transnational communities is that it goes beyond geographical borders. By connecting people physically distant miles away social media strengthens the scope of collective action. It means social media compared with old media provides more impetus towards civic response. It can actually mobilize people for a common purpose. It can provide opportunities for people from all domains of life for civic engagement. The basic essence of democracy is people's participation and so in this regard new technology is providing that. Yunus (2013) also examined the features of social media which makes it unique over traditional media and identified the features as more spontaneous communication worldwide. Immediacy transparency, accessibility and participation are other important features.

Arab spring initiated in Tunisia and it was spread in Middle Eastern countries. The platforms used for these protests were Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Tunisia government censored internet but it didn't work at all because the country was also connected outside with Gulf through internet. The protests initiated spread on social media with a tag Jasmine Revolution and it helped opposition to arrange their protests and to gather and gain support from more and more number of people. Similarly in Egypt during Mubarak's regime the use of internet especially Twitter was at its peak and there were more and more tweets against Mubarak's regime were being posted in a single day (Safranek, 2012). Social media was being used to throw oppressive regimes. It is to be mentioned that protests started in streets but social media was a platform for protests to make them more appealing and successful.

Studies on the role of social media in Arab Spring suggests that it played a major role in middle east countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, Libya to overthrow authoritarian regimes. The people of these states used social networking sites to have broader appeal of unity. The messages were communicated not only to local residents but all over the world using social media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Whether social media stimulates a response or not it affects are undeniable. So in case of Arab revolutions, social media gave people power to revolt against their corrupt and oppressive governments. The highest number of youthful population is in Middle East countries and they are active members of social networking sites. During political unrest in these countries, social media mobilized people by having different campaigns and hash tags on Facebook and Twitter (Gire, 2014; Safranek, 2012). In Britain Burford (2012) examined the political participation by Muslim council of Britain and explored that there was a successful use of Twitter as compared to other traditional sources of newspaper and press release.

In Pakistan, Kugelman (2012) explored that in case of Lawyers' movement of 2007-09 when Pervez Musharraf banned the private TV channels to broadcast any sort of information. Social media was the only one medium used for communication and in flood of 2010 in Pakistan, several online forums were used to appeal aid and it worked out. So initially a medium of communication is bringing a change in society (Kugelman, 2012).

The 2013 elections in Pakistan witnessed first time the use of social media. Social media usage for political campaigns was observed by PTI, PMLN, PPP and MQM .PTI regularly updated the elections campaign on Twitter (Ahmed & Skoric 2014). Ahmed and Skoric has given the analysis of 2013 elections in terms of elections campaign and claimed the use of Twitter as a major communicating tool in their article "My name is Khan: The use of Twitter in the campaign for 2013 Pakistan General Election". According to them it was the first time in election history to use social media especially the use of Twitter was on its peak. According to him, the unsafe environment of Pakistan during rallies also triggers the use of social media as a safe place for mobilizing voters. The purpose of twitter use was to have a large number of audiences. Basic target of PTI was youth and mainly youth was active on social networking sites. So it was a nice strategy used by PTI and it somehow was successful because the voter turnout in 2013 elections for PTI was a large (Ahmed & Skoric 2014).

Madiha Shakeel in her article 'Social media to become key tool during election campaigns in Pakistan' claims the successful use of social media in 2018 elections because social media has reduced the gap between politicians and voters. Reactions, feedbacks and online political debate allow politicians to know about people's support and participation. This mean that immediate feedback of people which cannot be possible through mass media helps politicians strengthen their election campaign (Shakeel, 2018).

Study conducted on exploring the impacts of new media technologies on political parties' campaign and government's activities in Karachi during Pakistan's 2018 election suggests that social media have shown positive results in terms of informing citizens about political happenings and mobilizing voters (Jamil, 2018). Social media serves as a platform for youth to have political exposure (Saud, Mashud, & Ida, 2020).

Similar research studies clearly claimed that the rising trend of social media is useful for political parties to share their manifestos. The highest users of social networking sites are youth so as youth as voters can have political knowledge as well as they manages to have in depth information about politicians to where they are going, their meetings with other party officials, their scandals. This is otherwise difficult to know from traditional media due to its manipulation. This means that this platform enables the voters especially the youth to firstly to know about news, secondly to have their reviews by posting a status or a video. This can help them to have a political

knowledge and analysis in terms of what other people are sharing on social media about certain news. All this contributes to their political participation (Javaid, 2017).

Studies conducted on political socialization in the twenty first century suggested that technology has already facilitated the communication process and it is not wrong to say that one of the agents of socialization is social media, which is the prime function of social networking sites. But at the same time these sites are useful in political socialization which is the way to know about political values and beliefs. This means that whether or not someone is interested in politics, they come across variety of political stuff on social media and they get informed about how political system is working. So they set up certain belief about the political system or policies and it actually made them to think differently (Khan & Shahbaz, 2015; Owen, 2008).

Various researches have been conducted on measuring the impact of social media among youth of Pakistan and it has been concluded that as world is moving towards globalization and this is the era of technology and smart phones so relying on traditional media for news is becoming outdated among youth and they are preferring online means of communication. Among that means of communication, Facebook is the popular one to be used by students. It is students spend more time on Facebook having exposure to socio political happening around them (Zaheer, 2016; Zulqarnain, 2017; Abdu, Mohamad & Muda, 2017; Karamat & Farooq, 2016).

Study on impact of new media on dynamics of Pakistan politics suggests that if new media is serving as a platform where people from diverse backgrounds can interact so it is promoting intergroup relations. Moreover this new media has introduced the concept of cyber sphere and to gain external attention. Social media successfully creates a hype regarding any important as well as unimportant topic. People can get out their frustration in media regarding any political decision (Eijaz, 2013).

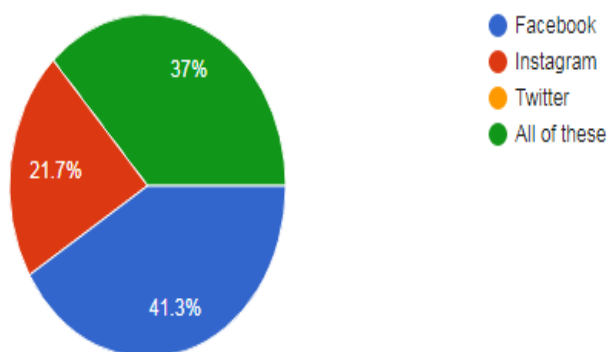
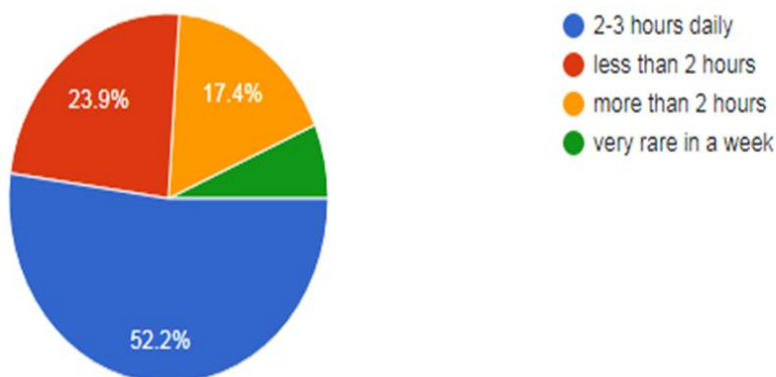
Students actively use social media for gaining political information and sharing their views and discussing political issues with their fellows (Arshad & Hassan, 2014). Marcheva (2008) found that Facebook helped in understanding politics by providing a platform for discussing issues. Social media strongly influences political participation and youth responded to be better about what is happening in politics and government by using social media (Ahmad, Alvi, & Ittefaq, 2019). In this context, Perilla (2012) also discussed the successful relation between internet use and political participation.

METHODOLOGY

To analyze the impact of excessive usage of social media on political awareness among students, perception of university students were analyzed. The data was collected through a self-administered questionnaire. Population of the study was university students of Lahore. Sample was drawn from n=200 across universities of Lahore including Punjab University Lahore, Government College University Lahore, University of Management and Technology, Services institute of Medical Sciences, University of Veterinary and Animal Sciences, Lahore college for women university and king Edward medical university Lahore. Sample was selected by using convenience sampling technique. The sample was selected from both male and female. The age group of the respondents was between 20-25. They were asked certain questions regarding the use of social networking sites, preference of which of the social networking site, their trust on any news circulating on social media, and how much traditional media is now important in their day to day life. The data was analyzed by using descriptive statistics.

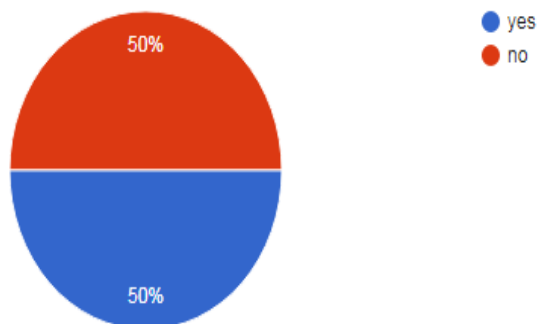
DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

The first question asked was that which of the social networking sites is popular among youth and about 37% responded that they are member of all social networking sites including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, while 41.3.% said that they only use Facebook so it was quite clear from this question that all social networking sites are popular among youth . Facebook was the most widely used social networking site among youth.

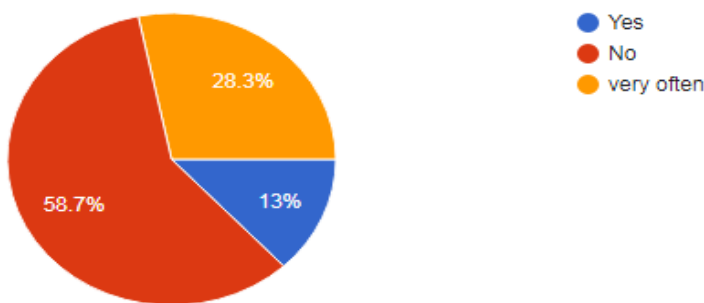


Second question asked was about on average how much time they spend on social networking sites and majority of the respondents 52.3% answered that they use social media on daily basis and give about 2-3 hours daily. Very few percentage (6.5%) responded that they use social media very rare in a week. 17.4% responded that they spend more than 2 hours on daily basis.

Participants were asked about likeability of their favorite political party which they follow on social media. Options given to them on the basis of major existing parties. Religious parties were excluded from the options. 46.1% responded that they follow Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf on social media while 17.6% voted for Pakistan Muslim league (N) and rest of the participants were following Pakistan’s people party (PPP). It shows that majority of youth follows PTI on social media.



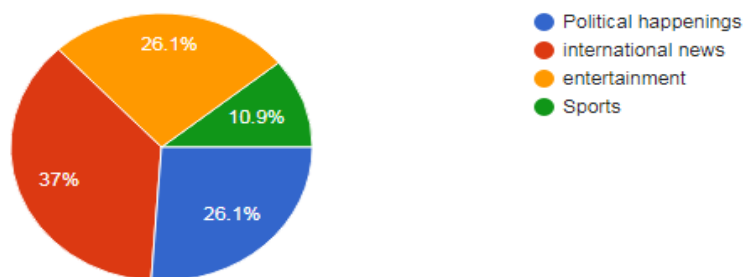
The next question asked was that if participants use Facebook/Twitter for sharing political news or not. Results were very interesting and surprising in this case. According to 50% respondents they use Facebook/Twitter for sharing political news. While 50% did not consider Facebook. /Twitter as a medium for sharing political news. So the opinion was divided in this question.



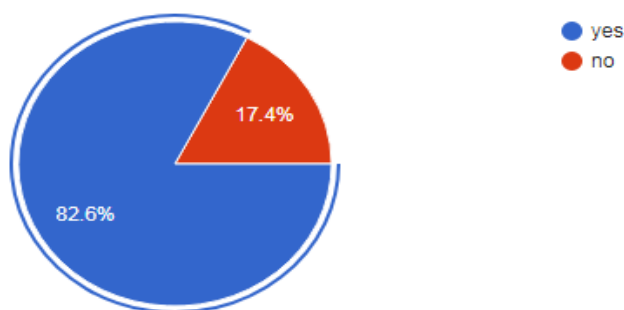
In this regard, another question was asked about the provoking role of social media on the participate in political protests or not. As we have seen the 'dharna' trend by PTI and large rallies by PPP and PML (N) advertise their message about campaigns on social media. So basically the need of this question was to know that if youth gets mobilized on the call of their favorite political party leader for protest through social media campaigns or not. 58.7% responded that they social media does not provoke them for political protests and 28.3% responded that very often they get provoke.

Next question asked was how much educated youth rely on the information obtained from social media. In this question 17.4% responded that they don't rely on information obtained from social media while 39.1% responded that they do rely on information obtained from social media and 43.5% were of the view that they not always they rely on authenticity of news but sometimes they do rely.

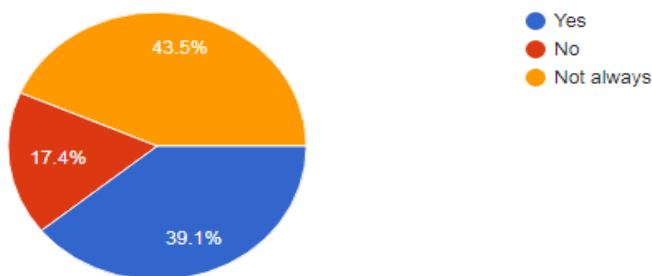
When asked about preference regarding traditional media, majority 50% voted for television and 19.6% voted for newspaper. While 30.4% were having no preference for traditional media.



In response to the question for what purpose they use traditional media So 26.1% told that they use for knowing about political happenings and 26.1% responded that they use television for entertainment like for viewing dramas, movies and cartoons while 37% use Television for getting updates about international news and 10.9% voted for sports channels.



In response to the question regarding expressing views on social media, 82.6% responded that yes it is quite convenient for them to express their views on any issue or decision on social media platform.



It is quite clear now from the results as this is age of new media and social media has influenced all walks of life so the role of traditional media has been suppressed. As it is quite convenient for the youth to have cell phones and can get latest updates from internet. Different social networking sites are providing different services and the most important and the common function among all is the communication. Youth clearly agreed that communication patterns have been modified. There is still a place for Television and newspapers in every house but they are now not

that important as they were before social media. It is only left either to know about international news or entertainment. It is quite surprising to know that where in schools and college times, there was more emphasize by teachers to develop reading habits now technology speaks everything.

Political news shared on social media demands authenticity and you can't question the authenticity of news because you do not know who is behind the news because hiding your identity on social networking sites is very common and it is difficult to trace the original person. So the youth not every time relies on the news shared on social media. It is very important that platforms like social media give voice to ordinary citizen. Not every voice can be heard on traditional media. People do express their concerns regarding any issue on social media. They can write about whatever they want. As far as popularity of a political party is concerned than PTI was the most popular party followed by youth on social media other than Pakistan Muslim League (N) and other parties.

CONCLUSION

So the research concludes that youth of Pakistan is quite active on social media but it cannot be generalized that every time the news on social media is authentic one. But yes it does serve as a tool of communication. Most of the stories ignored by traditional media or due to media manipulation not covered by news channels are presented on social media. Even the news channels have their social media pages. Any Youth finds it a source of every kind of information and among all social networking sites Facebook is the popular one. Social media gives voice to everyone. And people do raise their opinions best on social media. Social doesn't every time contribute to political activism among youth. It all depends on the purpose being served by the calling protest.

This research presents the conclusion by survey that social media is playing a pivotal role in political awareness but it doesn't contribute towards political participation. Power of social media has been quite eminent in politics of Pakistan. Not only is it used for communication and promotion of parties. It is also being used to defame opponent members and wars of comments or hate speech also continues on social media. In this age of technology everyone is getting benefits from the successful use of technology. Youth is active on social media and they do express their concerns on social media but they don't get mobilized by social media campaigns. They do get updates from social media which contributes towards political awareness but political participation is negatively related to social media usage.

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