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## **ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN CREATING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG THE YOUTH IN LAHORE; PAKISTAN**

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### **Abstract**

Social media has developed as an instrument recently that permits people to generate and share diverse thoughts, pictures, videos and information in an effective manner. It is a tool through which people communicate, interact and collaborate with each other online which ultimately affects their attitude and conduct and has led to an increase in their information concerning various social, economic and political issues. This research thus aimed to examine the role and effectiveness of social media in creating political awareness among the youth in Lahore, Pakistan. Further, the question like does the political awareness gained from social media increased political participation of youth in Pakistan? has also been entertained in this paper. This research paper has been written by implying mix methodology i.e. qualitative and quantitative. For finding the results a survey method was used as a strategy to collect primary data from students of different universities. On the basis of the survey, it was concluded that social media has increased the political awareness of the youth in Pakistan however despite of this increase in awareness politically, there has been less development in the political participation of the youth.

### **Keywords**

Social Media, Political Awareness, Youth, Political Participation



## 1. Introduction

Social media is a tool or an agent of sharing of ideas and information to help the people through computer-generated link. Social media is explained as a system of gathering of computer based messages and conversations tools based on people's shared ideas and interactions. Presently, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and LinkedIn are few examples that allow their users to share, raise and communicate their ideas, thoughts, photos and videos with their families and friends. Most important aspects of Social Media are to provide a channel to get information, show views and have discussions. Social Media also increases freedom of expression of people who uses it regularly. In this regard, there is a research conducted by Bode *et. al* (2014) in which researchers found an affirmative connection between online political countenance and political participation.

On the other hand, political awareness is referred to as being sensitive about government and its policies and the outline that politicians follow in their affairs. It is also about gaining insight into the existing or secreted plans, in an association, and mainly the power relationship that exist in a society. Political awareness is a very vital element of democratic states as it allows the general masses to examine the political realities of their society and then make their judgment about voting. This awareness can be gained through various sources which include "information shared by family and peers, campaigns of political parties or political leaders,

educational institutions as well as religious institutions in some countries". Moreover, television and newspapers which are two notable forms of media play an important role in providing political awareness all across the globe. However, in the recent years social media has evolved as a new medium for political awareness particularly amongst the youth whose ages range from 15-25 as they are more active on the social networking websites than the older people. Social media gained prominence as it allows its users to communicate not only with their family and friends but also offer them accessibility to the profiles of well-known political leaders and political parties through which they not only acquire political knowledge but also get the chance to voice their opinions openly.

## 2. Importance of Social Media

Social media has evolved as a significant feature of the present world and has changed the thinking pattern and behavior of people to a great extent. In the contemporary world, social media is utilized to keep everyone around the world associated and has transmuted the world into a global village. Engagement and participation of people in the society has also increased due to social media as it enables citizens to voice their ideas and opinions in a free manner and allows them to take initiatives in an easier manner. Before the rise of social networking sites, governments and the traditional media i.e print and electronic media were mainly responsible for transferring information to the general public however this trend has changed with the

expanding scope of social media and technology. From the standpoint of development, it is now-a-days more convenient for people and groups to generate movements and present their views to the world, either for a good or a bad cause, by means of social network such as “Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blogs and micro-blogs etc.” Even in countries where social media sites are supervised or controlled by state authorities, civil uprisings and social movements have taken place with the assistance of the aforementioned communication channels, for instance Arab Spring that took place in the Middle East. Moreover, social media has now become an integral source of political awareness as many politicians and political parties are now using this medium to propagate their manifestos and opinions to the general public especially the youth in order to garner their support.

### **3. Historical Background**

During the end of 1980s and beginning of 1990s, ISP (Internet Service Providers) began to surface through which a new period in communication emerged. In 1990’s, internet usage enlarged considerably, particularly in the western biosphere, however, by 2001, one-third of the developed countries had internet penetration. Due to this increase in the internet usage, the marketable and communicational worth of internet began to apprehend which ultimately resulted in the rise and expansion of facilities by means of internet. Internet with the help of WWW (World Wide Web) laid foundations for “electronic mail services, discussion forums,

blogs, social networks, online shopping sites, media sharing platforms etc.”

Social media succeeded to produce a durable substitute for press and electronic media as unlike these two mediums it did not rely on “one-way communication” rather enabled its users to communicate and collect immediate response from its audience. Moreover, social provided its users with the facility to “watch videos, read blogs or listen to radio broadcast of individuals from the whole world” which was prior considered impossible in the presence of traditional media. Due to this factor large amount of people started using online social media services extensively such as Facebook which has “more than 850 million users at present from all around the world and more than 23% of these users check their accounts more than five times a day”.

One of the most significant impacts that this increase in the social media usage has created is the use of social media sites and technologies for political causes. Politicians and political activist all around the world are utilizing the strength of this medium now-a-days to reach to a large number of people. Political leaders and political parties have also started using social media by creating their personal “Facebook profiles, Twitter accounts, YouTube channels etc.”, in order to keep contact with the general public. In addition, many political activists and associations have now begun to use social networking sites for the purpose of creating political awareness and in some instances to organize protests. Thus, in this

way social media has become an integral part for people belonging to all walks of life and is now considered very important not only for social and economic benefits but for political benefits as well. Since the last decade, the world has transformed into a global village with the help of social media and has observed the impacts of social media in many areas including the area of politics. As the youth worldwide is more exposed to social media, therefore, this research tends to analyze the role social media is playing in providing political awareness to the youth particularly in Lahore. The nature of this study is quantitative. Objective methods were used such as questionnaire to collect relevant and impartial findings. The data was collected from primary as well as secondary sources such as a questionnaire and relevant journal articles, international reports and related websites. Data was collected by using Convenient Sampling Technique and a sample size of 100 consisting of university students was taken to fill the questionnaire.

#### **4. Literature Review**

Vasile (2014) stated that the speedy development of social networking sites in the past few years has made information more accessible to the people due to which social media has now become a main source of political information particularly for the youth that ultimately has an impact on their political interest and political participation. Although social networking sites like electronic media offers same features as far as exposure to informative material is concerned but the feature that sets it apart from traditional

media is its “global reach, better quality and greater speed, while also being an interactive platform for political discussion”. Youth in the contemporary world often acquire political knowledge from these sites rather than print and electronic media as the information available on social media is “more interactive, user-centered, briefer, easier to process and visually attractive”. People now-a-days progressively post their views online about politics, social and economic issues and also follow prominent political personalities on Facebook and Twitter etc. The author further cited the results of a study carried out by “Belgian Political Panel” to support her claims. The participants of this research exhibited strong inclination towards social media in regard to obtaining political information as social media sites are more reachable, informed and also offer chances for political debate. Most participants in the study disclosed that they liked speaking about different issues online and also stated that if their family members or friends shared a particular article, there are more chances that they would also read it and will get involved in the matter, hence showing the impact of peers in socialization. Additionally, most participants accepted that they continuously keep a check of their newsfeed on Twitter and Facebook, in order to remain up-to-date about political happenings. However, some participants in the research also appeared to be ignorant of the effect that the exposure of social media has on them, although they spoke at length regarding social media being a source of political knowledge and information.

Mohamad, Abdu and Muda (2016) stated that intellectuals over the years have displayed concern over the lack of political awareness and political participation among youth. Many researchers discovered that the reasons behind youth decline interest and participation in politics is their indifferent attitude towards political affairs due to their “lack of trust on their representatives, institutions as well as politicians”. Moreover, young people now-a-days are not stirred by the old-fashioned medium of information such as “radio, television and newspaper” which unvaryingly have narrow impact on increasing their interest in politics. However, recently due to the increasing number of social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, a change has occurred in the political awareness and political participation of the youth. Youth all over the world use social media sites almost regularly and express their views on different social, political and economic matters which show chances of increase in their participation in the political process in the future. Additionally, some scholars have stated that decline in political participation among youth is not a problem of much apprehension now-a-days because the youth have shifted their attention from “traditional political participation” to “alternative type of participation” which refer to the online activities of youth through which they can access information from different sources more easily and can communicate with people from all across the world. Yunus (2013) analyzed that in the past few years, the use of social media

has augmented significantly all across the globe. Since the last decade, the world has been witnessing the impacts of social media sites in different fields, however, one of the most considerable impact was observed in the field of politics. Politicians, now-a-days, use social media to promote their “political campaigns and to create awareness on political issues or for mobilizing protests”. Currently nearly in all social activities in the nations with high internet usage, the impact of social networking sites is being deliberated. The online communication through social media has evolved as an accessible and tremendously efficient instrument for influencing wide number of audiences with political motives.

In most parts of the globe, being active on social media platforms is now considered essential for the success of political campaigns of different leaders. Moreover, many political activist who previously experienced difficulty in reaching mass audiences through traditional media mainly due to its profit driven nature and censorship policies, are also taking advantage from social media. Arab spring is a primary example in this regard, in which social media was utilized efficaciously to plot a chain of protests against the government. Thus, it can be said that the social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter have become very significant for not only increasing awareness on political matters but also for engaging protests as the circulation of political material on these sites is tremendously high and reaches to a large sum of people in a

short span of time due to the viral nature of these sites.

Rainie, Smith, Schlozman, Brady and Verba (2012) claimed that social media usage has become a feature of civic and political engagement in the contemporary world. They stated that according to a survey conducted by “Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project”, 60 percent of adults in America use either Facebook or Twitter and 39 percent of them have carried out at least 1 out of 8 “civic or political activities” by using social media. The survey further claimed that these actions are more probable to be carried out by young users of social media sites in comparison to those who are fifty or older. According to the survey, there are more chances of young users to express their own views about different problems, share links containing political information, inspire others to participate in political activities and follow any political party or elected political leader on social networking sites. In addition, the survey highlighted that 35 percent users of social media have used social media platforms to boost people to cast their votes, 34 percent of them have utilized social media to share their personal opinions or to comment on any vital political or social problem, 31 percent of them have used social networking sites to motivate others to take a stand or action on a social or political matter that is significant to them while 20 percent users of social media have used it as an instrument to follow different political personalities and elected officials. Hence, social media is being used for

different political purposes due to which it has not only become a source of political awareness but is also playing a role in encouraging political participation.

Zaheer (2016) stated that the role and importance of social media has grown over the years and it has now evolved as a tool for political dialogue and debate and has become a platform for gaining political knowledge. Since the past few years, general masses and various social and political activists have started using social media as an instrument for “online and offline political participation” and have stopped relying on traditional media due to its restrictive nature. Political candidates and political parties all across the globe have also started using social networking sites to interact with general people, share their views and to influence probable voters. Social media has developed itself as an effective medium for political dissertation in Pakistan as well. Social media, in Pakistan, has provided a public platform to the masses through which they can express their views on different issues such as “corruption, exploitation, power crisis, injustice, and incompetent political leadership”. However, for Pakistani people, the notion of sharing political views on social networking sites is a moderately new phenomena. In the last few years, with the rise of consciousness among the masses and in particular the youth, political parties and leaders in Pakistan have also started utilizing the power of social media in order to update and effect society, particularly the youth. Thus, currently nearly all

the popular political parties of Pakistan have become active on social media by creating their own profiles by means of which they share their “achievements, policies, manifestos and moves”. For example, during 2013 general elections, social media was highly utilized by various political parties, especially by PTI (Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf), PML-N (Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz) and MQM (Muttahida Qaumi Movement) who used social networking sites such as Facebook to spread their respective political ideology and to motivate youth to use their power of vote in the elections. Thus, at the moment social media is playing an effective role in Pakistan for creating political awareness and thereby increasing political participation.

Karamat and Farooq (2016) stated that in the present age of technological advancement, the popularity and need for social media platforms has increased. In the past, internet was used as a rare form of communication, however, in the current timeframe, the significance of internet has doubled as it has not only made communication easier but is also affecting the society and its norms to a greater extent. At present, people all over the world depend on the internet for nearly every bit of information due to which social media have become critical for the “preparation of the aggregate activity and the creation, association and usage of social empowerment around the globe”. It has evolved as a source

through which people get informed about various socio-political happenings taking place all around the world and they also get to present and share this information with others. Moreover, through social media people have the benefit to articulate their political opinions more freely and independently. However, the reliability of the information available on social media sites is frequently criticized by many political and social analyst, nevertheless, its significance as an important source of socio-economic and political information cannot be denied in the contemporary world.

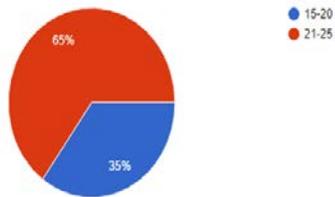
Furthermore, in this context, Kang (2010) is of the view that that whenever social media is used as an instrument to communicate for increasing public awareness and participation, its credibility should be taken into consideration as a major factor.

## **5. Results and Analysis**

To analyze the role of social media in creating political awareness among youth of Pakistan, a survey was conducted in which several university students participated. In regard with social media, Facebook and Twitter were mainly focused as most of the students use these web sites to interact with their friends and family or to get and share information. The ages of the participants ranged from 15-25, 58% of which were females while 42% were males.

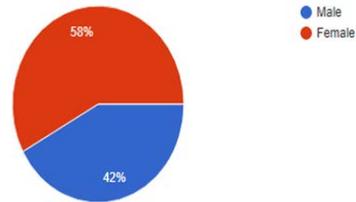
Age

100 responses



Gender

100 responses

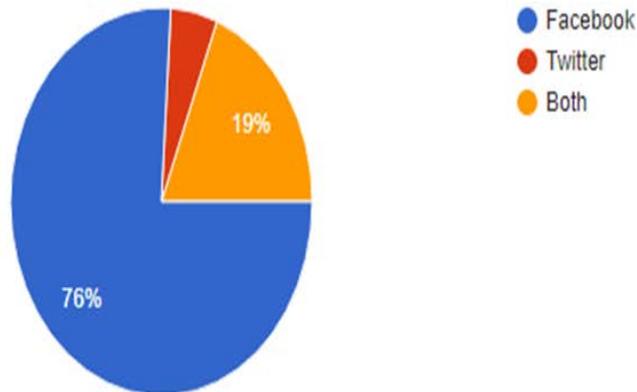


Firstly, the students were asked about which social media site among Twitter and Facebook, they use the most. 76% of the respondents used only Facebook, while 19% used both and only 5% used only Twitter. The results, thus, show

that most of the youth in Pakistan use Facebook to interact with friends and family, share their views and get informed about various social, economic and political happenings.

### Which social media site do you usually use?

100 responses

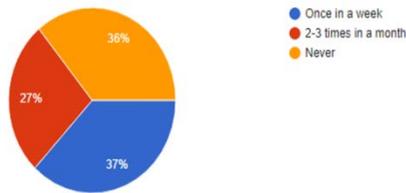


The respondents were then asked about the frequency of their Twitter and Facebook usage to express their political views. 37% of the respondents stated that they use these social media sites once a week, 27% stated that they use these sites 2-3 times a month while 36% stated

that they have never used these sites to express their political views. The result thus indicate that although most of the youth use social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter but only 64% of them use these sites to express their political view

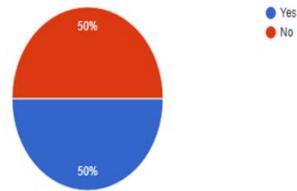
How frequently do you use Facebook or Twitter to express your political views?

100 responses



Do you follow any political pages or political personalities and ask your friends to participate in political events/actions on Facebook or Twitter?

100 responses

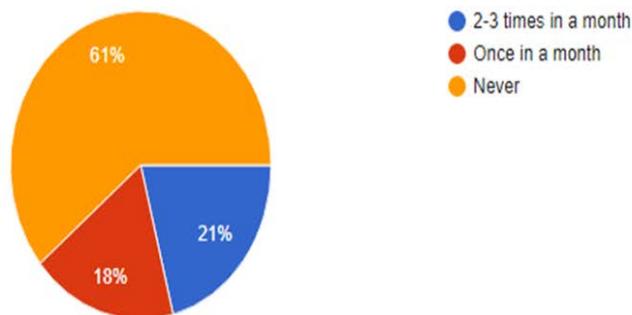


When asked about whether they follow any political pages or political personalities and ask their friends to participate in political events/actions on Facebook or Twitter, 50% responded in a Yes while 50% responded in a No. Hence, on the basis of this result it can be said that the respondents who follow political pages and political personalities on Facebook or Twitter and also encourage their friends to participate in the political activities they themselves support, are more interested in country's politics and are thereby more politically aware as compared to those who do not follow any political pages.

Respondents were then asked about their frequency regarding promoting any political activity on Facebook or Twitter. According to the results, 61% of the respondents have never used these sites to promote any political activity, 18% do so only once in a month while only 21% do so 2-3 times a month. The results indicate that although half of the youth does follow political pages and personalities but as far as engaging in political activities is concerned, most of them do not usually participate in them.

How often do you use Facebook or Twitter to promote any political activity?

100 responses

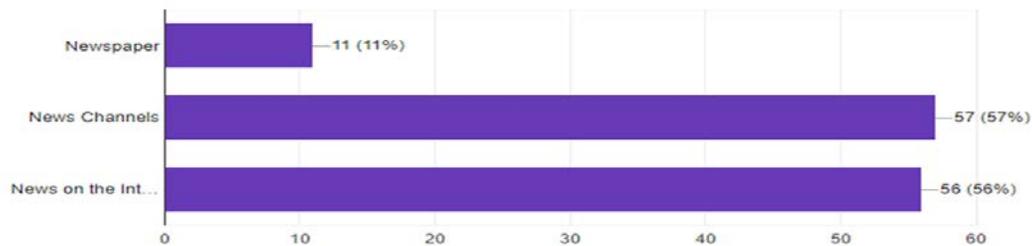


Respondents were further asked to choose the medium of information which they usually use to get information about the political scenario of the country. According to the results, 57% rely on news channels, 56% rely on the news on the Internet while only 11% read newspapers to get

familiar with the politics of the state. Based on this result, it can be said that although social media has become an effective alternative of mass media but still the youth of Pakistan rely on news channels more to get news about the political happenings.

**Which medium of information you usually use to find out about political news or information?**

100 responses

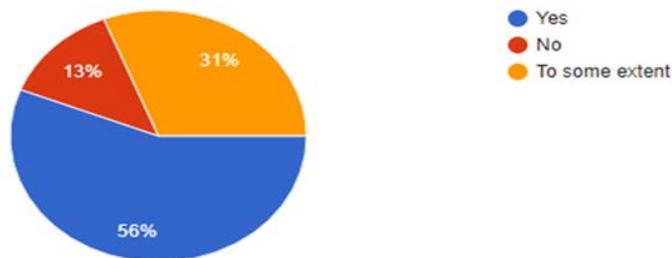


When asked about whether their political awareness increased or not after using social media sites, 56% responded in affirmation, 13%

responded in negative while 31% believed that their political awareness increased to some extent after using social media sites.

**Did your political awareness increased after using social media sites such as Facebook or Twitter?**

100 responses

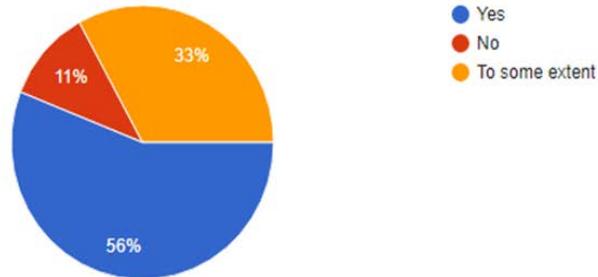


Lastly, the respondents were asked about their opinion regarding the role of social media sites in promoting political participation among youth in Pakistan during the 2013 general elections. 56% of the students considered social media effective

in promoting political participation among youth while 11% favored the opposite stance and 33% referred social media to be somewhat effective in ensuring political participation of the youth during the 2013 general elections.

Do you think social media sites in Pakistan were effective in ensuring youth political participation during 2013 general elections?

100 responses



## 6. Conclusion

In the present age of technological development, social media has gained much popularity and has become an integral part of today's world. The influence of internet on the day-to-day lives of the people and on the society is increasing by each passing day and today many people in particular the youth is dependent on social networking sites for communication purposes and for acquiring and sharing information regarding various social, political and economic matters.

Given the mounting significance of social networking sites all across the globe, the present research aimed to analyze the role of social media in creating political awareness among the youth of Pakistan. It was found out that the number of youth that uses social media in Pakistan is increasing day by day and it has now become an essential part of their life. The results of the study show that majority of the respondents believe that

the use of social media has increased their political awareness about political issues.

The youth in Pakistan is actively using social media to get information about their surroundings and to express their views on various social, economic and political issues, however, as far as practically engaging and promoting political activities on social media is concerned; the youth in Pakistan still have a long way to go. Nevertheless, the research found out that most of the youth in Pakistan does acknowledge the role social media is playing in political awareness and continue to rely on this medium for getting information about the local as well as global happenings.

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