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## **FACEBOOK AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM: A CASE STUDY OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study explores the significance of Facebook in imparting political knowledge among youth. The research is based on a detailed analysis of youth using social media such as Facebook, for getting profound knowledge about politics. It has provided substantial information about the use of social media by youth in Pakistan and its impacts on their political decision-making. The survey method through a specifically designed close-ended questionnaire was used for recording selected audience responses against various variables. The population of the present research include university students who frequently use Facebook as a source of information and political developments. The findings reveal that the use of Facebook among educated youth is growing to an exponential level. Male students spend more time using Facebook as compared to female and students with ages ranging from 23 to 26 frequent use Facebook to stay politically updated and seek help in political decision making.

**Keywords:** Facebook, social media, networking, political activism, students, information

### **INTRODUCTION**

Social media or new mediums that are operating through the internet are popular and have huge consumers around the world because they are swift, accurate, and rapid. The invention of computing has revolutionized as well as changed the representation of human society. The common use of computers in the nineties has given common man the access to the internet, while social media is becoming more and more popular every day. Social media is also considered tremendous breakthrough in rapidly grown technology as a forum for political activism. Social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube provide new ways to stimulate citizen engagement in political life during elections and electoral campaigns (Tenhunen & Karvelyte 2015). Social media users also bring politicians and political parties closer to their potential voters. It allows them to communicate faster and reach citizens in a more targeted manner and vice versa, without the traditional role of mass media. Reactions, feedback, conversations, and debates are generated online. Messages posted to personal networks are multiplied when shared, which can target new audiences (Lama, 2014).

Today, customers can get information through a gigantic variety of channels and sources. Researches show that some web-based system administration stages, like Wikipedia and YouTube, have ascended as basic information sources. More than fifty percent of teenagers and more than eighty percent of school students utilize internet to organize for their scholarly purposes.

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philosophers especially Russel pointed out that by viewing the profile at facebook, user can have an idea about the activity happening in diverse regions. Facebook customers join social events and like pages to discuss issues, topics, articles and confer other journalistic information to their friends (Russell, 2007).

The political system of Pakistan seems stable after a smooth transition of democratic power from one political party to another in General Elections of May 2013 and July 2018. Democratic system represents people and bring fruitful results. A major share of the population in Pakistan comprises youth. Educating youth on politics through online political campaigns is the emerging trend in Pakistan these days.

The present study is based on a detailed analysis of youth using social media networking sites for getting profound knowledge about politics. It provides significant information about the use of new media by youth in Pakistan and its impacts on their decision making. The study provides valuable facts and suggestions for policymakers and contesting political parties of Pakistan to modify their election campaigns according to the wish and desires of their voters. The study aims: to explore the significance of Facebook in imparting political knowledge among youth; to learn the efficacy of using Facebook by youth and its impacts on their knowledge and decision making about political issues; to determine the relationship between the use of Facebook and the change of political propaganda techniques by political parties. The study endeavors to explore; what is the impact of using Facebook by youth in obtaining political news and information? How Facebook is helpful in educating youth on political issues and decision making? What is the impact of using Facebook on social interaction and actual political participation of youth?

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The attractive nature and friendly interface of social media networking sites including WhatsApp, Facebook, Linked In, Google Plus, Twitter, Instagram, and many more consumes a great portion of the time of users. The young people spend more time on such networking sites while aged users also consume noticeable time surfing the internet. Web-based social networking and the interpersonal interaction destinations that transmit online networking content are specialized instruments that can be utilized as a part of each component of everyday life spreading over business, individual and urban parts. While web-based social networking and person to person communication are utilized conversely, the refinement between web-based social networking and long-range informal communication destinations is imperative (Burke, 2013). The capacity of client created content has been made conceivable by the intuitiveness and socialization highlights offered on interpersonal interaction destinations. For youthful voters, the relational network has turned into a fundamental part of their lives from utilization to instruction and community engagement (Loader & Mercea, 2012). Social media networking sites are mostly used for entertainment purposes by similar age groups. Most of the young people use social networking sites to keep their friends informed about their activities.

Kennedy et al. (2009) analyzed the colossal convenience of web-based system administration among students. Hemmi, Bayne & Land (2009) analyzed that use for social and political gains is not t a straightforward and continuous process.

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As per Kennedy, Judd, Dark, Krause, and Churchward (2008), demonstrated six issues fusing indicating technique to the degree progression blend. These issues include: understudy learning gathered qualities, regard and utilization of improvement informative activities and appraisal wise dependability staff progress and limit building, and ICT base. For more than 10 years, specialists have given a cautious plan to make changes in information sources and their use in the pushed period. A new analysis reports that electronic systems association is getting more prominent among all categories of customers, including understudies (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith and Zikuhr, 2010). The use of social media is growing among youth. The ratio of growth rate is five percent every year from 2000 to 2010 and in the span of ten years, it has reached the maximum number around the world (Lenhart, et al., 2010; Smith, 2011).

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The mass media theory Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) proposed by Blumler and Katz (1974) is applied in this study. UGT is an approach to understanding why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs. The theory is an audience-centered approach to understanding mass communication. It assumes that audience members are not passive consumers of media. UGT suggests that media users play an active role in choosing and using the media. Users take an active part in the communication process and are goal-oriented in their media use. The theorists say that a media user seeks out a media source that best fulfills the needs of the user. UGT assume that the user has alternate choices to satisfy their need. According to the theory, media consumers have free will to decide how they will use the media and how it will affect them.

UGT is considered to be a standout amongst the most prevailing speculations in sociology unequivocally in media research. It sees particular use and choice and that different people can use a comparable medium for different purposes. UGT states the motivations driving an individual to settle on a media decision and be satisfied from this choice. Point of views are a key piece of gathering group of viewers' activity and are the comprehensive attitude portrayed by uses and gratification researchers that affect a man's movement. This theory has been associated with an arrangement of mass and media content, with the assurance of media sort progressing to facilitate the overarching or rising media of the day.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study explores the linkage between the use of Facebook and political activism. The Facebook usage means use of Facebook by a student of any of the universities selected for this study and has a valid Facebook account, for multiple purposes including for information. Political activism is the use of actions to demonstrate a political affiliation towards or against some political activity or opinion. The use of confrontational or direct action in opposing or supporting any cause can be defined as political activism. Activism alone can be defined as an attitude of taking some actions or an active part in social events.

The study aims to discover how students of various universities (respondents of this research) use Facebook as a source of political information and how this information affects their political knowledge and aid them in boosting their political activism. Accordingly, the core intention of the researcher is to explore how social media specifically Facebook is used for discussions and information regarding changing trends of politics and what is the behaviour of consumers

(Facebook users) after getting information about political incidents around them on Facebook. The assessment technique adopted in this research is the survey method through a specifically designed close-ended questionnaire comprising both demographic and research-oriented questions. As many as 300 respondents were randomly selected from top educational institutions of Islamabad including International Islamic University (IIU), Quaid-e-Azam University (QAU), and National University of Modern Languages (NUML) for a survey and their responses against various research questions were analyzed to draw some inferences and findings.

### DATA ANALYSIS

This study's core objective is to examine the significance of Facebook in imparting political knowledge among the educated youth of Pakistan. It investigates the efficacy of using Facebook by youth and its impacts on their political knowledge and decision making. The research encompassed the use of social media in general and Facebook in particular and how it is promoting political activism among the users. The study focused on the impacts of using Facebook on political and social interaction of youth. The targeted audience of this research were educated males and females enrolled in leading universities of Islamabad and using Facebook. The coding sheet of data is prepared on SPSS and a descriptive analysis technique was adopted. Later, under descriptive analysis, mean, ratio, and frequencies as well as bar charts are extracted. These inferences are then given a sense by narration.

The audience (71 percent male and 29 percent female) were randomly selected from three national level universities of Islamabad i.e. Quaid-e-Azam University, National University of Modern Languages and International Islamic University. A total of 276 students participated in the survey. Findings show that approximately 46 percent respondents use Facebook for more than three hours a day, while 66 percent use Facebook to keep themselves updated about latest news; 56 percent users considered Facebook a source of information on multiple topics. The analyzed data shows that 63 percent of the selected youngsters think information of Facebook is useful and informative while 26 percent said it is less important but of their interest at the same time. A mix opinion of audience was recorded against the question related to characteristics of posts usually appeared on the screen of the Facebook users; 25 percent respondents seemed convinced that post they see on their Facebook account wall are about something related to their friends.

<b>Statement/Question</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
Facebook is a unique package for all political info at one place	36 (13.0%)	61 (22.1%)	50 (18.1%)	41 (14.9%)	88 (31.9%)
I Rely Most on Facebook for political information and news	30 (10.9%)	68 (24.6%)	51 (18.5%)	46 (16.7%)	81 (29.3%)
I prefer Facebook on traditional media for political news and information	38 (13.8%)	50 (18.1%)	73 (26.4%)	48 (17.4%)	67 (24.3%)
Facebook is replacing all the other sources of information for providing information about political activities around me	27 (9.8%)	41 (14.9%)	28 (10.1%)	58 (21.0%)	122 (44.2%)
Facebook is authentic and valid source to obtain political information	42 (15.2%)	62 (22.5%)	43 (15.6%)	52 (18.8%)	77 (27.9%)

I am satisfied with the speedy and accurate information about political events I receive from Facebook	50 (18.1%)	49 (17.8%)	23 (8.3%)	71 (25.7%)	83 (30.1%)
I know lot about current political situation of my country and mostly took part in political debates on Facebook	44 (15.9%)	38 (13.8%)	43 (15.6%)	59 (21.4%)	92 (33.3%)
I learned lot about strikes, demonstrations and other political activities through Facebook	30 (10.9%)	39 (14.1%)	40 (14.5%)	101 (36.6%)	66 (23.9%)
I use to avoid commenting on post related to politics on my Facebook wall	33 (12.0%)	47 (17.0%)	65 (23.6%)	56 (20.3%)	75 (27.2%)
I actively took part in debates on political topics on Facebook	21 (7.6%)	40 (14.5%)	61 (22.1%)	72 (26.1%)	82 (29.7%)
I mostly share political post on my Facebook wall whenever I see any of my interest	26 (9.4%)	36 (13.0%)	62 (22.5%)	78 (28.3%)	74 (26.8%)
Political debates on Facebook are good source of understanding the current developments and affairs of political parties.	28 (10.1%)	27 (9.8%)	50 (18.1%)	80 (29.0%)	91 (33.0%)
When I see any propaganda on Facebook against the political party I like, I quickly take a position	22 (8.0%)	16 (5.8%)	51 (18.5%)	77 (27.9%)	110 (39.9%)
Facebook kept me informed about political developments and I will cast my vote to support the political party of my desire	35 (12.7%)	49 (17.8%)	52 (18.8%)	66 (23.9%)	74 (26.8%)
Facebook has helped changing the thinking of people regarding politics	51 (18.5%)	36 (13.0%)	49 (17.8%)	66 (23.9%)	74 (26.8%)

Upon asking, 74 percent respondents ranked social media as the best source of political news and information rather traditional media. Majority of the respondents argued that Facebook is the exclusive medium for political orientation while a noticeable percentage (35 percent) disagreed.

Dependency on Facebook for news and information about politics brought comparative results based on the perception of surveyed respondents. A total of 46 percent discernments were in the favor of Facebook for its ability to provide political information as 17 percent (46 respondents) were agreed while 29 percent (81 respondents) strongly agreed. The respondents were asked to give opinion on preference they give to Facebook over traditional media for getting political news and information. Thirty-two percent respondents denied giving preference to Facebook over traditional media as their primary source of information while 42 percent agreed.

The overall ratio of the respondents who perceived that Facebook is a replacement of other political information dissemination mediums was recorded as 65 percent including 44 percent strongly agreed and 21 percent agreed with the statement. Ten percent of the respondents out of total (276) neither agreed nor disagreed. It was important to learn the understanding of Facebook users regarding authenticity and validity of this medium as a news and information provider. Less than half (38 percent) disagreed while 47 percent asserted about the validity and authenticity of Facebook. Thirty percent respondents denied taking action when they get informed about political

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events and activities around them. Surprisingly, 55 percent of the responses were in favor of this statement.

One fourth of the respondents denied getting to know about strikes, demonstration and other political updates through Facebook, while 29 percent respondents disagreed that they avoid taking part in political deliberation related to politics when it appears on their Facebook wall. More than half of the respondents (56 percent) were found participating in political debates on Facebook while 23 percent denied. The respondents were asked if Facebook kept them informed about political developments and if they would like to cast their vote to support the political party of their desire because they are involved in running its political campaign on Facebook. Almost half (51 percent) respondents agreed that Facebook impacts on their political activities as well as decisions.

### **Research Findings**

After processing, codification, and cleaning of data the researcher has prepared the findings of the study. After detailed analysis it was learned that male university students are more frequent users of Facebook as compared to female students. The data was gathered from 276 respondents and it can be said that the male-female ratio of using Facebook among selected respondents was 71: 29, approximately. The population of this research was randomly selected from three national level universities of Islamabad. A total number of 100 respondents from each university were randomly selected for record of their response on the questionnaire prepared for this study.

To inquire about the frequency of using Facebook, respondents were asked about the number of hours they use Facebook daily. Forty-six percent respondents use Facebook for more than three hours a day. This shows the amount of time an average youngster in Islamabad is spending on the social networking site. The reason of using Facebook for more than three hours a day was satisfaction to be in contact with friends. When inquired about the medium respondents use for Facebook, 67 percent students replied cell phones followed by 28 percent on laptops and 5 percent on their desktop computers. These stats show that the use of cell phones for information as well as connection between the friends' circles among educated youth is growing day by day. The respondents were asked about their preferences while using the Facebook in response to which 66 percent said they use Facebook as a medium to keep themselves informed about the latest news and updates.

A mix opinion of audience was recorded against the question related to characteristics of posts usually appeared on the screen of the Facebook users. One fourth (25 percent) of the respondents seemed convinced that posts they see on their Facebook account wall are about something related to their friends. While 28 percent of the respondents see information pertaining to media outlets they liked and followed on their Facebook wall while the highest percentage (47 percent) of the respondents admitted that the posts they view on their Facebook wall are mostly a mixture of videos and pictures provided by the pages they liked on Facebook. The replies of the respondents were recorded against the statement that Facebook is an exclusive medium for politically oriented information. A mixed opinion was recorded as 13 percent of the respondents strongly disagreed with the statement while 22 percent simply do not agree. The overall ratio of disagreement was 35 percent of the total 276 examinees. As many as 50 (18 percent) students remained neutral on this statement. Among the remaining 47 percent, 41 respondents (15 percent) agreed with the

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uniqueness of Facebook as a prime medium for political news at one place while 88 respondents (32 percent) strongly agreed with this statement.

RQ 1: What is the impact of using Facebook by youth in obtaining political news and information?

The first research question designed for this study was about the impact of using Facebook on the political knowledge of youth. The overall percentage of the respondents who perceived that Facebook is a replacement of other political information dissemination mediums was recorded as 65 percent including 44 percent strongly agreed and 21 percent agreed with the statement. Ten percent of the respondents out of total (276) neither agree nor disagree with this possibility. Surprisingly, 55 percent of the responses were in favor of this statement. Twenty-two percent of youth agreed while 33 percent strongly agree with the statement. As many as 11 percent (30 out of 276) respondents strongly disagreed that they learn about strikes, demonstrations, and other political updates through Facebook.

RQ2: How Facebook is helpful in educating youth on political issues and decision making?

The data analysis shows that 29 percent respondents disagreed that they avoid taking part in political deliberation related to politics when it appears on their Facebook wall. Approximately, 24 percent of the respondents remained neutral on this account. In addition, 20 percent agreed while 27 percent strongly agreed with this opinion that they avoid commenting on politics related posts and issues they encounter while scrolling their Facebook wall. About taking part in debates on political topics on Facebook 82(30 percent) respondents strongly agreed followed by 72 agreed (26 percent), 61 neutral remained (22 percent), 40 disagreed (15 percent) and 21 strongly disagreed (8 percent) with the said statement.

Regarding their action towards the post they view on their Facebook wall approximately ten percent of the students strongly disagreed while 13 percent disagreed with the statement. As many as 22 percent respondents remain neutral on this opinion. The remaining 54 percent respondents agreed that they mostly share political post on their Facebook wall whenever they see any such information.

RQ3: What is the impact of using Facebook on social interaction and actual political participation of youth?

Another question was constructed to measure the impacts of using social media and Facebook on actual political interaction of young students. The respondents were asked if Facebook kept them informed about political developments and if they would like to cast their vote to support the political party of their choice because they are found involved in running its political campaign on Facebook. As many as 51 percent respondents agreed with this statement.

## **CONCLUSION**

For the last many years, Pakistan's political situation remained uncertain, unpredictable, and vague. According to the population census 2017, the majority of population residing in the country belongs to young age group. Pakistan witnessed a smooth transition of power from one democratic government to another for the first time in history in 2013 and then in 2018. The reforms in political process have fueled the voters to learn and educate themselves about politics and political and democratic process. On the other hand, exponential growth in the technical world and

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revolutionary inventions like smart-phone has made things easy for common public to keep them updated about information of their interest. Young people are more involved in use of internet and social media as compared to elders. There are 1280 million daily active users of Facebook around the world. In Pakistan, as per stats by Facebook audience insight tool, there are approximately 25 million Facebook users with around 15 to 20 million male and five to six million female users. The data shows that about 30 percent of total internet using population in Pakistan uses Facebook.

Moreover, a majority of young students (46 percent) use Facebook for more than three hours a day which shows the significance of Facebook in daily life of the students. Another important finding of the study is a great proportion (67 percent) of the respondents use Facebook on their smart phones which is an evidence of growing demand as well as the use of smart-phones among the young generation. The study finds that 67 percent of selected respondents agreed that use of Facebook enables them to learn about latest news and updates. This shows the dependency of youth on social media and the internet for information. In the age of technology, there seemed a shift of audience from traditional media mediums to new media mediums. A handful of respondents shared their view in favor of Facebook as the best available source for providing information of their interest which shows the penetration of social networking sites that emerged as an easy source of information dissemination. People use Facebook for a number of activities like sharing of pictures and videos, information about events, posts related to multinationals topics, and many more. The research found that most of the appealing factors of using Facebook for its users are its quality of publishing photos and videos.

The study suggests that there is an evident shift of media audience from traditional media to modern forms of media. The study recorded as many as 74 percent of the interviewed youth prefer social media over traditional media for news and information. The educated youth agreed with the statement that Facebook is an exclusive bundle for most of the data in one place. They are convinced and admitted their reliance on Facebook for political information. They confessed that Facebook is replacing other mediums as a source of political information.

There is no question about the extensive and growing use of Facebook among youth in Pakistan. The matter of concern is the information. It should provide information to add in knowledge fruitful for the development of a healthy and informed society.

Following are key recommendations of this study:

Excessive use of Facebook means more impact on the information a user sees on its Facebook wall. When a person likes any page or post it stayed there in the notification box about any development on such a post. This repeated process prints that information in his mind and he would be able to remember that particular piece of information for a much longer time.

Due to the increasing use of social media networking sites, there is a boost of various services provided with specified agenda and policies. In such cases, both users and information provided should ensure the quality of education and at least cross-check the facts before making any decision on single source information.

Political debate sometimes leads to chaos. There should be a controlled mechanism in place at both user and service provider's end to avoid any unfair situation.



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