Journal of Media Horizons
ISSN: 2710-4060 2710-4052 Volume 6, Issue 1, 2025

THE MODERATING ROLE OF GENDER WITH ONLINE POLITICAL ACTIVITY AND OFFLINE POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT: A SURVEY STUDY

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15016266

Keywords
Online Political activity, Offline Political Engagement, Gender, Political behaviour, political participation.

Article History
Received on 03 February 2025
Accepted on 03 March 2025
Published on 13 March 2025

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Abstract

This research study explores the link between online political activity and offline political engagement, focusing on the moderating role of gender. A purposive sampling technique was used to collect data from Bahria and NUML University Islamabad, with a sample size of 386 students. A quantitative research approach was applied, utilizing survey analysis. The questionnaire was distributed among students, and data were analyzed using SPSS and AMOS. The study first assessed missing values, followed by testing the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. Linear regression analysis in SPSS was used to examine relationships between variables. Results confirmed that online political activity significantly influences offline political engagement. Additionally, gender was a substantial moderator in this relationship, reinforcing the role of demographic factors in political involvement. Findings suggest that online political activity strongly predicts real-world political engagement, with gender playing a crucial role in shaping this connection.

INTRODUCTION

Miller et al., research study examines social media usage in the context of online politics among youth. Beyond voting, youngsters engage in political-related activities, including campaigning, interaction with political figures, and fundraising. Young people use social media more than older people, so it has become a key tool for political engagement (Smyth & Best, 2013). Social media forums shape public political behavior (Miller et al., 2015).

Political participation is important in a democracy since it involves individuals in decision-making, voting, politics, debates, attending rallies, and political activities. Youth involvement in Jordan has traditionally been low; however, political participation is a significant feature of democratic governments because people express their opinions towards the governing system, which affects their lives. However, (Alodat et al., 2023).

Extending earlier work (Cheng et al., 2023) demonstrated the growing influence of social media influencers on young voters' political opinion, shifting the perception of credibility to Generation Z and Millennials. (Sinpeng, 2020) explore social media-driven political polarization in Southeast Asian countries, showing its effects on offline participation based on cultural and political contexts. Social media is the key platform for young people to contribute to politics and public discussion. Social media substantially correlates with online political engagement, especially in online activities. However

(Certoma, 2022), social media's impact on political participation is complex and varies based on socio-political contexts.

Building on previous research (Ali et al., 2020), it is argued that social media platforms enable rapid and widespread dissemination of political information and political awareness and increase voter's interests. Social media platforms provide an excellent space for political discussion. (Hampton & Wenhong, 2021) link this "networking individualism" concept where online interaction shapes political opinions. (Wang & Tsai, 2023) found that political discussion on social media increased offline participation by 23% among the voters in Taiwan.

Youth political participation is low due to the absence of interest in politics, limited access to information, and a sense of decision-making. Only 23% of young Jordanians articulated attention in politics, according to the Arab Barometer survey, associated with 60% of older people. This is because of a lack of faith in political institutions; the dishonest and self-centered method of the politicians is the reason behind that; hence, limited access to politics is the motive for Jordanian youth (Nyberg, 2021).

A key aspect of (Tang et al., 2021) study is that social media usage negatively correlates with conventional political participation among the younger generation. This study argues that government control over social media platforms may contribute to this phenomenon.

Political participation is vital in democratic government, especially during election days (Willeck & Mendelberg, 2022). The political dynamics have evolved in the digital age, particularly among the younger generation (Postill, 2020).

Problem Statement

Social networking sites have become a significant part of our daily lives, shaping individuals to engage with news, political activities, and discussions. Initially, social media was designed for social interactions, but these platforms have gradually evolved into key political awareness and mobilization sources. Various research studies have highlighted students' widespread usage of social networking websites (Ellison et al., 2007). The study in Pakistan by (Ittefaq et al., 2021) found that social media usage for news is increasing rapidly, with university students among the most active users. Social media is the region's most potent communication stream, so students are more inclined to read political news digitally. Among university students, social media is an influential tool for shaping opinions, persuading political behaviour, and nurturing engagement in online and offline political activities. The present study wants to look into the relationship between online political activity and offline political engagement while analyzing the role of gender as a moderating factor. The research on variations in online activities of both males and females and its effect on offline political engagement in Pakistan is required to be understood in order to involve people politically for their own future.

Objectives

The significant objectives which the research is:

1.To examine the relationship between online political activity and offline political engagement.

2.To analyze the moderating role of gender in the relationship between online political activity and offline political engagement.

Research Questions

RQ_1: Do individuals who participate in online political activity have increased involvement in offline political engagement?

RQ_2: Does gender moderate the relationship between online political activity and offline political engagement?

Hypothesis

H_1: Individuals who participate in online political activity have increased involvement in offline political engagement.

H_2: Gender will moderate the relationship between online political activity and offline political engagement.

2. Theoretical Framework

The applicable theory for this research is Uses and Gratification. This theory is applied as foundation to explore the individual's role in online political activity, offline political engagement, and user's gratification needs. The theory provides the theoretical background to develop the research

model in this study. The theory suggests that people's social and psychological needs drive media usage, engagement, and effects (Katz, 1974). Studies support that people seek gratification from the media (Rubin & Rubin, 1981), which impacts their media exposure (Palmgreen & Rayburn, 1979).

The theory proposes that individuals utilize social media to engage actively with the content to fulfil their needs. Blumer and Katz claimed that individuals select media according to their satisfaction. This study applies the theory to examine how people use media for political participation, both online and offline. Online engagement gratifies political interests, which often decodes into offline involvement, such as attending rallies, donations, campaign activities, political seminars, and supporting parties. This theory was established by Elihu Katz in 1959. During that occasion, most researchers were asked, "What do media do to people?" However, Katz asked, "What do people do with the media?" (J, 2001).

2.1 Literature Review

Social media plays an important role in political mobilization, boosting younger voter's participation by fifteen percent in South Korea (Choi et al., 2021). However, it also presents challenges such as 'echo chambers and filter bubbles (Efstratiou & De Cristofaro, 2022). Furthermore (Waeterloos et al., 2024) found that social media users enhance political online participation, and its impact on offline engagement varies based on local political context.

In their 2023 study, (Cheng et al., 2023) highlighted the importance of "digital literacy" in influencing the relationship between political involvement and social media use. Their finding revealed that young voters with digital literacy skills are more involved in accessing political content on social media because they are more expected to contribute to political activities.

A research study conducted by (Masiha, 2018) examined the connection between the usage of Facebook among the youth of Pakistan. The study concluded that users of Facebook shared pictures, status messages, and policies of their political parties on their timelines. The study concluded that there was a significant relationship between the usage of SNS and political participation among the youth of Pakistan.

The growing body of literature suggests that theory has defined the medium's use and purpose for individuals, groups, and the general public. The uses and gratification theory was developed with three primary objectives. How can individuals satisfy their needs by using mass media to discover the media used for the primary purpose of individuals, to recognize the positive and negative aspects of the person's use of media? The theory stated that people were not vulnerable to mass media but the use of media to get their specific gratifications (J, 2001).

Building on previous research (Kristoffer Holt, 2013), the socio-demographic factor in media usage was explored. It investigated the impact of social media usage on politics. The 2010 Swedish national election campaign study used the four-wave panel study, which emphasized the age group, the political usage of social media, and the level of political engagement over time. This research study by Kristoffer Holt, recommended that using social media among citizens can work as a leveller in terms of political motivation.

3. Methodology

This study examined the youth's online political activity and offline political engagement in the twin cities. Data collection involves undergraduate and graduate students from Bahria University, Islamabad, and NUML University Islamabad due to coeducation for equal participation of each gender. Demographics and cultural factors affecting the youth's thinking process impact their behavior and motivation toward political participation. The researcher adopted a purposive sampling technique to select the sample. The reason for selecting purposive sampling is based on assumptions that specific individuals may possess unique and valuable views about the ideas and understanding of the issues being studied and, therefore, need to be included in the sample (Mason, 2017).

The target population of this study is clear, and the existing sampling frame and the sample size of the target population are known. The study included students from multiple academic disciplines. The department-wise distribution was as follows: Business Administration (52 respondents, 13.5%), Psychology

(56 respondents, 14.5%), Arts and Media (49 respondents, 12.7%), Management Sciences (38 respondents, 9.8%), Project Management (52 respondents, 13.5%), Media Sciences (47 respondents, 12.2%), English (41 respondents, 10.6%), and Software Engineering (51 respondents, 13.2%). This distribution ensured a diverse representation across various fields of study. The sample size credentials for this study survey the sampling table of (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). For such a large population, the minimum sample size vital for this study was 386 respondents. The rule of thumb (Roscoe, 1969) selects the suitable sample size for this study, requesting that most research sample sizes of more than 30 and less than 500 are appropriate. Therefore, 386 is acceptable based on the rule of thumb.

The online political activity for youth formed by (Jung et al., 2011) is the first scale used for the data collection. A structured, close-ended questionnaire consisting of 15 questions was developed in English. The first nine questions aimed to explore online political activity, utilizing a five-point Likert scale with response options: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree. Questions 10 to 15 helped explore offline political participation; for this purpose, a 5-point Likert scale Strongly Disagree, Disagree Nor Agree, Agree, and Strongly Agree" was utilized.

4. Discussion and Implication

For the political engagement the study adopted a measure created by (Lim, 2009) to assess political awareness. The political participation indicated the internal consistencies (i.e., coefficient α) of the two constructs understudy. From the results, it was evident that the constructs of the study have reasonable reliability estimates. The results indicated that all the constructs reflect acceptable reliability. Value 0.60 was considered a benchmark for the conduct of successful research (Fornell, 1981) and (Nunnally, Psychometric Theory (2nd ed). New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978). The internal consistency of the instrument value is α .922, whereas the offline political participation's value is α .904. The questionnaires were disseminated to university students from twin cities. The targeted groups are designated based on their interest in politics, political activity, and process. Therefore, the respondents responded to the political participation before completing the survey. The researchers received a total of 386 questionnaires. Time restrictions posed a significant challenge during data collection. Some respondents hesitated to complete the questionnaire, and a few refused to participate, citing a lack of time or attention. IBM AMOS 22 and Statistical Package for Social Sciences (IBM SPSS, version 23) are the two statistical software used for data analysis.

The structural model is established to confirm the relationship between the variables involved in the structural equation of gender political participation. After collecting the data, it was systematically categorized for analysis. Responses were assigned numerical values, with "Male" coded as "1" and "Female" coded as "2." Multiple-choice responses were also categorized numerically on a scale from 1 to 5 to facilitate statistical analysis. Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated to analyze the relationship between online political activity and offline political engagement. This helped determine the strength and direction of the relationship between these two variables. Linear regression analysis was applied to examine the impact of one variable on another. Specifically, regression analysis, including ANOVA (F-test) and t-test, was shown to assess online political activity's influence on the offline political process. Additionally, coefficient regression analysis was performed, incorporating gender as moderating variables. The results indicated that age and gender significantly moderated the relationship between online political engagement and offline political engagement.

Table 1: Data Analysis Chart

Hypothesis	Research Questions	Statistical Test Used
H_1: Individuals who engage in online political activity have increased involvement in offline political engagement.	**RQ_1:** Do individuals who participate in online political activity have increased involvement in offline political engagement?	Pearson correlation was used to analyze the relationship between online and offline, whereas regression analysis (ANOVA- F-test and t-test) showed that online positively impacts political engagement.
H_2: Gender will moderate the relationship between online political activity and offline political engagement.	**RQ_2:** Does gender moderate the relationship between online political activity and offline political engagement?	The Coefficient regression analysis was applied to a model for online & offline with Gender and age as a moderator. It showed that the age moderates the relationship between online & offline which is significant.

For data analysis, SPSS 23 was used to process the survey responses. Descriptive statistics were obtained for all study variables, including Cronbach's alpha reliability, mean, and standard deviation. For hypotheses, Pearson Correlation and Regression analyses were applied. No missing values were detected in 386 completed questionnaires during the data transformation. The gender-wise breakdown revealed 202 male and 184 female students participating in the study. Descriptive statistics were measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 as strongly disagree to 5 as strongly agree). The mean values for Online Political activity and Offline Political engagement ranged between 24 and 35, with online at 31.97 and offline at 20.25, providing a foundation for further analysis. The study constructs' internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) confirmed acceptable reliability. A 0.60 benchmark was used for validity (Fornell, 1981).

The reliability scores were 0.922 for online and 0.904 for offline political engagement indicating strong reliability. This study used Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to test the relationship between online and offline. SEM was preferred over ANOVA and regression due to its ability to test multiple equations simultaneously while minimizing measurement errors (Arbuckle, 2006). Data analysis was conducted using AMOS 22, and moderation hypotheses were tested in the later sections.

For the normality assumption, residual errors were examined. According to (Gujrati, 2007), error terms should follow a normal distribution for statistical tests like t-tests and F-tests to remain valid. Histogram analysis showed that residuals were mainly within the standard curve and symmetrical, with slight right skewness and kurtosis at the peak. The standard probability plot further confirmed that residual values followed a normal distribution, as most data points aligned along the 45-degree upward-sloping line. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to assess the relationship between online & offline. The correlation coefficient was 0.669, indicating a strong positive relationship. The regression model showed that R^2 was 0.448, meaning that 44.8% of the variance in OF was explained by online (Gujrati, 2007).

The ANOVA test ($F = 311.796$, $p < 0.01$) confirmed the model's statistical significance. The standardized regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.494$, $p < 0.01$) further supported the significant positive impact of online & offline. The t-statistic (17.658, $p < 0.01$) indicated that the effect of online & offline was highly significant. Hierarchical regression analysis using process addon in SPSS was conducted to examine the moderating effects of gender on the relationship between online political activity and offline political engagement. Before the analysis, centering was functional for variables, and an interaction term was created by multiplying the standardized data set of independent and moderating variables, serving as a third predictor (Cohen, 2013).

Table 2, is the model summary of online and offline moderation with gender.

Table 2: Gender As A Moderator Between Online & Offline Coefficient Of The Regression Model For Online & Offline With Gender As A Moderator

Model Summary						
R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.7213	.5203	16.0514	138.1297	3.0000	382.0000	. 0000

Table 3 showed that gender moderates the relationship between online & offline. which was significant at $p < 0.01$. Beta value for interaction term, i.e., 0.1568 significant at $p < 0.01$, indicating moderation in effect (Cohen, 2013) . An active moderation in the case of female students compared to male students. This case is elaborated in the graph below.

Table 3: Conditional Effects Of The Focal Predictor At Values Of The Moderator(S)

Model	coeff	se	t	p
constant	6.2934	1.2097	5.2026	.0000
ON	3864	.0381	10.1416	.0000
Gender	-2.1172	1.7379	-1.2182	.2239
Int_1	.1568	.0529	2.9609	.0033

Figure 1: Gender As A Moderator Between Online & Offline (Graph)

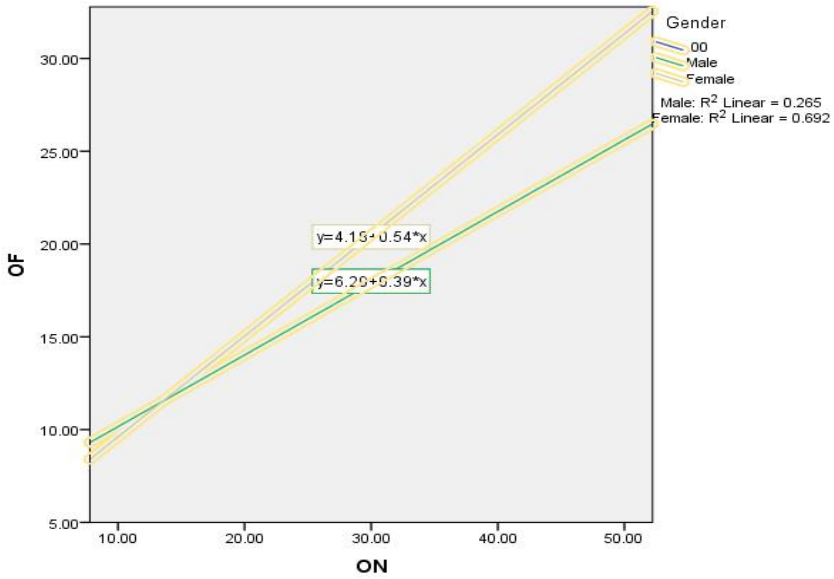


Figure 1 shows that moderation took place between online & offline. Further investigation by looking at the slope of the lines in the graph revealed that moderation by female students was substantial compared to male students. Hypothesis H_2 is supported in both cases.

Table 4: Summary of the Hypothesis

Hypotheses		Results
H_1: Individuals who engage in online political activity have increased involvement in offline political engagement.		(Supported)
H_2: Gender will moderate the relationship between online political activity and offline political engagement.		(Supported)

This research study explores the link between online political activity and offline political engagement with the moderating role of gender. The findings of this research confirmed that individuals who engage in online political activity have increased involvement in offline political processes. Moreover, this research study explored the moderating effects of gender.

Moreover, the model fit indices, i.e., Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), were selected to finalize the model fit for the hypothesis testing. The results supported the hypothesis that higher social media usage for political activity leads to increased offline political engagement; many successful studies have found a constant gender gap in political participation. Recent research found a gap in low-level women's elected representation in many democracies. The study (Dassonneville, 2018) tested the hypothesis that a higher level of women's elected representation increased women's political knowledge. The study's findings showed that there are significant implications not only for explaining the gender knowledge gap but also for the exploratory depiction of political engagement.

H_1: Individuals who engage in online political activity have increased involvement in offline political engagement.

The statistically significant impact of ON on OF, i.e., $\beta = 0.699$ for $p < 0.01$ with the value of R^2, i.e., the goodness of fit suggested that total variance caused by an independent variable is 44.8 %.

H_2: Gender will moderate the relationship between online political activity and offline political engagement.

Gender was found to moderate the relationship between online & offline, i.e., $p < 0.01$. The beta value for the interaction term was 0.1568, which was significant at $p < 0.01$, indicating a moderation in effect. Further investigation by looking at the slope of the lines in the graph revealed that moderation by female students is substantial compared to male students.

Both males and females are utilizing online political platforms to get informed and participate which in turn effects their offline political engagement. Hence, the result indicated from the present study was that individual who engage in the online political activity has increased the involvement of their offline political engagement. Results indicates that there is a positive moderation between both. Further investigation by looking at the slope of the lines in the graph revealed that moderation by female students was substantial compared to male students.

Gender is a competent moderator between online political activity and offline political engagement. Women often face backlash, fear of harassment and safety concerns when participating in politics, whether is online or offline. Due to these factors this is common phenomena that women participate less in political activities. However the result shows the opposite they indicates that females are more substantial in their political engagement compared to men. Normally these political activities like posting and commenting is more likely to be done by males than females. Females are less visible due to less online activities like commenting and posting political material and offline political engagement like participating in rallies and seminars. This finding is unique, as it is challenging the belief that females are less involved in political activities due to these barriers.

5. Recommendations

Following are the recommendations for the concerned scholars and academicians. This study only focused on students from the universities of Islamabad, it could have extended to the more universities and the other cities of Pakistan. The selected sample size, and entire data has collected from two universities therefore, the generalizability of findings across other universities is uncertain. Another possibility to refine the results is that relationships, as set out in the theoretical model of this study, maybe confirmed through a longitudinal

study in a new line of research including samples from different cities of Pakistani Universities. This research conducted under certain limitations, the only quantitative research design employed in it. For instance, it was a cross-sectional study, whereas behaviors were likely to change with some natural or self-regulated interventional techniques. Therefore longitudinal or time-series data is required to achieve even better results. Policy makers & politician should use social media platforms to engage with both genders in political discussions and they must encourage active participation. Government institution should arrange host online political discussions and debates to stimulate the offline engagement of the male and female students. Youth forums and student councils should be encouraged to fill the gap between online activity and offline political engagement of both genders. Comparative studies across different cities of Pakistan could provide deeper insights that how social and cultural factors influence political engagement.

5.1. Conclusion

This research study determines differential patterns of online political activity and offline political engagement. Both gender use online platforms and offline political activities so that their voices can be heard in order to have impact on policy making and governance of the political elites. Social media has changed people's lives and played a vital role in bringing about the revolution. It has become a fundamental instrument for political campaigns and determining the political views of the masses. Besides contributing to the literature in the areas of online political activity, offline political engagement of males and females, the assumptions of the present research are likely to help leaders, policymakers, government, and NGOs in framing and designing policies related to social media usage, especially the ones connecting youth, and afterward, on how to use them to assemble the both males and females effectively.

In conclusion, it would be sensible for politicians and government organizations to deliberate and recognize the importance of all genders as both males and females are serious social media users for political activities. In today's world both genders rely on social media, so moulding and targeting them via social media should be important in strategizing future political activities. The use of social media for manifestation and discussion of opinions, political effectiveness among males and females for the democratic process can be improved by the government. Normally females' strategic online engagement choices due to apprehension of backlash can limit their offline political activities and participation.

Thus it can be summarized that how online political activity translates into offline political engagement is significantly influenced by gender.

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