

ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION BY FEMALE VOTERS IN SUKKUR DIVISION, SINDH PAKISTAN

Maria Issani^{*1}, Dr. Muhammad Qasim Nizamani², Dr. Farheen Qasim Nizamani³

^{*1}PhD scholar Media & Communication Studies, University of Sindh, Jamshoro.

^{2,3}Associate Professor Media & Communication Studies, University of Sindh, Jamshoro

¹maria.isani@salu.edu.pk, ²qasim.nizamani@usindh.edu.pk, ³farheen.memon@usindh.edu.pk

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19624961>

Keywords

Article History

Received: 20 February 2026

Accepted: 30 March 2026

Published: 17 April 2026

Copyright @Author

Corresponding Author: *

Maria Issani

Abstract

This study examines the role of social media in shaping political participation among female voters in Sukkur Division, Sindh, Pakistan, within a socio-cultural context characterized by gender-based constraints and limited access to traditional political spaces. Grounded in the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) and the Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM), the research adopts a quantitative approach to analyze how different dimensions of social media usage influence political awareness, engagement, and participation.

Data were collected from 500 female respondents aged 18 and above using a structured questionnaire, and analyzed through statistical techniques including correlation and regression analysis. The findings reveal a complex relationship between social media use and political participation. While overall social media usage showed a statistically significant but negative relationship with political participation, exposure to diverse political content and frequent engagement with political information significantly enhanced political awareness among female voters. Additionally, interaction with political content demonstrated only a weak association with actual political participation, indicating a gap between online engagement and offline political action.

The study highlights that social media serves as an important informational and expressive platform for women, enabling them to access political knowledge and engage in discourse despite socio-cultural barriers. However, it also emphasizes that mere access to digital platforms does not guarantee meaningful political participation, as structural, cultural, and motivational factors continue to play a critical role.

This research contributes to the existing literature by providing a gender-specific and contextually grounded analysis of digital political participation, and underscores the need for strategies that translate online engagement into substantive democratic involvement.

1. Introduction

Social media has changed the nature of communication so that individuals communicate, interact, and share ideas without being limited by geographical distance and time (Lilleker and Koc-

Michalska, 2017; Bode and Dalrymple, 2016). Through social media, the users enjoy the freedom to comment, pass opinions, offer feedback, and disseminate information faster and far among the users (Cai and Zhou, 2019). Social media spaces,

including blogs, online forums, websites of social networks, visual websites, etc., are created with the purpose of promoting participation and sharing diverse points of view to form virtual communities and exchange differing opinions.

The key driver of a democratic rule is political participation because it makes the citizens feel that they are not only part of the policy-making process, but also to hold their leaders responsible. Sometimes, in the traditional model, political participation has involved activities like voting, membership in political parties, attending a rally and having a face-to-face interaction with representatives (Ahmad et al., 2019). These traditional ways of participation are significant to ensure that democracy remains healthy because they are representative of the voice of people in decision making (Kaskazi and Kitzie, 2023).

With reference to Pakistan, gender inequality has not yet disappeared in the political participation. According to Global Gender Gap Report (2020), in terms of Women in Pakistan Political Empowerment, 93 out of 153 countries are ranked. As of now, the proportion of women in the national parliament is 20.2, and only 12 percent of women hold posts of ministers. Empirical studies have revealed that increased number of women in parliaments has the propensity of further translating into increase in advocacy on women and social interests. Therefore, allowing women to engage in politics more is not only essential in the quest of achieving gender equality, but it is also essential in the pursuit of inclusiveness in the decision-making process in democracy since women will be able to deal directly with public policy and national interests.

1.1 Background of the Study

The relationship that existed between the media and political participation in the modern digital era has been changed radically as well, particularly in the developmental democracies where access level to the political processes in institutions is not even. The social media have also emerged as alternative political arenas, whereby the citizens are able to access information, develop opinions,

and engage in civic discussions which are not constrained to the borders of the traditional political set-ups (Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, and Valenzuela, 2012; Boulianne, 2015). This transformation is especially radical in those spheres, in which socio-cultural and structural limitations do not allow participating in the political life directly, and instead, digital places become another arena of political involvement.

These dynamics can also be put in wider South Asian context. The world largest democracy in India has become permeable through the social media which has become a part of the political system, voter mobilization, and a place of discussion. Such researchers as Vaishnav (2019) and Pal and Gonawela (2017) also mention that digital platforms have assisted in raising awareness of the political process, and can be used to mobilize the participation of millions in elections. However, similarly to Pakistan, the disparities exist on the gender level and literacy and socio-economic one, and the disadvantaged social groups are characterized by a poor capability of transferring the digital activity into the active politics process. It means that although the organs of democracy may be robust, the digital membership is not evenly spread across the social layers.

Another evolving democracy is the social media in Bangladesh that is where the use of digital is gaining pace and is becoming more and more useful in political communication and participation of citizens. The case study by Chowdhury (2020) and Karim (2021) supports this view by stating that social media such as Facebook is an important source of disseminating political information and also mobilizing the young population. At the same time, the misinformation problem, the digital surveillance and socio-political pressures issues can offer a hint at the complexity of the issue of the persistence of important democratic practices within the digitally mediated environments. Similar to the case of Pakistan, women in Bangladesh are likely to become victims of the two restriction of digital access and socio-cultural norms in order to play an active role in the political discussion there.

Various recent studies uphold the argument that females who were initially not marginalized in the election debate because of the patriarchal culture, are now able to take part in political discourse (Shehzad et al., 2021). These mediums enable the gatekeepers such as the political parties, the old and media institutions to be relegated.

According to a recent Sindh study, Chhachhar and Malik (2021) investigate that the number of social media users in the woman segment increases. To their surprise, the research revealed that women in urban and semi-urban Sukkur were more digitally involved in civic affairs than expected, exhibiting participation by providing political postings, campaigning and discussions about the election issues in their personal WhatsApp groups. Such results refute the belief that politically, women in conservative regions are indifferent or unconcerned.

Another study by Masood and Adnan (2021) also found out that both rural and urban women in Pakistan employ media exposure in gaining political awareness although urban women placed more confidence in political messages displayed on social media than the traditional news providers. This point is significant to regions like Sukkur where television or printed media may not be easily accessible and online literacy is gradually growing among the young generation and women. Additionally, online campaigns by political parties are keeping up with this change. The politicians are targeting female voters online with gender specific campaigns. Shehzad et al. (2021) found that the presence of Facebook in the 2018 and 2023 general elections in Pakistan revealed that the presence of women in online spaces was higher than before (particularly, in places where the citizenship expressed themselves poorly). In Sukkur, some local women organizations and university undergraduate groups are present and engaged on Facebook to inform about political events, voting campaigns, as well as debate on the rights of women.

1.2 Scope of the study

The analysis looks at the involvement of women in digital sites of civic and political engagements in a conservative semi urban to rural socio political

setting namely Sukkur Division which is characterized by patriarchal norms and restricted offline political spaces that influence women participation. It is aimed at the demographics of 18-45-year-old female voters, students, working women, and homemakers of various socioeconomic backgrounds who actively use social networks (Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Tik Tok, and YouTube). In theory, the study evaluates the connection between the usage of social media (frequency, interaction and exposure to the content) and political participation (voting, activism and discourse). The research will be built on the data gathered in the year 2024-2025, which is characterized by an increased political polarization, escalated digital activism and amplified voices of women in the Pakistani political arena. It is also interdisciplinary and contributes to political science, media studies, gender studies, and development studies by providing a comprehensive view of digital surrounding impacts on the political agency of women in underrepresented areas.

1.3 Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to analyze the relationship between social media usage and political participation among female voters in Sukkur Division, Sindh:

- To investigate the relationship between the frequency of exposure to political content on social media and female voters' knowledge, awareness, and understanding of political issues.
- To analyze how the diversity of political content on social media (e.g., party narratives, independent journalism, user-generated content) shapes female voters' perceptions of political candidates.
- To examine the extent to which interaction with political content on social media (commenting, liking, sharing, discussing) predicts levels of political engagement among female voters.
- To assess the impact of specific social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok) on different forms of political

participation (e.g., voting intent, campaigning, online expression) among female users.

1.4 Research Questions

To investigate the impact of social media on the political behavior of female voters in Sukkur Division, this study seeks to answer a series of interrelated research questions:

- **RQ1.** To what extent does social media usage influence political participation among female voters in Sukkur Division, Sindh?
- **RQ2.** How does the diversity of political content encountered on social media affect female voters' perceptions of political candidates?
- **RQ3.** What is the relationship between the frequency of exposure to political information on social media and female voters' awareness and understanding of political issues?
- **RQ4.** How does interaction with political content on social media—such as commenting, sharing, or engaging in discussion—relate to levels of political engagement among female voters?

1.5 Hypotheses of the Study

The following hypotheses are formulated to test the proposed relationships between key variables in this study:

- **H1:** There is a statistically significant positive relationship between social media usage and the level of political participation among female voters in Sukkur Division.
- **H2:** Greater diversity of political content encountered on social media is significantly associated with higher levels of political awareness and engagement among female voters.
- **H3:** Higher frequency of exposure to political content on social media positively correlates with greater political awareness and issue-based knowledge among female voters.
- **H4:** Active interaction with political content (e.g., commenting, sharing, participating in discussions) on social media is positively correlated with higher levels of political engagement among female voters.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Media and Political Engagement

According to previous studies in the field like Lee and Kim, 2020; Xie et al., 2019 social media reconstruction in relation to political involvement in any of the sphere of youth, women and marginalized population is a subject of attraction. Social media has been in the center of relaying political information, which is being sought to support and turn out. Special attention is given to Twitter and Facebook, which are typically viewed as powerful forces of spreading political information, accessing a discussion, and allowing citizens to present their opinion in digital areas of the state (García-Gavilanes et al., 2018). The fact that they are interactive platforms means that users are not only able to consume and create political information thereby facilitating the level of activeness at the people level and fosters civil-level activeness on the ground.

More so, social media removes the barriers to political participation by offering permanent media to citizens to communication, access, and communication particularly when they get torn apart by the traditional political process. This is especially applicable in Pakistan where structural and sociological restrictions tend to disallow political involvement of women. Shehzad et al. (2021) Evaluated the impact of facebook on political participation among Pakistani women. The findings suggest that both offline and online political action continues at the same time with women who engaged in political activity online both in contents and political discussion that is more inclined to engage in offline political activities like voting, rally or a discussion at the local level. This implies that Facebook not only serves as the location of political awareness, but as a trigger of offline political activism. Secondly, the purpose of using Facebook (i.e. to receive political news or to entertain) was also a huge determinant of the extent of political involvement. The trends reveal that online social media use is not a passive engagement and the intent to use them is important in defining levels of political activity among women.

These include, but are not limited to, creating echo chambers, which are areas in which consumers are exposed primarily to information

and opinions that support the thoughts they already have. This is selective exposure, as mentioned by Flaxman et al. (2016), that can result in the constrained range of viewpoints that individuals will be exposed to, which, eventually, narrows the arena of group discussion.

Chhachhar, Malik, and Pahore (2021) were interested in investigating the campaign role of the social media on the city of Hyderabad in Pakistan. Although their target was not female voters, the study revealed that Facebook and twitter were effective tools of informing the masses of information on political leaders, party ideologies and manifestos. The respondents indicated frequent exposure to political materials and speculated that social media campaigning enabled them to get to know more about political affiliations and party stands. This paper provides a hint at the instructive capabilities of social media that can be especially helpful in such areas where the traditional methods of political engagement are not as widespread as in Sukkur Division.

Tariq, Zolkepli, and Ahmad (2022) examined how social media affects the Pakistani youths who turn to vote. The research has found nine direct and five indirect relationships between social media use and political participation, which also indicates a complicated relationship. Although there is the initial excitement, the number of people still participating in online activism has declined over the last few years and it is feared that online political activism cannot be sustained any more. An intriguing result of this paper is that the online political efficacy, i.e. a belief held by a person that he/she can play a role in political processes, did not/ had small effect on offline political action.

The study is particularly applicable in the case of women voters in Sukkur Division since most of them belong to the young bracket and are most probably subject to change in their political motivation.

2.2 Content Diversity and Perception of Political Candidates

Researchers have indicated that content diversity on social media platforms has a critical role in

informing the minds of the people concerning political contenders (Bail et al., 2018, and Barbera et al., 2015). When people are exposed to diverse political opinions, political ideologies as well as political stories, they will probably develop a balanced and informed opinion about different political actors. The great diversity of the sources is aimed at equalizing the high bias in contact with exposure and assists citizens who are capable of assessing political candidates (Boxell et al., 2017). This passionate insight comes in particularly when it comes to democracy and in which an informed election is the basis of citizen action.

In the case of the state-filtered or unreachable mainstream media including that of Sukkur division in rural and semi-urban Pakistan, the source of the information is by voters, including women, who then informs the sources of the information on a decentralized platform of social media. To women voters that may be prohibited under the influence of the culture requirement of under dynamics or under the political restriction of public participation, they may access the content of anonymous or secrecy under discussion and politics found within the virtual space.

But even greater and greater democratic participation may prevail, but algorithm materials are participation issues of participation limitation by control. According to Pariser (2011), filter presents the effect of bubbles which is that the algorithm groups materials based on previous activity, interest and interaction of the user. It is convenient because this customization, it can permit users to repeat repeatedly in order to ideologically isolate to reinforce their existing strategies. Consequently, rather than tolerate different methods, users are involved in Eco Chambers enhancing biased polarization and sensor independent analysis. This is an exceptional risk in the political environment where disintegration or polarized reporting may have a huge influence on the opinion and votes of people.

2.3 Frequency of Exposure and Knowledge Acquisition

Guess et al. (2020) and Prior (2013) Check the significance of the interaction between the

intensity of engagement with political information on social media sources and political knowledge of the users. They discover that users highlight themselves to political content actively on Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp regularly, depending on their findings. This is attested by Bode et al. (2017), which points out that the live and involvement of the social media in nature can make the user to be more engaged to the developing events, leading to better-informed political choices. It is more because at least and traditionally conservative districts like Sindh in Sukkur Division allow the women voters.

Women might not be able to have access to political knowledge in convenient form that is available via formal educational centers in most of these areas. The social media can thus serve as a great level, which will provide a readily accessible source of political knowledge, which will fill the knowledge gap and will trigger an electoral alliance.

Researchers, including Pennycook and Rand (2019), warn that, though exposure can heighten the amount of the consumed information, there remains a question of credibility and quality of the information. Incorrect or false information shared on social media networks through misinformation, disinformation, and politicized propaganda are more likely to result into internalization of false or distorted reports. It is possible that even people with below-average media literacy, or fact-checking ability will accidentally make political decisions and beliefs based on unproven, or falsified information. This danger is particularly timely in countries where the digital education is less widespread as the ability to evaluate the political information online critically might be underdeveloped.

2.4 Interaction with Political Content and Political Engagement

Vaccari et al. (2013) define a major relationship between the active engagement of the political content in social media and increased political relations. Passive risk i.e. merely reading political positions is not similar to active behavior i.e. comment, sharing, reacting and political debate

which is a more deliberate of participation. This communication allows one to sink deeper into knowledge, be heard and impress ones in their virtual social networks. This assertion has been continued by the studies of and Valenzuela et al. (2017), In which they established that the politically inclined Internet users were more prone to influence offline, such as voting, joining political groups, attending rallies, or initiating a citizen discussion in their respective communities. To the female voters of Sukkur Division, social, cultural and structural barriers tend to restrict direct involvement into the political or public life—since the Internet-based actions present another form of political influence and realization. The political participation on the Internet allows women to overlook the physical movement or social distance at location and join the political interactions. This involvement may also be cultivated in terms of political identity and belongingness that may drive the women to greater participation in democracy either by voting, activism, or in the causes that give voice to their sets in their beliefs through political involvement in the causes.

2.5 Social Media Engagement Patterns and Perception of Political Candidates

According to Kim and Vishak (2018), some forms of social media consumption can be significant in organizing the sentiments of people towards political people. In accordance with their work, how individuals consume the material, i.e., the platforms used by them (eg, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp), money, sort and other forms of political information were read/seen, can significantly influence political beliefs and the rating of candidates. To illustrate, Twitter, which allows users to view real-time feeds and engaged political relations, can expose users, whereas curated information, including friends, pages, or even political parties, may be available on Facebook. The differences in platforms functionalities influence the tone, frames and reliability of the political messages which also influence the perceptions of the individuals of political leaders.

The opinions expressed by Jungherr et al. (2016) are also in support of the given approach, as the authors state that individuals who are in constant contact with a broad spectrum of political concepts and read a variety of materials, create more advanced and moderate views on political candidates. Simultaneously, the people, whose engagement patterns are limited, i.e., they are following a small number of party accounts or consume the unbalanced material, can come to a polarized or biased notion, which strengthens them rather than reshapes the already existing political bends. This is so engaged in the electoral behavior of the electorate, which is likely to dictate the voting behavior in a situation where there is a perception and in addition to the accession of politicians or political debates.

The traditional means of political participation (city meetings, rallies, or policy debate)- particularly because of the socio-cultural barriers- the vision may decline in Sukkur Division to the social media as the main channel of creating political opinion among women. Female candidate voters engaging in diverse contents of political nature in social media platforms are bound to develop a knowledgeable strategy regarding posts, leadership qualities, and party philosophy. The other ones are those with some exposure to algorithms which is either biased or has limited digital literacy.

2.6 Social Media's Role in Bridging the Political Information Gap for Women

Bano and Noureen (2022) conducted a classical research that sheds light into the increasing power of social media on the voting behavior of women in the 2018 general elections of Pakistan. Their study shows that websites like Facebook and twitter served a crucial purpose in creating awareness of politics and votes in female voters. It has been stated that political parties which paid money to engage in online campaigning have an upper hand and the tally of votes becomes higher due to their online appearance. This reaffirms how important new media is in electoral politics.

The equal degree of impact of social media on rural and urban areas is one of the most interesting

research findings. This is a debunk of the common assumption that rural populations which are habitually underserved in access to technology are less influenced in online political discussion. In the specific environment of Sukkur Division where women are often limited by socio-cultural barriers to participate in public and political space, the virtual world appears to be becoming open to new spheres of participation.

Mu duct, Yaseen, and Safdar (2021), discussed the fact that in 2018, general elections, the comparative analysis of Facebook and Twitter effects on voter choices was offered. Political affiliation on each platform had a definite trend according to this research- the PML-N was more prone to the user and PTI was more prone to the user in Twitter. This is an indicator of the political parties that influence their online materials based on the nature and profile of the users of each platform.

2.7 Social Media and Strengthening Democracy

Batool, Sultana, and Momineen (2019) provide an informative account on the impact of social media platforms that enhances the entrenchment of democracy in Pakistan. They outline in their study how social media sites like Twitter and Facebook are vital arenas of political engagement by enabling users of such sites express their views, spread political news, and co-ordinate support on national issues. These sites are plated in the web 2.0 paradigm offering a two-way communication between the citizens and the government, which is effective in preventing the differences that exist in the context of political participation. It is not only this interaction that encourages political efficacy - since people feel their voice is heard, but also results to collective action due to online campaigns and forums.

2.8 Social Media as a Catalyst for Political Awareness and Mobilization

Among the most prevalent and documented arguments in literature is the idea that use of social media is killing a central task of raising political awareness and bringing people together to take action in the political arena. The empirical data

given to Peshawar by Minhas, Khan, and Haq (2022) reveals that voters use digital platforms actively not only to receive different information associated with politics but also to discuss political issues and take an oppositional part, both online and in the real world. Both virtual and real communications work in these two ways to raise awareness of the citizens on their political obligations and rights so that the informed citizens can justify political actors.

In continuation of this argument, Ida, Saud, and Mashud (2020) have presented comparative research studies in Indonesia and Pakistan to examine the use of social media by millennials. According to their study, it can be established that Millennials are not only political consumers, but political contributors are powers that utilize social media as a political discussion platform, debate forum and expression. Notably, this research has developed a great and positive correlation between social media use and political participation and the level and scope of political knowledge. This implies that social media websites have a role to play in the establishment of political awareness among young generations of the new democracy.

To support such arguments, Iqbal, Hussain, and Iqbal (2022) affirm that social media has emerged to be a favorite platform among Pakistani youth to find information about politics, and outweighs the traditional media sources like the television and newspapers. The study establishes a good correlation between social media usage and rise in political connectivity, and political efficacy - the perception that political functions of a person can be made. This insider stresses the radicalism of the digital media in restoring political action among the youths by providing an appealing, time and user-related material offering.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1 Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) acted as a major paradigm of the activity of people during the interactions with media and their satisfaction of some psychological, social, and informational needs. It was Katz, Blumler and Gurevich (1974) who first developed the theory,

however it is no longer of the classical media effects models because the audiences are put at the centre of the media content rather than the consumer of the media content. This perspective is particularly applicable to the case with social media when the user has the extremely low amounts of control over the content they are exposed to, and control they have over the interaction and the sharing of said content.

UGT has also evolved to adapt to the interactive and participatory nature of these platforms such as Facebook, Tik Tok, and WhatsApp. The present day manifestations of the theory are founded on the pursuit of information, entertainment, socialization, expression of identity as well as empowerment. Falgoust et al. (2022) make a significant addition to the current literature on UGT because the authors apply the theory to a problem of motivational factors behind young adults being the participants of TikTok viral social media challenges. The key gratifications are social recognition, peer belonging, entertainment, and self-presentation, and they demonstrate that a mixture of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is often the root cause of the user engagement. The non-political background of their study is usable in the case, even though its implications are highly relevant to this research.

According to it, studies such as by Gil de Zuniga et al. (2012) and Lee and Kim (2020) have revealed positive relationships between informational and expressive actions of users on social media and political awareness and engagement. Compared to the traditional media, the social media provides the user with the opportunity to consume and create simultaneously hence continuing a cycle of interaction as satisfaction leads to increased interaction and vice versa.

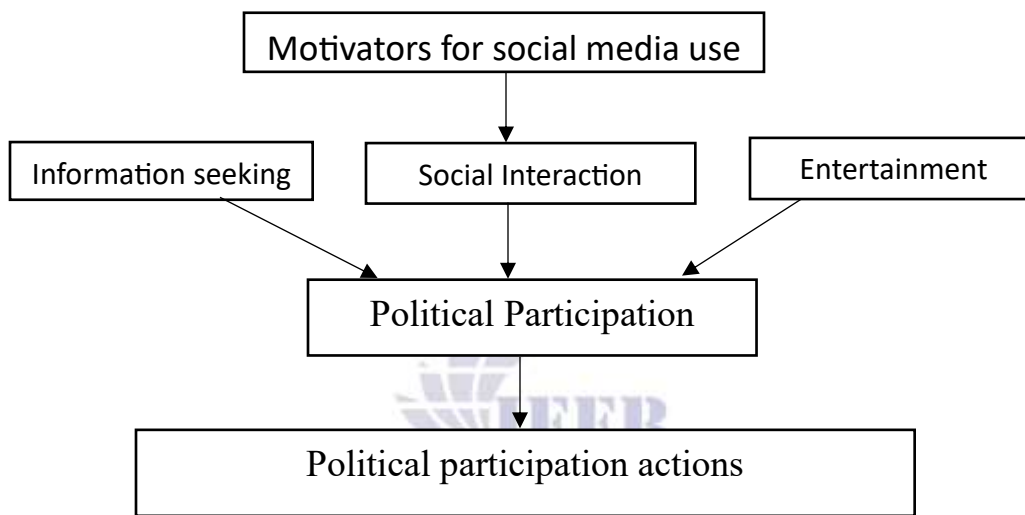
The UTG is quite helpful in explaining the agency in constraint in case of female voters in Sukkur Division. The women in the traditional socio-cultural context may be limited in their physical movement and social political interest, yet social media give them the freedom to fulfill the need, expressing their views, and socializing relatively in a intimate or controlled surrounding. This coincides with the basic premise of UGT that

decisions to be made by media are shaped by individual requirements despite increasing structural constraints.

Furthermore, the theory can also be applied in explicating the difference in the outcome of politics based on the usage pattern of the media. The political users who are more often likely to attain political knowledge, as an example, are the political content users primarily interested in political content mostly because of information

rather than the users of such content through discussions with others, post, and community-building behaviors more often. This difference will play a crucial role in this study because it would allow seeing how the difference between the forms of fulfillments will be converted into the difference between the forms of political involvement, a passive consciousness until the active one.

Figure 1 Uses and Gratification Theory Model in research



The UGT is useful in the study of Sukkur female participation in politics as it provides an opportunity to understand why and how women decide to engage with the political information online, whether it is to gather information (news pages), express their feelings (group chats), or express their voices by sharing political posts. It facilitates the quantification of motivations and satisfaction results by enabling you to classify behaviors in terms of proxies to engagement, including reading, commenting, liking or sharing.

3.2 Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM)

According to Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995), the Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM) is to this day one of the most influential models in political science to explain political participation patterns. The model maintains that political participation of individuals in political life has

been influenced by three factors in combination. Firstly, resources - time, money, civic skills etc. should be acquired in a practical way facilitating or interrupting participation. Second, there is psychological engagement, comprising of interest in politics, efficacy and awareness, which impresses whether people are inspired to become politically active or not. Third, mobilization and recruitment networks are significant in influencing people to transform their resources and interests into politics.

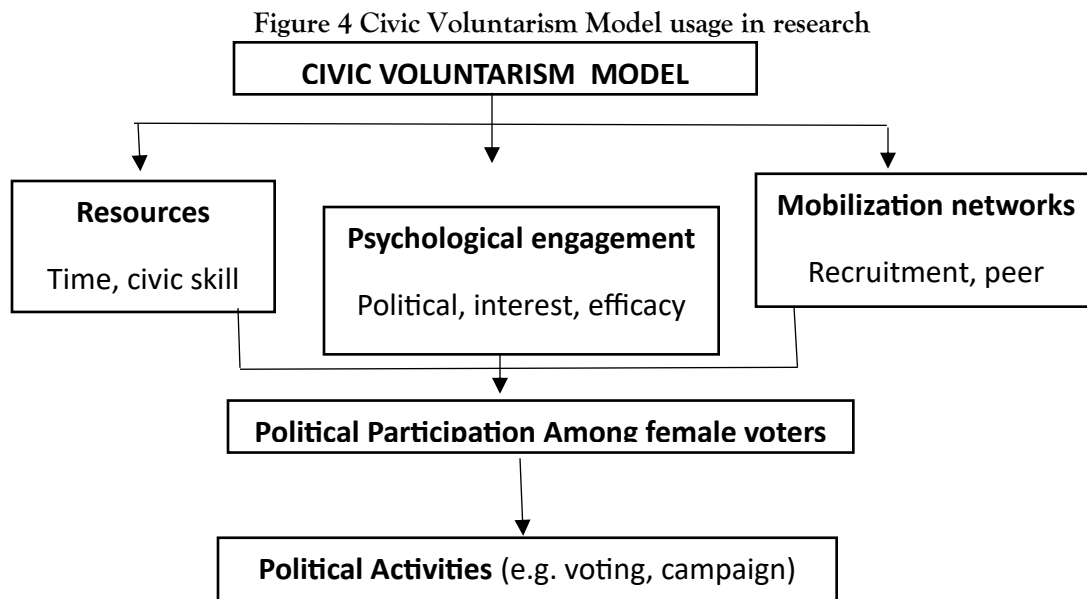
Conventionally, CVM has been used to study off line political activities that involve voting, opposition campaign and participation in elections. Nevertheless, over the past few years, researchers have been applying more to the digital contexts with the understanding that internet platforms reinstitute the balance of benefits-cost of political engagement (Boulianne, 2020). The

social media, in particular, minimizes materials needed to act politically and provide logical resource, provide the exchange of information, expression of opinions and cheap possibilities to raise the opportunities. Moreover, the digital networks offer innovative sets of recruitment, with people being shared not just among parties, civil organizations, but also with the political appeal by their colleagues, interested and community groupings in the online arena as well as the online arena.

To the female voters in Sukkur, where socio-cultural standards and structural disparities tend to restrict their access to the traditional political spaces, CVM will provide a useful framework to determine the skilled action of the social media. Within these traditional environments, a lot of women do not have resources with which to attend rallies, clinging to political elite or join civil groups. However, with the help of social media the cost of participation has decreased: the information can be received at home, the political discussion can be tracked in a reasonable way, and such civil skills like logic and digital literacy may be acquired over time. Within the framework of psychological involvement, exposure to the political material feeds political consciousness and makes women develop the efficacy spirit since they start seeing their opinion as a valuable contribution to the discussion.

Moreover, mobilization is remodeled online. Online networks like friends, family, local activists and even global women activists are the avenues of recruitment where women are being encouraged

to discuss, share and ultimately take action on matters to do with politics. This gives them a feeling of identification and togetherness which makes up their lack of presence in the physical spaces of conventional political arenas. By so doing, CVM assists in clarifying how social media, in addition to lowering the structural obstacles, enables the psychological reinforcement and networked assistance that women in Sukkur require, to make them politically active in aspects where they have not had the chance to do previously. Current research involving CVM said: The tools used in this paper on female political participation include the Social media platform, which diminishes the necessity to make use of the traditional political resources (e.g., by attending rallies, direct contacts with candidates). A mobile phone and access to the internet is enough to participate, this psychological Engagement with constant exposure to civic materials on WhatsApp or Facebook increases the levels of awareness, sparks interest and instills a perception of political effectiveness among the women. And the mobilization networks are distributed networks digital groups that are managed by peers are pages where female influencers promote collective political action, including sharing content, participating in protests, or engaging in electioneering. CVM, therefore, is at the center of the question on how and why women are engaging in politics through social media especially those who have limited access to formal political space in Sindh.



4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The research design used is quantitative, positivist research design to test the relationship between social media use and political participation among the female voters and the moderating effects of digital literacy and control of the patriarchy. It is theory-based, applied on the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) and the Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM). The cross-sectional approach was employed and data were gathered at one time. Such statistical methods were used as correlation, ANOVA, multiple regression, and moderation analysis.

4.2 Population and Sampling

4.2.1 Target Population

The target population comprised registered female voters aged 18 and above from Sukkur Division (Sukkur, Khairpur, and Ghotki districts), representing diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.

4.2.2 Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who were social media users, eligible voters, and residents of the study area, ensuring variation across demographic groups.

4.2.3 Sample Size

A total of 500 respondents were included, providing sufficient statistical power for advanced analyses.

4.4 Research Instrument and data collection

A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire that was structured and close-ended was used to obtain the data. The consistency of the results was established through Cronbachs alpha (≥ 0.70). The information was gathered within a period of two months using the online and paper questionnaires. Female data collectors were used to ease responses especially in the rural locations. No ethical issues such as informed consent, anonymity and voluntary participation were violated.

4.5 Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS. Techniques included descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, Pearson correlation, multiple regression, one-way ANOVA, and moderation analysis (PROCESS macro). A significance level of $p < 0.05$ was applied.

5. Results

5.1 Testing Hypotheses

H0: There is no statistically significant relationship between social media usage and the level of political participation among female voters in Sukkur Division.

H1: There is a statistically significant relationship between social media usage and the level of political participation among female voters in Sukkur Division.

Table 1 Correlations between social media usage and political participation

	Social media usage	Political participation
Social media usage	1	-.212**
Political participation	-.212**	1

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

Hypothesis H 1 (H1) was that political participation among female voters in the Sukkur Division will have a positive relationship with the use of social media. In order to test this, Pearson correlation analysis was done. Table 13 gave the results of the correlation and as can be seen, the correlation between the use of social media and political participation was statistically significant but negative ($r = -0.212, p < .01$). It means that despite the expected flow, the more people used social media, the less political participation they had among interviewees.

The result itself, as statistically significant, supports the fact that the correlation between the two variables is not as a result of chance. The negative trend is however the opposite of the hypothesized positive relationship thus disproving the fact that frequent use of social media is automatically equated to better political involvement. The unexpected result can be explained by a number of potential reasons. A major reason can be the prevalence of non-political or entertainment-based content on the social sites that can dominate a substantial

political conversation. Besides, social media use among this demographic population can be very superficial, and can take the form of passive consumption (e.g., liking, sharing, or scrolling) as opposed to acting politically. Also, rooted sociocultural and gender barriers in conservative areas like Sukkur Division can limit the level to which online exposures can be translated into offline politicking. Although the H1 proved to be statistically significant, there is a paradox in the relationship the correlation is positive; however, high usage of social media can actually suppress or crowd out meaningful engagement.

H0: Greater diversity of political content encountered on social media is not significantly associated with higher levels of political awareness and engagement among female voters.

H2: Greater diversity of political content encountered on social media is significantly associated with higher levels of political awareness and engagement among female voters.

Table 2 Correlation between content diversity and political awareness

		Content diversity	Political awareness
Content diversity	Pearson Correlation	1	.719**
Political awareness	Pearson Correlation	.719**	1

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

Hypothesis 2 (H2) was that increased variance of political content on social media would be

positively correlated with political awareness and participation in women voters. To check on this,

Pearson correlation test was applied between the variable that determines the diversity of content and political awareness. The results reported in Table 14 demonstrated that there was a positive correlation with the results and statistically significant ($r = 0.719, p < .01$). This outcome does not only prove the statistical significance but it also shows that the relationship is strong and significant, thus proving H2.

This correlation indicates the strength of association between female voters, the exposure of which to a large variety of political sources, including the varieties of parties, perspectives, and areas of concern, is more likely to result in a high level of political awareness. This finding supports the thesis that the content heterogeneity of social media promotes the formation of the deeper mental activity that allows people to acquire more

detailed information on politics and have a complex perception of various opinions. The availability of a wide array of political narratives on-line can specifically be very instrumental in influencing awareness in the case of the Sukkur Division because traditional sources of information about politics have limited reach in such a socialcultural conservative environment.

H0: Higher frequency of exposure to political content on social media do not positively correlates with greater political awareness and issue-based knowledge among female voters.

H3: Higher frequency of exposure to political content on social media positively correlates with greater political awareness and issue-based knowledge among female voters.

Table 3 Correlation between social media usage and political awareness

		Social media usage	Political awareness
Social media usage	Pearson Correlation	1	.576**
Political awareness	Pearson Correlation	.576**	1

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

Hypothesis 3 (H3) also stated that the more the exposure to political content in social media, the more positive the correlation between the levels of political awareness and issues based knowledge could be among female voters. In order to test this a Pearson correlation analysis was made between the variables of the social media usage and the political awareness. The findings indicated positive and statistically significant moderate correlation ($r = 0.576, p < .01$) as demonstrated in Table 15. This not only proves H3 but also shows that increased exposure to political content on the social media is significant in building political awareness and knowledge of the respondents.

The average level of correlation indicates that, though the social media is a significant source of political information, it is not the only aspect that influences political awareness. There are other concerns such as educational levels, personal drive, offline social behaviors and exposure to traditional media that can also have significant influences on creating political knowledge. This

observation highlights the intricacy of the digital aspect of political learning, which is predetermined by both online and non-online factors.

Further, the findings highlight the role played by digital platforms as convenient and expandable platforms on which women learn politics and such platforms are important in sociocultural environments where women are still less likely to directly engage in political forums. Social media platforms assist in bridging structural barriers, with women learning about issues and experience politically effectual by exposing them to political discourses, issues and debates. These results confirm preexisting theoretical directions whereby educative value of digital media in terms of political awareness is brought out and as well indicate the necessity of their counter-mechanisms in the offline, in terms of achieving more comprehensive political socialization.

H0: Active interaction with political content (e.g., commenting, sharing, participating in discussions)

on social media is positively correlated with higher levels of political engagement among female voters.

H4: Active interaction with political content (e.g., commenting, sharing, participating in discussions)

on social media is positively correlated with higher levels of political engagement among female voters.

Table 4 Correlation between interaction with political content and political participation

		Correlations	
		Interaction with political content	Political participation
Interaction with political content	Pearson Correlation	1	.034*
Political participation	Pearson Correlation	.034*	1

In hypothesis 4 (H4), the research question was to determine a positive relationship between active discussions and political content on social media and degree of political engagement in female voters. Pearson correlation analysis showed that the relationship between political discussions and political participation is statistically significant though the value is very weak ($r = 0.034, p < .05$). This implies that the correlation is statistically sound yet the substantive influence is insignificant hence meaning that the active discussions on the social media have no real success in creating greater heights of political participation among the said population.

In spite of the fact that the statistical significance proves the observed relationship is highly unlikely to have been obtained by chance, the value of the correlation coefficient is close to zero which indicates the mild practical significance of the observation. That is, though female voters can be engaged and involved in political discourses via online likes, comments or shares, these expressions do not always translate into real world votes, campaigning or lobbying.

This result points toward an incongruity between online expression and offline politics, a phenomenon that is recorded in the literature about so-called slacktivism, in which low-cost online actions replace more substantive political participation.

5.2 Discussions

Despite the fact that statistical analysis showed that there is strong negative correlation between

political participation and the use of social media, the broad conclusion of this report dampens significant levels of optimism regarding the methods of democracy in the online media, which made this finding potentially applicable to the local usage pattern in the communities in the Sukur Division. It is more possible to use social media to have fun, socialize or religious content as opposed to political matters. Secondly, the negative correlation means that there was contrary dislocation effect, in which excessive digital use - dislocation without political content or encouragement - dislocation can be the primary civil motive, with political disengagement as its result. This comes as expected of the warning that Morozov (2011) has placed on the issue of slacktivism in digital democracies and it is now that the need to distinguish between access and active action is stated.

The high degree of correlation of political material with the awareness of the political life brings more weight to the agenda-setting of new media. This further implies that plurality of ideas and diversity in idea development were factored in the development of civil awareness not just through media exposure. Various materials may have their exposure on the Internet, in the setting of Sukkur, this may make real a civil educating mechanism since this may be censored or compressed.

The corroboration of this hypothesis indicates that repeats enhance political spirit that is among the core concepts of media effects theory. However, moderate relationship power shows

that there are returns of power or even non-existence of filtering actions, possibly because of cognitive load, selective risk or low material reliability. With women at home, constant risk is able to reinforce political conventions or initiate action-based learning on the basis of problems, rather than action. How false is that what is required is awareness; Political messages may be framing, relevance and emotional salty that will distinguish awareness to change.

The marginal and tough relationship of partnership and interaction is diverse and may be rather a symbolic involvement than substantial political action. This contrast can refer to an underdeveloped region: the rise of online activity, where women like or sharing political content to subscribe or pay attention but not the actual change in the real world. It is also likely to convey risk-consistency, whereby the users operate in relative safety of digital oblivion, but out of an overabundant fear of familial or social disapproval, take no political action. It will imply the necessity to design gender principles of digital participation that embrace both exposing and the hindrance.

5.3 Recommendations for Future Research

- Future studies should adopt a longitudinal research design to examine how political awareness and participation among female social media users evolve over time, especially across different election cycles or political events.
- Mixed-method approaches are recommended, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews or focus groups, to better capture the emotional, cognitive, and cultural nuances behind female users' digital political behavior.
- Further research should explore the role of misinformation, political bias, and content credibility, analyzing how exposure to varying degrees of accuracy or ideological slant affects political beliefs and actions.
- Scholars should investigate platform-specific affordances by comparing not only user demographics but also interaction patterns across

platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp, especially in how they shape civic discourse.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

- The study employed a cross-sectional design, capturing responses at a single point in time, which limits the ability to establish causal relationships between variables.
- The research was geographically limited to female voters in Sukkur Division, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other regions of Pakistan or global contexts.
- While the sample size was adequate (N=500), platform-based representation was uneven, with some social media platforms (e.g., TikTok, Twitter) having significantly fewer users, limiting comparative analysis across platforms.

5.7 Conclusion

The paper set out to examine the impact that Internet social media has on the political mobilization of the women in Sukkur Division, Sindh in a socio-cultural setting where structural constraints and dynamic access to digital platforms affect the introduction of social media to the politics in this region. By merging the outcomes of the empirical research with the conventional theoretical models, the study will be in a position to suggest a delicate understanding of the character of the overlap of digital platforms and gendered realities to bear some impacts on political actions.

The findings of the research indicate that the social media has been utilized as a facilitative framework of political consciousness wherein women can find the information, follow the political discourse and form opinions at domains where traditional forms of communication are confined. The research however transcends the deterministic approach to technology and states that the access of technology is not the factor that determines participation. Instead, only a combination of individual possibilities and situation can be translated into meaningful political action as a result of digital exposure.

In theory, the study substantiates the adequacy of the Uses and Gratification Theory since it validates the occurrence of deliberate use of female users of social media since they take a deliberate attempt to achieve informative and expressive roles. At the same time, the study results further elaborate the Civic Voluntarism Model and give an empirical evidence that non-material inhibitors, most notably patriarchal control are extremely robust interfering variables on entering politics, even in the digitally mediated space. It alludes to the importance of placing classical traditional models of participation in politics into the cultural specific situation.

Overall, this study can be called an addition to the existing body of literature on the subject of digital political participation since it is a contextual, gender-specific exploration of the issue, resting on the empirical evidence. It shifts the discussion of the naturally democratizing quality of social media to the conditional facilitator role that the power of which varies depending on social systems, their personal qualities, and values.

References

- Ahmad, T., Alvi, A., & Ittefaq, M. (2019). The use of social media on political participation among university students: An analysis of survey results from rural Pakistan. *Sage Open*, 9(3), 2158244019864484. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2158244019864484>
- Amin, R. U., Gill, A., & Alam, M. F. (2020). *Gender Stereotyping: Hina Rabbani Khar—The First Pakistani Woman Foreign Minister's Framed Media Portrayals*. *AJSS*. <file:///C:/Users/USER/Downloads/1201-Article%20Text-2834-3-10-20210309.pdf>
- Bail, C. A., Argyle, L. P., Brown, T. W., Bumpus, J. P., Chen, H., Hunzaker, M. B. F., ... & Volfovsky, A. (2018). Exposure to opposing views on social media can increase political polarization. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 115(37), 9216-9221.
- Bano, S., & Noureen, A. (2022). Female Voting Behaviour: Role of Online Media in the Elections of Pakistan. *Global Digital & Print Media Review*, V(II), 172-182. [https://doi.org/10.31703/gdpmr.2022\(V-II\).16](https://doi.org/10.31703/gdpmr.2022(V-II).16)
- Barberá, P., Jost, J. T., Nagler, J., Tucker, J. A., & Bonneau, R. (2015). Tweeting from left to right: Is online political communication more than an echo chamber? *Psychological Science*, 26(10), 1531-1542.
- Batool, S., Sultana, S., & Momineen, F.U. (2019). Analyzing the Role of Social Media in Strengthening Democracy in Pakistan. *Global Social Sciences Review*. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Analyzing-the-Role-of-Social-Media-in-Strengthening-Batool-Sultana/cb39efdcdbdef840ee2e276e8aacfed75bb25058b>
- Bode, L. (2017). Closing the gap: Gender parity in political engagement on social media. *Information, Communication & Society*, 20(4), 587-603.
- Bode, L., & Dalrymple, K. E. (2016). Politics in 140 characters or less: Campaign communication, network interaction, and political participation on Twitter. *Journal of Political Marketing*, 15(4), 311-332.
- Boulianne, S. (2015). Social media use and participation: A meta-analysis. *Information, Communication & Society*, 18(5), 524-538.
- Boxell, L., Gentzkow, M., & Shapiro, J. M. (2017). Greater Internet use is not associated with faster growth in political polarization among US demographic groups. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 114(40), 10612-10617.
- Cai, W., & Zhou, S. (2019). Understanding the use of social media in political participation: A social capital perspective. *Government Information Quarterly*, 36(3), 343-353.

- Chhachhar, A. R., Malik, R. R., & Pahore, M. R. (2021). Social media political campaign in district Hyderabad, Sindh, Pakistan. *Медиаобразование*, (1), 54-63.
<https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/social-media-political-campaign-in-district-hyderabad-sindh-pakistan>
- Chowdhury, M. M. (2020). Social media and political communication in Bangladesh. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 30(6), 456-472.
- Flaxman, S., Goel, S., & Rao, J. M. (2016). Filter bubbles, echo chambers, and online news consumption. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 80(S1), 298-320.
- García-Gavilanes, R., Tsvetkova, M., Yasseri, T., & Iglesias, J. R. (2018). The digital traces of bubbles: Feedback cycles between socio-economic signals in the Bitcoin economy. *Journal of the Royal Society Interface*, 15(141), 20180177.
- Gil de Zúñiga, H., Jung, N., & Valenzuela, S. (2012). Social media use for news and individuals' social capital, civic engagement and political participation. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 17(3), 319-336.
<https://academic.oup.com/jcmc/article/17/3/319/4067682>
- Global Gender Gap Report 2020, World Economic Forum.
- Guess, A., Nagler, J., & Tucker, J. (2020). Less than you think: Prevalence and predictors of fake news dissemination on Facebook. *Science Advances*, 6(14), eaay3539.
- Ida, R., Saud, M., & Mashud, M. I. (2020). An empirical analysis of social media usage, political learning and participation among youth: a comparative study of Indonesia and Pakistan. *Quality & Quantity*, 54(4), 1285-1297.
<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11135-020-00985-9>
- Iqbal, J., Hussain, S., & Iqbal, N. (2022). Impact of Social Media and Political Participation on Political Efficacy of Youth in Pakistan. *Journal of Mass Communication Department, Dept of Mass Communication, University of Karachi*, 27.
<https://www.jmcd-uok.com/index.php/jmcd/article/view/243>
- Jungherr, A., Jürgens, P., & Schoen, H. (2016). Why the pirate party won the German election of 2009 or the trouble with predictions: A response to Tumasjan, A., Sprenger, T. O., Sander, P. G., & Welpe, I. M. "Predicting elections with Twitter: What 140 characters reveal about political sentiment." *Social Science Computer Review*, 30(2), 229-234.
- Kaskazi, C., & Kitzie, V. (2023). The Role of Traditional Forms of Political Participation in Modern Democracies. *Journal of Democratic Studies*, 15(2), 87-104.
- Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1973). Uses and gratifications research. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 37(4), 509-523.
- Lee, E. J., & Kim, Y. (2020). Factors influencing political participation through social networking sites. *Telematics and Informatics*, 49, 101362.
- Lilleker, D. G., & Koc-Michalska, K. (2017). *Political communication in the era of new technologies: Essays in honour of David Butler*. Routledge.
- Lim, M. (2017). Freedom to hate: Social media and political participation in Indonesia. *Journal of Communication*, 67(3), 411-432.
- Masood, H., & Adnan, M. (2021). Media and political socialization in Pakistan: A study of rural and urban areas. *South Asian Studies*, 36(2), 213-226.
<file:///C:/Users/USER/Downloads/836121.pdf>

- Minhas, S., Khan, Y., & Haq, A. (2022). Exploring social media role in political awareness among voters of Peshawar. *Global Digital & Print Media Review*, 1, 35-42.
- Muzaffar, M.R., Yaseen, Z., & Safdar, S. (2021). Role of Social Media in Political Campaigns in Pakistan: A Case Study of 2018 Elections. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Role-of-Social-Media-in-Political-Campaigns-in-A-of-Mu%E1%BA%93affar-Yaseen/dfc65ec99a7f44a08495960d1479f0534b40465d>
- Pal, J., & Gonawela, A. (2017). Political communication on social media in India. *Social Media + Society*, 3(2), 1-11.
- Pariser, E. (2011). *The filter bubble: What the Internet is hiding from you*. Penguin UK.
- Pennycook, G., & Rand, D. G. (2019). Fighting misinformation on social media using crowdsourced judgments of news source quality. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 116(7), 201806678.
- Prior, M. (2013). Media and political polarization. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 16, 101-127.
- Sajid, M., Warraich, N. F., & Javed, J. (2024). *The role of Facebook in shaping voting behavior of youth*. SAGE Open. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/21582440241252213>
- Saud, M., Ida, R., Mashud, M., & Yousaf, F. (2023). *Cultural dynamics of digital space: Democracy, civic engagement and youth participation in virtual spheres*. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0147176723001529>
- Shehzad, M., Ali, A., & Shah, S.M. (2021). RELATIONSHIP AMONG SOCIAL MEDIA USES, INTERNET MEDIATION AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN PAKISTAN. *Humanities & Social Sciences Reviews*. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/RELATIONSHIP-AMONG-SOCIAL-MEDIA-USES%2C-INTERNET-AND-Shehzad-Ali/828b1db095daf23f259894555282f1e802feed70>
- Shehzad, M., Yousaf, M., & Mahmood, K. (2021). Social media and women's political participation in Pakistan. *Journal of Media Studies*, 36(2), 89-105.
- Tariq, R., Zolkepli, I. A., & Ahmad, M. (2022). Political participation of young voters: Tracing direct and indirect effects of social media and political orientations. *Social Sciences*, 11(2), 81. <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-0760/11/2/81>
- UN Women. (2022). *Women's political participation and digital inclusion*. United Nations Report.
- Vaccari, C., Valeriani, A., Barberá, P., Bonneau, R., Jost, J. T., Nagler, J., & Tucker, J. A. (2013). Social media and political communication: A survey of Twitter users during the 2013 Italian general election. *Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica*, 43(3), 381-410.
- Vaishnav, M. (2019). *Digital politics in India*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Valenzuela, S., Kim, Y., & Gil de Zúñiga, H. (2017). Social networks that matter: Exploring the role of political discussion for online political participation. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 29(3), 392-414.
- Verba, S., Scholzman, K. L., & Brady, H. E. (1995). *Voice and equality: Civic voluntarism in American politics*. Harvard University Press.

Xie, B., Watkins, S. C., Golbeck, J., & Huang, M. (2019). Understanding and changing the discourse about vaccines: A big data study on Facebook. *Health Communication, 34*(2), 165-174.

