

SOCIAL MEDIA AS A CATALYST FOR ONLINE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

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Abstract

This study examines how Pakistani young adults, a group that is becoming more and more accustomed to digital communication, use social media and how it affects their online political engagement. The research, which is based on the theories of uses and gratification and media system dependency, examines how different facets of social media engagement, such as usage patterns, motivations, political discourse, and sharing of traditional media content, influence civic behaviour in virtual environments. A structured questionnaire was given to 500 respondents, ages 18 to 34, as part of a quantitative research design. Active social media use, usage frequency, political debates, and motivational variables are all strongly linked to higher levels of online political participation, according to data analysed using Pearson correlation and ANOVA. Political participation was also positively correlated with social media sharing of content from traditional media. Passive social media use, on the other hand, had no discernible effect. Differences in age and gender were also noted, with older youth (ages 34+ and 22–25) and males showing higher levels of online political activity. The results underscore how digital media activity and civic involvement are intricately linked, highlighting the significance of intentional and interactive media use. According to the study's findings, youth political participation can be effectively facilitated by social media if users transition from passive consumption to active participation.

INTRODUCTION

People can express their problems and ideas in a space provided by social media. Computer-based methods of sharing and exchanging data, concepts, images, and videos inside a network are referred to as social media networks (Siddique & Singh, 2016). According to Stieglitz et al. (2018), social media has grown significantly over the previous ten years as a tool for information gathering and dissemination across a range of industries, including business, science, entertainment, politics, and crisis management. Social

media has significantly impacted society in both socioeconomic and political sense within the last ten or so years. The popularity of social networking sites is expanding globally, indicating their exceptional nature, in contrast to the declining influence of mass media (McCay-Peet & Quan-Haase 2017). Social media is now a global source of entertainment, news, and conversation that is becoming more and more important. Social media adoption is an obvious trend that has risen year after year over the past ten years,

despite the fact that individual reasons and usage patterns vary widely.

A number of communication-related issues and communication patterns can now be studied in new ways because to the growing use of social networking sites. For example, social networking sites data can be analysed to discover more about problems, trends, important figures, and other kinds of information (Golder, & Macy, 2011). As to Kaplan and Haenlein's (2010) definition, social media comprises interactive online and mobile applications that facilitate in-the-moment contact between users who have similar interests and user-generated content. According to Tufekci (2017), social media is crucial to modern politics since it allows people to mobilise, organise, or support political and social change. By allowing politicians, political parties, individuals to interact in real time, share information and influence public discourse, social media platforms have changed political communication (Chadwick, 2017). People should also make use of social media through which they can gather information on politics so that they will be politically informed or engaged (Gil de Ziga et al., 2012). Frequent exposure of highly active Twitter users to political news on this platform makes them more politically aware than their counterparts who do not frequent indulge in microblogging (Boulianne, 2015). Digital platforms are turning into places where people can engage in political discussions and voice out their opinions via different online outlets such as Facebook or Twitter (Himmelboim et al., 2013).

Pakistan has a large youth population that uses social media to engage in political activity. By 2024, the total number of Facebook Messenger users is estimated to be over 49.9 million, with a considerable proportion falling between the ages of 18 and 24. Similarly, Instagram has 18.6 million members worldwide, the majority of which are in the same age range. This demographic accounts for nearly half of Pakistan's Instagram following making it the most active on these platforms. For political engagement, Facebook and Twitter are particularly popular. Based on this survey thus 76% youth from Pakistan engage in political conversation through social media where its significance as an important civic tool is apparent. The significant dedication to these forums suggests that they have a significant influence on the political conversations of young Pakistanis on social media.

Recent studies on civil society, the electronic revolution, citizen political involvement, democratic legitimacy, and democratic functioning in conjunction with the growth of populist feeling have all focused on political participation (Oser & Hooghe, 2018). Given its centrality to modern democracy (Eder & Stadelmann-Steffen, 2017) and the necessity of civil society for the existence of an efficient democracy (Whiteley, 2012), political participation is essential for democratic legitimacy (Johnson, 2015). According to certain theories, becoming involved in politics not only helps to revive democracy but also promotes human growth, accountability, and balanced socioeconomic advancement (Brodie et al., 2009; Ivaldi et al., 2017). The idea of collective action, in which people band together to pursue shared political objectives, is closely related to online political participation (Klandermans, 2014).

Given the variety of methods individuals can become politically active in the modern world, including social movements and social media platforms, it is imperative to comprehend how political involvement is evolving in the digital age (Tarrow, 2011). Before social media, young people in particular were unable to express their thoughts or engage in politics through radio and television due to a shortage of space in newspapers and the expensive cost of airtime. But according to recent research from the US, Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Europe, young people's engagement in politics is expanding the paradigm to include online public participation. Through the use of Facebook and other social media platforms, young people may now interact with politicians and other like-minded individuals to share ideas and information, creating new opportunities and optimism (Abdul et al., 2017). According to Chen and Gao (2013), social media is currently playing a big part in the "migration process," where young people from all over the globe are using medium to address the issue of political apathy and to participate in online political discussions that could ultimately lead to better governance and social progress. Political activity on social media platforms, such as contacting politicians via Facebook, leaving comments on a candidate's page, requesting funds for a political party, or sharing political content, is referred to as "online political participation" (Skoric & Kwan, 2011). Consequently, compared to earlier generations, youth

now have greater opportunity to engage in political activities (Zuniga et al., 2012).

The present study investigates the correlation among young adults' social media usage, online political participation, and civic engagement. Through an examination of the intricacies of online political participation and civic engagement, the study illuminates the complex relationships that impact the involvement of youth in movements and causes. As the internet grows in importance as a platform for political discourse and social activism, it is crucial to understand the intricate relationship between online political participation and civic engagement in the context of young mobilisation.

1.1 Research Objectives

- To analyse the influence of social media usage on online political participation of young adults.
- To find out the role of demographics in moderating the influence of social media usage on online political participation.

1.2 Research hypotheses

H1: It is more likely that social media consumption positively influences online political participation of young adults

H2: It is more likely that traditional media use positively influences online political participation of young adults.

H3: It is more likely that social media use positively influences online political participation of young adults.

H4: It is more likely that social media usage frequency positively influences online political participation of young adults.

H5: It is more likely that political talk positively influences online political participation of young adults.

H6: It is more likely that social media usage motivations negatively influence online political participation of young adults.

H7a: Males are more likely to participate in online political discussions than females.

H7b: Online political participation is more likely to decrease with increase in the age

2. Literature Review

The literature review is thoroughly explained in this chapter. This chapter covers the following topics: political talk, traditional media content shared on social media, social media usage, frequency of social media uses, and social media usage motive. This chapter also discusses the usage of social media and civic engagement, misinformation, and disinformation, as well as usage of social media and online political participation.

2.1 Social Media Usage

As to Kaplan and Haenlein's (2010) findings, social media comprises an assortment of Web 2.0-oriented programs that facilitate the production and sharing of information created by users, while also expanding upon the technological and ideological underpinnings. Social media has developed over the past many years from being a straightforward tool for sharing and creating material collaboratively to being an important part of today's media environment (Evans & Bratton, 2008). Social media is the term used to describe online groups, communication tools, and content creation and sharing capabilities (Chugh & Ruhi 2019). Chijioke (2013) claims that social media are nothing more than interactive online platforms that let users participate to create and pass on knowledge in real time. He continued by saying that they are online, democratic, participatory means of communication that allow users to freely share documents and information.

Social media usage improves exposure and awareness while facilitating textual, audio, video, and pictorial exchanges of ideas, opinions, and data. While social media can fulfil young people's needs in terms of cognitive, social integrative, educational, marketing, entrepreneurial, and other areas-focused desires and satisfactions action-oriented desires and fulfilments (Aydin, 2012). Stieglitz, Brockmann, and Xuan (2012) conducted a study which indicates a growing interest among German residents in political parties' social media-based communication. Additionally, they observe that German politicians especially those from left-wing parties have been using social media much more recently. The majority of politicians are eager to utilise social media more, according to this study, and they must stay up to date on current political discussions, their own online personas, new trends,

and well-known users on a variety of social media platforms.

2.2 Social Media Consumption for Political Purpose

Young individuals make up the bulk of social media users. According to Haddon (2015), this is because young people are spending an increasing amount of time online. Facebook and YouTube are huge in the social media world. What jumps out, though, is how younger Americans especially those in the 18 to 24 age range use a variety of sites, including Instagram, Twitter, or Snapchat. According to Ohiagu and Okorie (2014), young people are still among the most frequent users of social networking sites because it is widely held that they are the ones who belong in the digital age and that information about local and worldwide news and events has improved their lives. In order to determine if voters' selection of presidential candidates was impacted by their use of social media, Okoro and Santas (2017) investigate the use of social media platforms for political communication during the 2011 Nigerian presidential election. The results demonstrate that most respondents' selections of presidential candidates were influenced by their social media usage. Respondents also claimed that the two presidential candidates' popularity stemmed from their usage of social media during their campaigns. In particular, social media has a significant impact on political structure by boosting political efficacy and promoting awareness. Howard (2010) notes that young people were also coerced into using social networking sites for political repression during the Arab Spring. According to Kemp (2019), social media trends in Pakistan and Indonesia have so attracted the attention of 200 million users in particular.

2.3 Social Media Usage Frequency

The results of Omotayo and Folorunso's (2020) study show that young people heavily utilized social networking sites to engage in political discourse. Most frequently downloaded apps were found to be Facebook (98.8%), Yahoo Messenger (50.9%), Instagram (60.2%), WhatsApp (93.8%), Twitter (55.3%), and Instagram (98.8%). The youths primarily used social media for political advocacy (95.3%), political campaigns (91.9%),

communication with politicians (90.7%), political discussions (87.3%), monitoring and reporting election malpractice (85.1%), public consultations (80.4%), membership in lobbying interest groups (64.9%), political blogging (64.9%), and writing letters (51.2%) to local government officials. Three hours are spent on social media each day by 99.4% of users, according to the report, who use it on their phones.

Texting, browsing social media sites, watching or downloading video or online TV, making phone calls or video calls, and information gathering are the five most popular online activities among Malaysian Internet users (MCMC, 2020). Due to Malaysia's almost 70% broadband penetration rate and people's up to 20% weekly usage, the internet is now considered a potential information source (Bunt, 2009). Mustafa and Hamzah (2011) found that Malaysian social networking sites users spend a considerable amount of time online after conducting a survey on regional social media networks. According to Syahrir (2009), 66% of Malaysians used social networking sites in December 2008, ranking the nation third in Asia after Singapore. The most popular social network, according to Jafarkarimi et al. (2016), is Facebook, having 6.2 million users, followed by Friendster (4.2 million), Myspace (2.1 million), and X (approximately 750,000).

2.4 Social Media Use Motivations

A great desire or excitement to do something is what is known as motivation (Mahdikhani, 2016). Extrinsic and intrinsic motivation fall into these two categories. Motivation that originates from within an individual and is attained by enjoyment or a personal interest is known as intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation is derived from external sources and is typically directed toward rewards and incentives. To achieve a certain goal, one's conduct can be improved via extrinsic motivation (Vallerand, 1997). Munar and Jacobsen's research demonstrates that sharing knowledge online is driven by two different motivations: self-centred motivation and community-related motivation. Motivating oneself for one's own benefit is known as self-centred motivation. On the other hand, motivation for communities that results in specific support or aid to the communities is known as motivation related to communities. Similar to this,

there are two different kinds of motivation that lead someone to share expertise or information (Chang, & Chuang, 2011).

Research on media consumption and satisfactions assume that individuals use media with goals in mind and are conscious of the wants they are attempting to satisfy as well as their motives (Ruggiero, 2000). A person's motivations can have an impact on how they utilize and are impacted by media. For instance, sharing news on social media is more common among those who have social and informational goals. (Lee, & Ma, 2012) Social utility and self-expression are the main driving forces behind consumers of discussion forums, electronic announcement boards, and social media sites., but users of blogs are motivated primarily by information-seeking (Ancu & Cozma, 2009). Obananya (2025) found that the most common reasons people use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat for non-political purposes are convenience and entertainment value. Higher educated people are less likely to be motivated to utilise the Internet in general to get information regarding politics (Kaye & Johnson, 2002).

2.5 Political Talk

Statistics from the United States and the United Kingdom between the late 1950s and the early 1990s show that there was minimal shift in the number of people who talk politics, who they talk politics with, and the factors that influence their inclination to talk politics. Even after controlling for other factors known to affect political awareness, statistical analyses indicate that talking about politics increases citizens' understanding of public events. For those studying political behaviour and interested in promoting democracy, political discourse should be viewed as a crucial kind of political engagement (Bennett, 2000). According to Ekstrom (2016), regular political discourse is an essential component of democracy. It has been researched how conversations help young people socialise to politics. It has been said that studying politics could be perilous.

The study investigates how young people view interactions on social media, in their peer groups, and in their homes. The study adopts a social interactional perspective, seeing political discourse as a social accomplishment connected to self-identity management and norms. Personal interviews, focus

groups, and journals are all part of the multimethod approach it uses. The group consists of 23 high school students, ages 17 to 18. The results show that political discourse adapts to the social environment. Norms dictate that political debates should be either avoided or expected. A vital foundation for cordial dialogue, conflict resolution, and the formation of identities and views may be found in family and peer groups. In general, people are more reluctant to voice their opinions on social media. The fear of receiving threatening responses is one important component. The results show that political conversation is a behaviour that involves young adults deliberately control, reveal, and express their political identities.

2.6 Traditional Media Content Shared On Social Media

Various mass media platforms, including as radio, newspapers, posters, and television, are frequently utilized for political mobilization throughout election seasons across the globe (Akpoy, 2013). Katerina (2010) makes a distinction between mobilisation that is indirect and direct. Phone calls, direct mail, television campaigns, and street canvassing are all part of direct mobilisation. People who have subscribed to social networks are indirectly mobilised. Duffy, Liying, and Ong's (2010) study found that Singaporean young favoured online media when they wanted speed and conventional media when they wanted dependability. Poor (2006) found that individuals employ a range of media, both new and old, to satisfy their needs and are aware of gatekeeping. Gatekeepers have their advantages.

According to Skoric and Poor's (2013) research, social media use is positively correlated with traditional political participation, indicating the continued importance of conventional media for political participation. More specifically, we discover that traditional media news consumption is a more reliable indicator of conventional and online engagement than Facebook usage in general. The likelihood of sharing the news and the mean credibility scores given to the same news item delivered in various formats were compared, and the results showed significant variations between the groups. According to Beasalu and Pont-Sorribes (2021), participants exhibited a more circumspect attitude towards social media as a news source when they received information in a

conventional media format, especially digital television, which was perceived as having greater credibility. They were also more inclined to share the former.

Kim and Johnson (2009) Concluded that in this study, politically engaged internet users were surveyed to find out how they viewed independent internet newspapers, conventional news sources, and online versions of these publications. Additionally, factors influencing online sources' credibility were investigated in relation to the 2004 South Korean general election. When it came to political information, digital newspaper was seen as further reliable thus both conventional media and their online equivalents. Political factors including voting, political activity, and campaign interest also shown to be important predictors of online source trustworthiness, depending more on conventional and internet sources, which are typically better indicators.

2.7 Social Media Usage and Online Political Participation

Political participation is any activity where people express their political beliefs and/or communicate their thoughts to political decision-makers (Vissers, & Stolle, 2014). Except for the fact that the activities happen online, online political participation can be described in the exact same way as conventional political participation (Brady, 1999). Here are some examples of these relatively significant political internet activities: Contacting a politician via email; (2) making a campaign donation; (3) signing up for a political listserv; (4) offering online assistance for a cause or campaign; (5) sending an email with a political message; and (6) composing an online letter to a newspaper editor (Zúñiga Gil et al., 2012). Kim and Chen's (2016) study looks at two aspects of the relationship between social media use and online political participation: (1) how using social media, like blogs and social network sites (SNSs), affects people's online political participation; and (2) how exposure to political perspectives, like cross-cutting and like-minded viewpoints, mediates this relationship.

Online political participation is positively correlated with the use of social networking sites and blogs, according to the results. It is interesting to note that exposure to similar viewpoints mediates the

relationship between people's use of blogs and their online political activity, but exposure to ideas that cut across other domains mediates the relationship between SNS use and participation. Online political efficacy is a positive mediator between information-oriented social media use and political engagement; however, this effect of mediation is only significant when it comes to online political participation (Chen et al, 2019).

A favourable correlation was found between higher levels of political participation and the usage of social networking sites by Malaysian voters. Use of social media platforms, political blogs, politically online films, party websites, and political mobile commercials were found to be strongly correlated with political activism. Nevertheless, the likelihood that voters would cast a ballot was not predicted by the political online media they used (Willnat et al, 2013). Yang and DeHart (2016) A poll of 4,556 US college students was carried out after the 2012 election to determine what psychological and behavioural traits linked to social media predicted students' engagement in online politics. Social trust did not directly affect online political participation, but structural equation modelling and hierarchical multiple regression results indicated that political self-efficacy, Facebook group participation, and online social capital were positive predictors of online political participation.

3. Theoretical Framework

Following theories were applied in this study:

3.1 Media System Dependency Theory

In addition to suggesting micro-level connections between the media and people, media system dependency theory also suggests macro-level connections between the media system and political, social, and cultural systems (Ball-Rokeach, 1985; Ball-Rokeach & De-fleur, 1976). According to Ball-Rokeach & De-fleur (1976), "dependency" is described as "a connection whereby the fulfilment of needs or accomplishing of objectives of a single party is dependent upon the resources of another party." People who find the media's resources helpful in accomplishing their objectives may develop a dependent relationship with it. The three main purposes of media use, according to the idea of media system dependency, are activities, introductions, and comprehension. People use informational media to

make informed judgements by using it to comprehend the world around them. This is an example of how individuals accomplish the understanding goal.

When examining the impact of social media usage on young adults’ online political participation, this approach is helpful. It is beneficial to look into the extent to which young people’ use of social media shapes their motivations, usage patterns, and political conversation. It is also useful to look into what kinds of conventional media content they post on social media platforms. The idea aids in examining the web-based interdependencies created by social media, which impact this population’s online dynamics of participation in politics.

3.2 Uses and Gratification Theory

The authors of the Uses and Gratification Theory are Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974). According to McQuail (2010), however, the hypothesis actually began to take shape in the early 1940s when scientists started examining why individuals regularly read newspapers and listen to famous programs on the radio. Consequently, the hypothesis emerged in an attempt to provide an explanation for why individuals choose to consume particular media as well as what

they learn from it. Academics studying mass communication use the U&G Theory to look into, clarify, and offer solutions for why people use particular media and what advantages or satisfaction they get from doing so. The main tenet of this theory is that individuals use mass media to satisfy a range of needs and for a number of purposes (Galan, 2010). In this study, UGT is used as a lens to examine how young adults pick and engage with social networking sites with political content to satisfy their diverse needs. They may, for example, using social networking sites to find political knowledge express their affiliation with a party, or connect with others in online groups (Katz et al., 1974). Using UGT, the study intends to reveal the motives and gratifications that young adults obtain from their political social media usage, offering a full knowledge of how these gratifications impact their online political participation and behaviours.

3.3 Theoretical Model

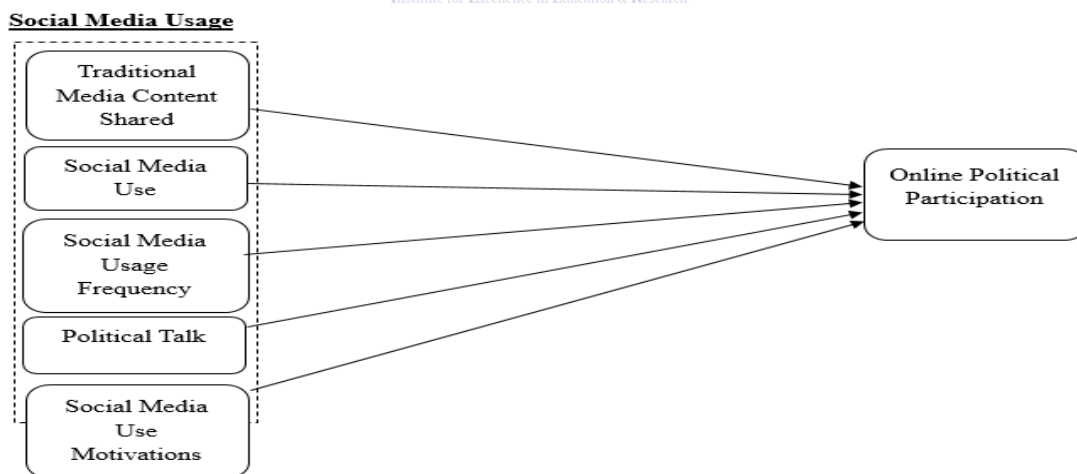


Figure 3.1 Theoretical Representation of Relationships

Methodology

This study used a quantitative research methodology to examine how Pakistani young adults’ use of social media affects their online political engagement. A

survey-based methodology was used, with a structured questionnaire serving as the research tool. Political discourse, social media use, frequency of use, reason for using social media, and sharing of conventional

media content on social media were among the constructs examined by the questionnaire.

Young individuals who use social media regularly, ages 18 to 34, made up the population. Data were gathered from 500 respondents in total using purposive sampling. Participants' exposure to political content on internet media was guaranteed by the inclusion criteria.

One dependent variable, online political participation, was examined in this study. A variety of social media usage parameters were added as independent variables. As possible moderators, demographic factors including age and gender were investigated.

Online data collection was used to reach the population's digitally active segment. Likert-scale

items were incorporated into the survey to collect behavioural and attitude information. Descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests, and Pearson correlation were used to examine hypothesized relationships after the data was collected.

Confidentiality and informed consent were among the ethical concerns that the study guaranteed. The methodological framework provided a strong basis for investigating how social media shapes political and civic behaviours in the digital age, since it was guided by the theories of Uses and Gratification and Media System Dependency.

5. Findings & Interpretation

Following are the results obtained from the statistical analyses:

Table 5.1 Pearson Product Moment between Social Media Consumption and Online Political Participation

		SMCC	OPPT
SMCC	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.40
	Sig (2-tailed)		.369
	N	500	500

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

The Pearson product moment correlation results are shown in Table 5.1. The correlation between social media consumption and online political participation was determined using a correlation test. Given that the p-value is greater than 0.05, the results

demonstrated that there is no statistically significant correlation between social media consumption and online political participation.

Table 5.2 Pearson product moment between Traditional media content shared on social media and online political participation

		TMC	OPPT
TMC	Pearson Correlation	1	.342**
	Sig(2-tailed)		<.001
	N	500	500

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

The Pearson product moment results are shown in Table 5.2. The relationship between traditional media content shared on social media and online political participation was investigated using a correlation test. The results showed that the variables mentioned above have a statistically significant association. Furthermore, as the p-value is less than 0.05, the strength of the relationship was determined to be moderate.

Table 5.3 Pearson product moment between social media use and online political participation

		SMU	OPPT
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	Pearson Correlation	1	.413**
SMU	Sig (2 - tailed)		<.001
	N	500	500

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

The Pearson product moment correlation test results, which were used to look into the relationship between social media use and online political participation, are shown in Table 5.3. The results showed that the variables mentioned above have a statistically significant association. Additionally, the p-value is less than 0.05 and the R-value is 0.413**, indicating a moderate relationship.

Table 5.4 Pearson product moment between social media usage frequency and online political participation

		SMFC	OPPT
SMFC	Pearson Correlation	1	.198**
	Sig (2-tailed)		.000
	N	500	500

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

The Pearson product moment results are shown in Table 5.4. The correlation between the frequency of social media use and online political participation was determined using a correlation test. Given that the p-value is less than 0.05, the results indicate a statistically significant association between the variables mentioned above.

Table 5.5 Pearson product moment between political talk and online political participation

		PTC	OPPT
PTC	Pearson Correlation	1	.359**
	Sig (2- tailed)		.000
	N	500	500

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

Results for the Pearson product moment the relationship between political talk and online political participation was estimated using a correlation test. Table 5.5 displays the correlation between the two measured variables. The r-obtained value of 0.359** indicates a moderate correlation, with a p-value less than 0.05.

Table 5.6 Pearson product moment between social media usage motivations and online political participation

		SMUMC	OPPT
SMUMC	Pearson Correlation	1	.394**
	Sig (2-tailed)		.000
	N	500	500

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

Table 5.6 displays the Pearson product moment results. The correlation between social media usage motivations and online political participation was examined using the correlation test. The results demonstrated a statistically significant correlation between the variables mentioned above. Additionally, the p-value is less than 0.05, indicating a moderate association, with the R-value of 0.394**.

Table 5.7 Difference between online political participation on the basis of gender

Measure	Male	Female	F(2, 497)	η^2	Sig.
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	M	SD	M	SD			
Online Political participation	72.87	18.401	66.10	20.662	7.603	0.0297	.001

To determine the influence of gender on online political participation, the findings of a one-way analysis of variance between the groups are displayed in table 5.7 above. Gender-based groupings of respondents were created (Group 1 = Males; Group 2 = Females). The test results clarify the notable

distinction in online political participation between the groups based on gender [F(2,497)= 7.603,p<.001]. Since there were only two groups, post-hoc comparisons could not be performed to ascertain whether there were any differences between the groups.

Table 5.8 Difference between level of online political participation on the basis of age

		18-21		22-25		26-29		30-33		34 - above		F (4, 495)	η ²	Sig.
Online political		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
			62.82	22.5	73.6	18.27	69.64	18.90	71.02	15.913	75.00	13.279	7.119	0.054

The findings of a one-way analysis of variance between the groups to determine the influence of age on online political participation are displayed in Table 5.15Based on age, the respondents were split up into five groups. (i.e. Group 1= 18-21, Group 2= 22-25, Group 3= 26-29, Group 4=30-33 and Group 5 =34-above). Findings derived from the test intricate significant difference among the groups on the basis of age for online political participation [F (4, 495) = 7.119, p=.001]. However, post -Hoc comparison was made. the 22-25 age group has a substantially higher mean OPPT score than the 18-21 age group (Mean Difference = 10.795, p <.001), and the 34-plus age group likewise has a significantly higher mean OPPT score than the 18-21 age group (Mean Difference = 12.177, p =.027). No additional pairwise comparisons yielded statistically significant differences at the.05 level.

6. Discussion

According to Stieglitz et al. (2018), social media has grown significantly in the past ten years as a tool for information gathering and dissemination across a range of industries, including business, science, entertainment, politics, and crisis management. Social media has significantly impacted society in both a socioeconomic and political sense within the last ten or so years. The popularity of social networking sites

is expanding globally, indicating their exceptional nature, in contrast to the declining influence of mass media (McCay-Peet & Quan-Haase 2017). Social media is now a global source of entertainment, news, and conversation that is becoming more and more important. Political activity on social media platforms, such as contacting politicians via Facebook, leaving comments on a candidate’s page, requesting funds for a political party, or sharing political content, is referred to as “online political participation” (Skoric & Kwan, 2011).

Young individuals make up the bulk of social media users. According to Haddon (2015), this is because young people are spending an increasing amount of time online. Facebook and YouTube are huge in the social media world. What jumps out, though, is how younger Americans especially those in the 18 to 24 age range use a variety of sites, including Instagram, Twitter, or Snapchat. While intensive political use of Facebook and Twitter was inversely connected with online political participation, general political usage of these platforms was positively correlated. It was found that for young adults, participation online acts as a springboard for offline engagement. Nonetheless, young people’s offline activities often translate into their online involvement. These results highlight the value of encouraging young people to participate in politics online and the necessity of paying attention to

their developmental phases (Kim et al., 2017). Use of social media for news predicts online political participation (Diehl et al., 2015). Online political participation is predicted by the use of social media for news (Diehl et al., 2015). Use of social media for news has expanded in tandem with rises in online political participation (Chan, 2016).

H1: It is more likely that social media consumption positively influences online political participation of young adults (Disapproved)

This study has not supported the hypothesis that was suggesting positive relationship among young adults' online political participation and their social media consumption. Based on table 5.1 presenting Pearson product-moment correlation test results, it was noted that there exists no significant correlation among social media consumption and online political participation with a p-value greater than 0.05. This conforms to recent research indicating that merely following social media posts does not necessarily amount to politics (Boulianne 2019). An example of this is given by Boulianne (2019), who mentions how important different types of use can be based on whether they are passive or active: "Passive consumption such as scrolling through news feeds without interacting, often fails to foster the political engagement that active participation does". Scholars have argued that even though some people may perceive social media as playing a role in politics, it takes more than just passive consumption for meaningful interaction to occur (Theocharis & Van Deth, 2018).

H2: It is more likely that traditional media content shared on social media positively influences online political participation of young adults (Approved)

The Pearson product-moment correlation test was therefore employed to assess the hypothesis that young adults' online political participation was positively impacted by sharing traditional media content on social media, based on the findings presented in table 5.3. Findings show a statistically noteworthy association among these variables (p-values < 0.05). This significant link indicates that the younger adults interact with traditional media content disseminated on social media platforms, the higher the probability of them participating in political

activity on the internet. These results are in line with studies showing that young adults' political participation can be enhanced by the sharing and debate of news and political items on social networking sites (Boulianne, 2020). The moderate relationship strength suggests that there is a positive influence. Although traditional media is instructive and mobilising, other factors including personal interests, social networks, and digital literacy are equally important in encouraging young people to get involved in politics online. So, although social media posts from traditional media can encourage political engagement, they do so in concert with a larger ecosystem that shapes young adults' online political engagement (Gill, de Zúñiga et al., 2014). However, there are several research that contradict this as well that according to Freelon et al (2013) that passive consumption of traditional media content always not lead to active engagement and interaction with traditional media content is more critical than the content itself.

H3: It is more likely that social media use positively influences online political participation of young adults (Approved)

To investigate the hypothesis that social media use positively influences the online political participation of young adults. Pearson Product Moment correlation test was conducted, results are detailed in table 5.4 results revealed a statistically significant link between social media use and online political participation (R-value .413** and p-value less than 0.05). This has been moderate positive relationship, indicating that as young persons' use of social media increases, so does their online political participation. However, previous literature, which claims that social media platforms provide a unique place for political engagement, allowing users to access different political content, engage in conversation, and mobilise for causes, is validated by the results of this research. (Smith, 2013). These outcomes have the consequences of comprehending the dynamics of online political participation in the modern era.

The moderate correlation (0.413**) emphasises the value utilizing social networking sites as an instrument of political participation among young adults. Social networking sites interactive character and broad reach make it an effective medium for boosting political

awareness (Loader et al., 2015). Furthermore, there are some contrary studies according to Marozov et al (2011) that social networking sites provides users an illusion for participation in that they feel politically active, simply by clicking like or share through they are not engaged activity wise in a true sense and this slacktivism would reduce influence for social media on actual participation in politics resultantly.

H4: It is more likely that social media usage frequency positively influences online political participation of young adults (Approved)

Additionally, the hypothesis was assessed using the Pearson product-moment correlation analysis based on the results in table 5.5 that social media usage frequency positively influences online political participation of young adults. Findings showed statistically significant association among social media frequency or online political participation with p-value less than 0.5. It means that young adults more often use social media, the greater their likelihood of participating in online political activities or participate more in political debates and campaigns. Recent studies also suggested that social media is important platform for youth to take part in political activities (Boulianne, 2015). One of the elements influencing online political participation is the social media usage frequency the hypotheses proved that. However, these findings contradicted the findings of Hyun and Kim (2015) i.e. due to excess exposure to political contents making users fatigued of politics effectively being disengaged.

H5: It is more likely that political talk positively influences online political participation of young adults (Approved)

Therefore, based on findings in table 5.6, the person product moment Correlation test was conducted to analyse the hypothesis that political talk positively influences online political participation of young adults. Political talk and online political participation are significantly correlated, according to the analysis, with a p-value of less than 0.05 and a r-value of 0.359**. The moderate positive correlation indicated that youth are inclined to participate in political talk, or political discussions their online political participation increases such as participating in debates, commenting on posts. The recent studies also

highlighted that Talking politics promotes political knowledge and raises political consciousness or build sense of efficacy which are critical component for active participation in political process (Barnidge et al., 2017). Not all political talk leads to engagement. It is argued by Cho et al. (2016) that this results from political discussions that can increase awareness, however, they habitually take place within echo chambers whereby individuals only encounter other people who share their viewpoints, which could serve to confirm what they already believe without leading to any new actions. This selective exposure may restrict the space for mass-based political mobilization

H6: It is more likely that social media usage motivations negatively influence online political participation of young adults (Disapproved)

To analyse the hypothesis that social media usage motivations negatively influence the online political participation of young adults. Pearson Product Moment correlation test was conducted and results were detailed in table 5.7 results indicated that a statistically significantly correlation exists among social media usage motivations or online political participation. R-value is .394, and p-value is lesser than 0.05. This suggest as the motivations for social media increase, so does the online political participation also increase among young adults. The result is somewhat contrary given to original hypotheses but aligns with the recent literature highlighting the role of motivational factors in enhancing political engagement. Study shown that motivations such as seeking information social exchange or self-expression on social networking sites can significantly contribute to online political participation (Boulianne, 2015).

Young adults who are encouraged to employ social networking sites for similar purposes are a greater probability come across political content, take part in political conversations, and engage in political activities online. According to Gil de Zúñiga et al., (2018) usage of social media can raise awareness of politics among the audience. Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2012) discovered in another study that people who were driven by the desire for information were more inclined to participate in politics offline as well as online.

H7a: Males are more likely to participate in online political discussions than females (Approved)

Results shown in Table 5.13 provide credence to the notion that men are more inclined than women to participate in online politics. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) has revealed a substantial difference among males or females of online political participation at $F=7.603$, $p = .001 < .05$, which means it is statistically significant. In other words, gender is a crucial element affecting online political participation or men are more likely to participate in such actions than women based on the findings of this study. This corresponds with previous research which indicates that males generally have higher levels of political involvement than women do both on and offline (Bode, 2017). On the other hand, there are some contrary studies that suggested there is no significant gender difference in online political participation across European countries (Koc-Michalska et al., 2019).

H7b: Online political participation is more likely to increase with increase in age (Approved)

A hypothesis that online political participation decreases with age was subjected to a one-way analysis of variance (Anova) investigating five age groups (18-21, 22-25, 26-29, 30-33 and 34-above). Results in table 5.15 indicate significant differences in online political participation across age groups with an F-value of 7.119 and p-value. 001 suggested that age has significant influence on online political participation. Notably, post hoc comparisons reveal that mean score for OPPT is significantly higher (Mean Difference = 10.795, $p < .001$) among those aged from 22 to 25 years than their peers between 18 and 21 years old. Similarly, the mean OPPT score for the above 34-year-old age group was observed to be significantly high compared to the same for the below 21-year-old age group (Mean Difference = 12.177, $p=0.027$). Thus, it implies that younger adults (18-21) participate less in online politics compared to slightly older ones (22-25) and also individuals between ages of thirty-four years and above. There exists however no other statistically significant difference in pairwise comparisons made between various age groups which suggests that not all ages follow a linear trend. Different levels of political socialization and access to digital platforms across age cohorts help in explaining the observed significant

differences between the youngest group and the two older ones. However, 18-21 age in the early stages of building their political identities, whereas others may not have been actively engaged in politics yet (CIRCLE, 2020). Conversely, those aged between 22-25 and above 34 years are already established with stronger views concerning politics which can lead them into joining online politics discussions. Schlozman et al. (2012) also found that older people are now becoming politically active via digital platforms challenging the assumption that online participation always decreases with age.

7. Conclusion

By empirically analysing the ways in which social media usage affects young adults' online political participation in Pakistan, this study adds to the expanding corpus of research investigating the relationship between social media and political engagement. Based on the frameworks of Uses and Gratification Theory and Media System Dependency Theory, the results highlight the intricate and multidimensional connection between political participation and digital media behaviour.

The findings demonstrate that motivational variables, political discourse, frequency of use, and active social media use all considerably increase young users' participation in online political debates. Notably, social media posts featuring content from conventional media also act as a catalyst for political engagement, indicating that hybrid media consumption patterns are influencing the development of new civic engagement strategies.

The difference between engaged and incidental media use is highlighted by the fact that passive social media use by itself does not predict political engagement, as was previously thought. Age and gender also showed up as important demographic moderators: older youth (ages 22-25 and 34+) showed higher levels of engagement than the youngest age group (18-21), which may still be developing their political identities, and males were more active in online political discourse than females.

These observations have two implications. In order to recognize the increasingly digital and interactive nature of participation, they first demand a re-evaluation of youth political engagement that goes beyond conventional metrics. Second, in order to

develop knowledgeable, critical, and engaged youth, they recommend that policymakers, educators, and civil society actors take advantage of social media's participatory affordances.

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