Social Media a Tool of Political Awareness and Mobilization - A Study of Punjab, Pakistan

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Social media is considered the most readily overused means of communication between individuals and other social stakeholders. Its usage in politics has been increased drastically over the years. In Pakistani politics, it has been noticed that a shift occurred in the dynamics of the political landscape due to the use of social media. It has been excessively used in political campaigns, political protests, political talk shows both by the politicians and the general public. The general public became more conscious of their political rights, forcing established political organizations to respond appropriately. The purpose of this research was to see how this media is influencing voter behavior in Punjab province. A survey was conducted to find out the role of social media in creating political awareness and political mobilization. A sample size of 300 participants has been chosen to conduct the research. The results of the study depict that social media plays a vital role in the dissemination of public awareness and inflicts upon the voting behavior of the masses.

Key words: *Social media, awareness, mobilization, Punjab*

Introduction

The advent of the internet has revolutionized the globe dramatically and made the world a global village. This addition in technology narrowed the communication gaps between individuals, societies, and countries as well. The arrival of social media has bridged the social gap among different societies & communities. The history of social media starts in the early 21st century. However, the popularity of social media sites and usage of their application was

raised with the arrival of YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter in 2005 & 2006 respectively. In 2009 and 2010, WhatsApp, Instagram, telegram was launched. The various social networking sites have grabbed the attention of individuals, societies and captured the social media world to large extent. Numerous social networking applications are also available to facilitate their users (Njegomir, 2016 & O'Morain, 2016).

Social media has drastically transformed the way of social interaction among the general population; even illiterate people may simply access social media tools and applications. There are more than 44 million active social media users in Pakistan whereas Pakistan's total voters account for roughly half of the country's population. (Khan, et al., 2016).

In the previous election in Punjab Pakistan, political parties have used social media to publicize their party manifestos. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has benefited the most from this evolving technology. Political parties were attempting to gain entry into parliament but were unable to garner sufficient public support. They were able to enter the Pakistani political system using social media and achieve a notable position in the parliament. Although they did not achieve the desired result, they did obtain the government in one province and opposition in another. This observation revealed that, when used correctly to educate the public about the country's politics, social media can have a significant positive impact on the election (Butt & Awang, 2017).

Other parties such as PML-N, PPP, JUI-F, Jamat-e-Islami (JI), and MQM, etc. are also using social media to attract their voters and compete with one another on this effective platform. However, PTI is presently dominating in effectively using social media tool for their political gains, and the PTI Chairman Mr. Imran Khan is the topmost favorite leader among the political leadership of the country who have a record number of followers on Facebook and Twitter, whereas PML-N, is in the second position in this race. Social media tools provide an amazing platform for political workers to communicate with the party and its leadership. (Ghani, et al., 2020).

The most positive impact of social media is that politicians are bound to fulfill & follow their promises with their voters, otherwise they have to face criticism on social media. Many societal issues have been raised and addressed as a result of social media's effect. Undoubtedly, social media has proven itself a very useful, cost-effective way of communication particularly in the political spectrum (Riezebos, 2011).

People feel free to share their opinions about political parties and leaders on social media since it is a cost-effective mode of communication. Due to the push of social media, many bad government policies have been reversed. An overview of the political arena in the country and the popularity of political leaders indicates that the PTI has the most followers on Facebook and Twitter. On the other side, PML-N has fewer followers as compared to PTI. Other political

parties including PPP, ANP, JI, MQM, JUI-F, etc. are attempting to get into the social media arena. (Khan, et al., 2020).

Keeping the view of the importance of social media in politics, this study is being carried out to analyze and evaluate how social media is disseminating political awareness, influencing voters by spreading education and awareness in Punjab.

Objectives

The main objectives are as under:

1. To know and access the impact of social media in raising political awareness among voters.
2. To identify the most effective social media tool in terms of disseminating political awareness among the voters in Punjab
3. To know and determine which political party has a strong social media presence in Punjab.

Significance

The increasing trend of social media usage in political campaigns and political processes in the province of Punjab has grasped the attention of the researcher. The usefulness of social media as a tool of political awareness will be analyzed as this aspect required to be focused and attended.

Statement of the problem

The present research study will explore and investigate the importance and usefulness of social media tools and their rapid use by the general public in Punjab province in Pakistan. More so, this research study will also elaborate on how social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc. are effective in political mobilization and awareness in Punjab.

H-1

Social media tools disseminate political awareness among users.

Rationale of Hypothesis 1

Social media applications spread political awareness among their users. Many political parties are effectively using social media platforms in the country. They have designated social media teams, who regularly basis share political updates, news about political events, the manifesto

of their party, etc. Thus, the users get the latest political information through the social media platform.

H-2

Political parties mobilize their voters through social media platforms.

Rationale of Hypothesis 2

Political parties use social media platforms very effectively. They boast up the morale of their supporters and voters by sharing such information which attracts their supporters. Live to a stream of political events, video clips, speeches, and messages from their mainstream leadership are shared in such a manner that inflicts the affiliated worker and supporters and causes them to mobilize.

Research Questions

1. What role does social media play in raising political knowledge among the general public?
2. How does the general public react to social media awareness?
3. How many political parties are successful to use social media for political gains?

Literature Review

According to Stieglitz, et al. (2012), social media is proven to be an excellent medium of knowledge sharing. Social media supports and facilitated the engagement of the general public in political processes. Presidential elections held in the USA in 2008 are a big example of the same, wherein various political views were debated with the general public via social media. The researcher also describes the influence of social media usage on political engagement from the standpoint of political groups and also emphasizes the monitoring of social media in a political setting.

Vonderschmitt (2012) describes the effectiveness of using social media in political campaigns. The research also found that social media campaigns are also useful on the ground in general elections e.g. 2012 US presidential elections, in which candidates used social media to promote themselves. Social media also influenced the youth, resulting in a significant boost in young people's voting intentions.

According to Zaheer (2012), political involvement and the amount of time spent on Facebook have a favorable correlation. Students who spent the majority of their time on Facebook were considerably more likely to participate in politics both online and offline. As a result, students who spent the least amount of time on Facebook were less interested in politics both online and

offline. The age group demonstration indicates that students between the ages of 18 and 26 are more interested in political activities. The research also revealed that social media content was considered authentic as compared to conventional media.

Ali (2013), describes that various political parties and celebrities use social media and their fans follow them. Facebook users' "likes" and "comments" the information shared by their political party or celebrity. The research shows the popularity of social media among political parties. And general public and also portrays the importance of using social media for political purposes.

Eijaz, (2013) describes that Pakistani political parties use new media technologies which inflict the dynamics of the country's politics. The study reveals that rural respondents who live in university hostels are quick to adopt Facebook. According to the researcher, when compared to other social media tools such as TwitterTwitter, myspace, blogs, etc., Facebook is the most popular social networking site among young students for disseminating political information.

Shabir, et al. (2014). illustrated that in the era of technological advancement, social media dependency has been considerably increased and its impact has also been enhanced due to the result of this rise. According to the researcher, social media is a venue for both young and old people to actively participate in politics. Around the world, social media is playing an important role as a powerful instrument for social and political empowerment. It disseminates news & information from all around society to keep members informed about political events in their communities.

According to Wani & Alone (2014), social media is an efficient election campaign tool, subsequently widely used by political parties & groups for political purposes. The researcher argued that a large number of the youth population has been influenced by social media and their political conduct has shifted as a result of social media.

According to Muntean (2015), social media is a perfect medium for attracting the attention of the younger generation to politics. The public has proclaimed social media to be an important channel of political communication. It is a valuable source of providing updated information about the political scenario.

Ali & Fatima (2016) illustrates the media's role in raising political awareness among Pakistan's educated youth. Youth are becoming more interested in politics, and the media is playing a role in raising political knowledge. The research depicts that social media and other online sources have given through the internet were the most popular form of media among the young. The youth expressed faith in the media and saw newspapers and the internet as reliable providers of national and worldwide news. The youth's political knowledge was palpable. According to the researcher, the youth is very well aware of political party manifestos and understood the

importance of voting, since the youth is optimistic and interested in politics and this aspect will bring about change in the country.

Njegomir (2016) argues that social media does not have a complete influence on some public's political conduct. The researcher selected three different social networking sites viz: Facebook, Twitter & Youtube. Facebook was the most popular among other social media tools whereas YouTube came in second and Twitter came in third. The participants of the survey were active Facebook users who were politically knowledgeable enough to judge the authenticity of political information. They were all in accord with Facebook's political influence. Finally, the researcher revealed that actual political participation will eventually fade away in the focus group. As a result, internet political activity will obliterate genuine voter turnout.

Zaheer, (2016) argues the relationship between social media use and political participation in the context of Pakistan. The researcher describes that Pakistani students use Facebook to remain to engage with the politics of the country and use Facebook to gain political objectives which has an impact on both online and offline political activity. Further, the researcher pointed out that political engagement is strongly linked to demographic parameters such as gender and age.

According to Butt & Awang (2017), describe that boosting individual participation in social media, such as Facebook, might improve voting intention. The research reveals that the use of social media as a tool for altering views and influencing others has an impact on the political arena.

According to Ahmad, et al. (2019), online political activities affect political efficacy and real-world political participation among university students in rural Pakistan. There exists a link between political activity and political awareness. The majority of students utilize social media to stay informed about current events. Online political participation has a huge impact on political efficacy. Furthermore, social media is an important venue for the public to engage in real-world political activities. Political awareness and offline political participation are highly linked to internet political actions.

Ida & Saud (2020) describe that the youth play a considerable influence in the political dialogue and the use of social media makes it easier for young people to participate in political activities, which increases their knowledge, allows them to participate, and builds their political efficacy capacity. The researcher also argues that youth are actively engaged and use social media to discuss political issues to educate the public. The study reveals that the role of youth is influential in political activities in a country.

Research Methodology

To gauge the social media effectiveness as a political awareness tool, a survey method was used to conduct this research study. A comprehensive result-oriented survey was managed by the researchers. For this reason, a questionnaire was designed and prepared. The said questionnaire consisted of close-ended questions. The questionnaire was delivered among the participants which were selected from the population. To get online responses, a Google online form was also generated. The link of Google form was shared among various social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, etc. to get the responses.

Research Design

For this project, the population sample of social media active users of Punjab province was being made in contact. Active users mean the regular user of social media of Punjab province not below the age of 18.

Sample Size

A sample size of 300 participants has been selected for the said research wherein 150 participants are Male and 150 participants are female.

Data Analysis & Interpretation

Demographical analysis of participants

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are as under:

1. Gender

Male	50.00%
Female	50.00%

2. Age group

18-25	29.00%
26-30	27.70%
31-35	24.20%
36-40	10.00%
41-45	6.80%
Above 46	2.30%

3. Education level

Matric	11.30%
FA/FSc	29.40%
BA/BSc	32.20%
MA/MSc	18.60%
MS/M.Phil	7.30%
Above	1.20%

Survey Results

This section shows the outcome of the survey which illustrates a valuable approach to understand the development in present political and electoral tactics due to the progress and growth in media and technology. Results of the questions asked during the survey from the participants are elaborated hereunder.

Table-1: Do you use social media?

	Yes	No	Neutral
Frequency	297	0	03
Percentage	99.1	0.0	0.9

Participants were asked to share their opinion about the usage of social media. 99.1% of respondents opined that they use social media, only 0.9% of respondents did not share their opinion on the issue.

Table-2: For what the main purpose, do you use social media?

	Education	Information	Entertainment	Politics	All of them
Frequency	13	65	27	24	171
Percentage	4.3	21.7	9	8	57

According to Table-2, participants were asked about the main purpose of use of social media. The majority of the respondents were of the view that they use social media for all the reasons i.e. education, information, entertainment as well as politics. The rest public has also shown their political interest which indicated that the target population was among the active social media users of Punjab.

Table-3: Do you believe that social media has made a remarkable contribution to ensure the provision of political information to the general public?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Frequency	90	115	15	75	5
Percentage	30	38.3	5	25	1.7

According to the results, a total of 68% of participants favored this statement, 5% of respondents have neutralized opinion whereas about 26% of participants did not agree with this statement.

Table-4: Do you agree that after getting political information through social media, you have experienced an inclination towards a certain political party?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Frequency	35	109	30	111	15
Percentage	11.68	36.3	10.02	37	5

The results of the survey portray that majority of respondents i.e. about 48% favored this statement, a total of 42% of participants did not agree with this opinion and only 10% of respondents did not share their viewpoint and remain neutral. Results depict that social media inflicted upon their users in terms of their inclination towards any political party.

Table-5: Do you agree with the statement that social media is extensively used as a propaganda tool by the political parties?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Frequency	48	81	54	90	27
Percentage	16	27	18	30	9

According to the survey, a total of 43% of participants agreed with the statement that political parties use social media as a propaganda tool. 18% of respondents have neutralized opinions whereas a total of 39% of respondents disagreed with the statement.

Table-6: Do you agree that social media causes awareness and motivated its users to participate in political issues in Punjab?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Frequency	36	141	54	57	12
Percentage	12	47	18	19	4

The majority of respondents i.e. 59% do believe that social media motivated them to participate in political issues whereas 23% of respondents disagreed and 18% of participants have not shared their views in this context.

Table-7: Do you believe that due to social media usage by the public, the Biradrisam factor is eliminating from politics in Punjab?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Frequency	15	93	69	66	57
Percentage	5	31	23	22	19

About 36% of respondents opined that due to the use of social media the factor of Biradarisam is eliminating from Punjab province. In this context, 23% of participants have neutralized opinions Total of 41% of participants did not agree to this effect. Results of the survey clearly show that the baradari factor still exists in the political system of Punjab province and plays a crucial role in the politics of Punjab.

Table-8: Would you like to share your political awareness level before the usage of social media?

	Very High	High	Average	Low	Very Low
Frequency	15	27	111	48	99
Percentage	5	9	37	16	33

The survey results reveal that 37% of participants have an average level of political awareness level before social media exposure. About 49% of respondents have a low level of exposure before the usage of social media tools. Only 14% of participants have a high level of political awareness before the social. Overall, results indicate that social media has inflicted upon the political awareness level of their users and has created a positive impact on the general public.

Table-9: Do you think that your political knowledge and awareness have been increased after the usage of social media?

	Yes	No	Do not know
Frequency	141	45	114
Percentage	47	15	38

According to the results, the majority of the target population opined that their political knowledge and awareness increased after usage of social media, whereas 15% of respondents negated that and 38% of participants remained salient and have neutralized opinions on the issue.

Table-10: Up to what extent do you think that social media has inflicted upon your voting behaviour and decision-making?

	Very Probably	Probably	Neutral	Probably Not	Definitely Not
Frequency	42	105	63	69	21
Percentage	14	35	21	23	7

The majority of participants i.e. 49% confirmed that their voting tendency was inflicted by the usage of social media. 21 % of respondents have a neutral opinion and 30% of the targeted population disagreed with this statement.

Table-11: In your opinion which one is the more effective social media tool to disseminate political awareness among the masses?

	Facebook	Twitter	YouTube	WhatsApp	Others
Frequency	159	66	21	39	15
Percentage	53	22	7	13	5

The survey results depict that 53% of participants are of the view that Facebook is a more effective social media tool to disseminate political awareness, 22% of participants supported Twitter in this respect, 13% favored WhatsApp, 7% of participants selected YouTube and the remaining participants are of the view that other social media tools are most effective in this context.

Table-12: What you do when you obtain any information about some political issues?

	Check Authenticity	Share directly	Neutral	Like & Comment	React
Frequency	33	63	105	93	6
Percentage	11	21	35	31	2

Results of the survey reveal that only 11% of respondents check the authenticity of information they obtain from social media. 21% of participants directly share the information they received from social media whereas 31% of respondents responded that they like & comment on the information they received from social media. 2% of participants opined that the show reaction whereas 35% of the participants has a neutral opinion on the statement.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research study was to know and examine the use of social media as a political awareness tool among the voters in Punjab Province as well as to know the most effective social media platform which is spearheading this charge. Third, which political party is dominating this region's social media? The results of the survey indicate that the public's

interest in politics and social media has increased the political awareness level among its users. The majority of participants revealed that they are getting political information through social media and respondents have also confirmed that social media had influenced their political conduct.

The public has also stated their belief that political parties utilize social media as a propaganda weapon. A large number of participants do believe that voters are now actively engaged in politics due to the usage of social media. According to the findings, people also feel that social media is eradicating the component of baradari politics in Punjab. This study demonstrates that social media is successfully assisting the public and the voters in becoming more politically savvy than they have ever been as social media is inflicting its users in making their voting decision.

In Punjab's next general elections, a record voter participation is predicted. People are now more conscious of the importance of their vote. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf is a political party that has garnered popularity among social media users in this region whereas PML-N remains the runner-up.

Aside from that, the target audience is unsure about the likelihood of a similar outcome in general elections. The findings suggest that rather than simply accepting political content published on social media, the public is keen to verify its legitimacy. This is the positive perspective that social media has established among voters, and a good shift in this area's politics is predicted. In this political battleground, Facebook has been designated as a source of political knowledge and political influence whereas Twitter comes in second. Other social networking applications such as WhatsApp, YouTube, etc. are currently less well-known in this region.

Finally, the study concludes that social media is impacting the politics in Punjab province as it is not only disseminating awareness but also causing political mobilization. Social media is assisting the people in political decision-making, the general public in Punjab is becoming more aware of political developments and their political rights. In the future, Punjab's political landscape will be dominated by social media.

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