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Use of Twitter for Political Socialization in Pakistan

Abstract: *People especially, younger generations use Twitter for various purposes, including political socialization. This research aims at exploring Twitter's usage for political socialization among young people in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The Uses and Gratification theory provides a theoretical framework to the present research study. A survey research technique is used for the purpose of data collection. A standardized questionnaire was used as the research tool in this quantitative research. The population for this study was taken from the students reading in different Universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In total, 525 students were selected on the basis of convenient sampling. The sample size was measured following Cochran's formula. 501 students positively responded to the questionnaire. Analysis of the data revealed that political parties and politicians interact with voters via Twitter for political socialization.*

Contents

Key Words: Twitter, Political Socialization, Pakistan, Youth

Introduction

Social networking platforms have been playing key role in affecting human social life. The political behaviour of the people in particular has been changed out rightly. Given this role of social networking sites, political parties, and their leaders are activating their workers to attract as many supporters as they can via these online channels, especially twitter. According to Tang and Hew (2017), Twitter has created a new avenue for the dissemination of information and has witnessed enormous user growth since its start in 2006. One of the microblog services, it enables consumers to send and get information instantly by posting a public message with 280 characters which previously had 140 characters, and this communication is known as a tweets (Azeema, Abbasi, & Ansari, 2020). Social Networking Sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have rapidly advanced across the globe including Pakistan, especially among youngsters (Waqas, Afzal, Zaman, & Sabir, 2016). Twitter creates enormous amounts of text with political insights that can be mined to study public opinion and forecast future election patterns (Ansari, et al, 2020).

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Role of Twitter in Politics

Political leaders across the globe interact personally with voters via Twitter, where they communicate their own distinct agendas without any restrictions (Caplan, 2013).

Politicians, particularly during election campaigns, make extensive use of Twitter. As Tumasjan, Sprenger, Sandner, and Welpe (2010) proclaimed that Barack Obama's presidential campaign in 2008 catapulted Twitter to the center of American politics, demonstrating how it might be utilized to efficiently engage with prospective voters. In the same way, Batool, Ahmed, Mahmood, and Saeed (2021) asserted that the usage of internet platforms such as Twitter during the US presidential election in 2008 helped Barack Obama win. With over 20 million tweets on November 6, 2012, alone, Election Day 2012 became the most talked about event in US political history. With approximately 800,000 retweets by 8:16 PM on Election Day, Barack Obama's winning tweet, headlined "Four more years," was the most retweeted tweet to that moment in time (Buratti, 2014).

Donald J. Trump and his followers used Twitter to mobilize their fans and outperformed the conventional Republican Party during the 2016 US elections. Twitter was a quiet political instrument that has contributed to Trump's success. Donald Trump was the most creative Twitter user in politics with more than 43 million followers and over 36,000 tweets. Trump has been an extremely active Twitter user prior to his 2016 presidential campaign. He has tweeted 7.5 times daily on average since September 28, 2016. Trump referred to Twitter as a "powerful phenomenon," a "modern way of communication," and during his campaign, spoke of the millions of followers he had on social media (Anderson, 2017: Marx, 2017)).

Role of Twitter in the Politics of Pakistan

Politicians in Pakistan also use Twitter. Every politician has followers and opponents who influence the course of their destiny. Khan et al. (2020) conducted a study which emphasized on the supporters' network of three prominent Pakistani political influentials: Imran Khan (IK), Maryam Nawaz Sharif (MNS), and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari (BBZ). According to the survey, IK has a robust support system and is more prominent on Twitter than MNS and BBZ. The statistics noted Khan as the most well-known of the three politicians and had the largest supporter base, while utilizing Twitter in a fairly regulated manner.

Political Socialization

Political socialization refers to the process by which individuals form relationships with the political environment and acquire knowledge, beliefs, values, and behaviours that shape their political identity (Papaoikonomou, 2017). Political socialization's primary goal is to pass along political values from one generation to the next. It is a process by which people pick up on fundamental political ideas, attitudes, and practices as well as political behaviour and conventions (Gupta, 2022).

There are many agents of political socialization. The family is the initial agent in a person's socialization. Parents instill in their children political and social awareness as well as an interest in politics (Rahman, et al, 2021). Religion is another agent involved in the socialization process. Parents' religiosity has the greatest influence on their adult offspring's religiosity, teenage experiences have independent consequences on religious behaviour (Nelson, 2004). Schools can support civic norms, offer civic education programs, and encourage political discussion in the classroom (Lee, 2016). Peers groups are described as social groupings made up of individuals of the same age, which play a vital part in political socialization (Blazevic, 2016). Social scientists are now more frequently acknowledging the state's function as a socialization agent due to its growing impact on the life cycle (Gulzar, 2020). Political socialization writers have recognized the importance of political parties in the political socialization of individuals, and they regard political parties as the primary mobilizers of people (Deb, 2015). The mass media may be an effective instrument for political socialization as well (Kononova, Alhabash, & Cropp, 2011).

Theoretical Framework

The current study is based on Uses and

Gratifications Theory (U&G). The idea of uses and gratifications (U&G) was introduced to the public in the 1940s and became popular in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Weiyan, 2015). Elihu Katz was the first to present the theory. In the early 1970s, he and his two collaborators, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch began to extend the idea. This idea was deemed modern at the time since it opposed prior perspectives or paradigms that thought mass media audiences were passive. According to the uses and gratifications theory, the audience is active, which means that they actively seek out certain media and material to attain certain results or gratifications that meet their own requirements (Kania & Agatha, 2012).

Many people believe that the Uses and Gratification Theory is outdated. However, the rise of social media has given fresh life to this stale theory (Musa, Azmi, & Ismail, 2015).

Adil, Mahmood, Hussain, and Rehman (2021) revealed that Social media platforms including Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Wikipedia are frequently used by young people in Pakistan. In order to satisfy their needs, they are commonly observed obtaining, sharing, talking about, debating, and commenting on political matters on social media sites. Similarly, Khan, Ali, and Abbas (2021) pointed out that Pakistani youth especially, of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa use Social Networking Sites for a variety of purposes in order to satisfy their needs. They are more inclined to use sites like Twitter for political information in order to satisfy their political needs.

Objectives of the Study

1. To investigate twitter's usage of political parties and leaders in KP
2. To find out twitter's role in affecting voters' turn out in KP.
3. To explore twitter's influence in bringing political parties closer to voters.
4. To search out twitter's role of convincing people in joining political demonstrations.

Research Methodology

The study is based on quantitative methods to identify the pattern of political socialization among the sample students by exposing them to the social networking site, twitter. The research was undertaken by making use of the survey method. For the purpose of data collection, the University of Peshawar and Islamia College University Peshawar were chosen from the public sector, and Qurtuba University of Science and Information Technology, Peshawar, and Sarhad University of Science and Information Technology, Peshawar were chosen from the private sector. The students of BS level (four years), MSc (two years), MS/M.Phil, and PhD were selected for the survey. A sample of 525 students was taken at the ratio of 2% (Cochran's Formula) from the total population of 26234 of the four universities.

Results

In the first step, various demographic categories such as gender, university, study program, age, and location, are analyzed. Each demographic attribute is examined using a single lengthy table.

Table 1. Demographics of the Respondents

Category	Values	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Gender	Male	352	70.3	70.3
	Female	149	29.7	100
University	University of Peshawar	261	52.1	52.1
	Islamia College University	124	24.8	76.8
	Qurtuba University Peshawar	25	5	81.8
	Sarhad University Peshawar	91	18.2	100
Study Program	BS	338	67.5	67.5
	MA/Msc	52	10.4	77.8
	Mphil/MS	79	15.8	93.6
	PhD	32	6.4	100
Age	16-20	167	33.3	33.3

Category	Values	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	21-25	232	46.3	79.6
	26-30	58	11.6	91.2
	more than 30	44	8.8	100
Locality	Rural	226	45.1	45.1
	Urban	275	54.9	100

N=501

Overall 525 students participated in the survey. Thirteen (13) questionnaires were wrongly filled, nine questionnaires were not returned and three participants were not users of Social Networking Sites. Thus, these questionnaires are excluded from data analysis. In the remaining 501 respondents, there were 352 male respondents and 149 female students. The gender category in table No.1 showed that 70.3% survey participants were male while 29.7% were female.

The outcomes disclosed that out of 501 students, 52.1% students belonged to the University of Peshawar followed by 24.8% students of Islamia College University whereas 18.2 % were studying in Sarhad University Peshawar and only 5% of the participants were from Qurtuba University Peshawar.

As far as the study program is concerned, the results revealed that 67.5% of the participants were studying in BS program followed by 15.8% in M.Phil/MS while 10.4% in MA/Msc and only 6.4% were enrolled in the PhD program.

The outcome of the age group showed that 46.3% of the respondents belonged to the 21-25 age group followed by 33.3% in the age of 16-20 years whereas 11.6% in the age of 26-30 years and only 8.8% were more than 30 years old. The last demographic category in the table is locality. The outcomes revealed that 54.9% of survey members belonged to urban areas whereas 45.1% belonged to rural regions.

Table 2. Use of SNSs

Value	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Facebook	196	39.1	39.1
Twitter	90	18	57.1
Instagram	62	12.4	69.5
You Tube	118	23.6	93
WhatsApp	35	7	100

N=501

Table 2 indicates the social media platform used by the respondents of different universities of Peshawar. It reveals that 39.1% (N=196) of respondents use Facebook followed by 23.6% (N=118) respondents use YouTube while 18% (N=90) respondents use Twitter and 12.4% (N=62) respondents use Instagram and only 7% (N=35) respondents use WhatsApp social media platform.

Table 3. Mode of Access to Twitter

Value	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Laptop	46	9.2	9.2
PC	19	3.8	13
Mobile Phone	436	87	100

N=501

Table 3 includes data with respect to the gadgets used for going online by the respondents of different universities of Peshawar. It reveals that 87% of respondents use mobile phones followed by 9.2% laptops and 3.8% PCs users.

Table 4. Log in Pattern; Real/Fake identity

Value	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Real	433	86.4	86.4
Fake	68	13.6	100

N=501

Data in table 4 reveals that 86.4% of respondents login to Twitter with real identities while 13.6% of respondents login to social networking site with fake identities.

Table 5. Frequency of Twitter use

Value	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Once a day	63	12.6	12.6
Twice a day	52	10.4	23
3 times a day	69	13.8	36.7
4 times a day	48	9.6	46.3
More than 4 times a day	269	53.7	100

N=501

According to results in the above table, 53.7% of respondents login to Twitter more than 4 times a day followed by respondents 13.8% with 3 times, 12.6% once a day, 10.4% twice a day, and 9.6% log in to twitter 4 times on a typical day.

Table 6. Time spent on Twitter

Value	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
0-1 hr	46	9.2	9.2
1-2 hrs	85	17	26.1
2-3 hrs	106	21.2	47.3
3-4 hrs	99	19.8	67.1
More than 4 hrs	165	32.9	100

N=501

The data in table 6 shows that 32.9 % (N=165) respondents spend more than 4 hours using twitter daily followed by 2-3 hours (21.2%) , 3-4 hours (19.8%), 1-2 hours (17%) (N=85) and 0-1 hour (9.2%).

Table 7. Twitter Helps Affect Voters' TurnOut

Value	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	62	12.4	12.4
Disagree	69	13.8	26.1
Neutral	152	30.3	56.5
Agree	140	27.9	84.4
Strongly Agree	78	15.6	100

N=5.01

As per data in the ensuing table, almost 44% of respondents showed their agreement whereas, around 26% disagreed with the asking- the use of Twitter helps affect voters' turnout. However, 30.3% remained neutral in response to the same statement (see table # 7).

Table 8. Twitter Brings Political Parties Closer to Voters

Value	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	33	6.6	6.6
Disagree	56	11.2	17.8
Neutral	125	25	42.7
Agree	181	36.1	78.8
Strongly Agree	106	21.2	100

N=501

According to data in the above table, around 57% students agreed to the statement - the use of Twitter brings political parties and politicians closer to voters whereas**,** almost 18% of respondents showed their disagreement with the same asking (see table # 8).

Table 9. Twitter Convinces People in Joining Political Demonstrations

Value	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	37	7.4	7.4
Disagree	54	10.8	18.2
Neutral	163	32.5	50.7
Agree	169	33.7	84.4
Strongly Agree	78	15.6	100

N=501

As per data in table # 9, around 50% of respondents showed their agreement whereas, 18% disagreed to the statement - Twitter convinces people in joining political demonstrations. However, 32.5% remained neutral in response to the same asking.

Table 10. Twitter Use in Political Parties' Election Campaign

Value	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	43	8.6	8.6
Disagree	59	11.8	20.4
Neutral	136	27.1	47.5
Agree	146	29.1	76.6
Strongly Agree	117	23.4	100

N=501

According to the results of table 10, more than 50% of respondents agreed with the statement regarding Twitter use in political parties' election campaigns whereas, just over 20% disagreed with the same statement. However, 27% remained neutral in response to the same asking.

Conclusion

This research was undertaken to explore the usage of Twitter for political socialization of the University students of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Results of the study suggested that Twitter was one of the preferred sites and most (87%) of the students were in the habit of login into Twitter via mobile phones. More than (86%) were using their real identity for going online and their login frequency was around (57%) on a typical day with almost (33%) of them using

Twitter for more than four hours daily. According to the findings, the majority (52.5%) of the respondents believed that political parties make use of Twitter during election campaigns and (43.5%) of them believed that Twitter is having an influence on voters' turn out. Likewise, more than (57%) have reported that Twitter help brings political parties and voters closer to each other whereas, around (50%) of students believed in twitter's role for convincing people to join political demonstrations. It is concluded that Twitter has been used by Pakistani political parties and their leaders for the political socialization of their workers and the general public.

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