

Social Media Effects on General Elections Turn-Out

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Abstract

The present study explores the effects of social media on general elections turn-out. Media is considered the fourth pillar of the state. This study was conducted in Bahawalpur city that is called a princely state and considered the heart of Southern Punjab, a sample of 200 respondents was selected as Stratified Random Sample technique including males and females form 18-60 years. Survey method was used for data collection and questionnaire was prepared including 15 close ended questions. The present study conducted under the light of Uses and Gratification Theory and Diffusion of innovation Theory". The study conclude that social media has strong positive effects on current political situation of the Bahawalpur. Social media aware people to vote for the country and for the promotion of democracy. Moreover, during elections social media attract more people to participate in political process. Study further concludes that social media also plays an important role in increasing turn-out in general elections.

Key Words: Social Media, Democracy, General Elections, Voting Process, Political Opinion

Introduction

The role of media in society is very important and critical. Media considered as a spokesperson in democratic societies. Media is reshaping the societies by spreading information and new ideas. It aware the public and gave new ideas. Media facilitate the watchers by educating about political system their state (Grossman,1996). In short words, the promotion of democracy is attached with education and information of public which gives from media. Media is a powerful tool of communication, it provides effective information to political elite and the electorate. It ensures the availability of information for scattered citizens, then they set their opinion and disseminate the information availed to them by media (Wheeler, 1997).

Politics exists in all over the societies. Basic purpose of politics is cooperation, negotiation and struggle in the activities, production and distribution of resources. Politics explain the power and forces which influence and reflect its distribution. Political process is about 'transformative capacity' of social workers and institutions: it is not about governments and governments alone (held, 1995: 247).

Pakistan is a democratic country, where every citizen has right to elect the government through vote. A vote is reflection of individual's political opinion. An agreed definition of human rights about voting is as 'All the citizens over the age of eighteen have the right of vote. It confirms that rights of the people are preserved' (HRCP, 2008). Voting is a way of expression of opinion for candidate or a party, which have more preference than others (Blais, et al., 2004)'. So it is necessary to know either social media play a vital role in increasing turn-out in elections in Pakistan or not.

In the modern world leadership is elect by ballot box. More participation makes democracy more authentic and reliable and it is a guarantee to exist the government. A government without the participation of public cannot be said to be democratic. John Stuart Mill (1910: 215-217) a great political philosopher said "The only

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government in which masses participate can satisfy all the necessities of social state, participation is very useful in any public function; that public participation is most important for the improvement of society”.

Now a day's technology is at its peak, it makes the communication faster, the event take place in one corner of the world and the news about the event break in seconds in the other corner of the world. Technology especially mobile telephone and Internet have solved the problems of distance and time. Technologies have also increase the functionality of traditional media like television and radio. Social media is one of the most powerful tools of media. It plays an important role in creating public opinion, it aware and informed the people about the benefits of democracy and makes sure the participation of people in democratic system. An educated and well-informed public is a major purpose of media and social media plays a significant role to achieve this goal through current affair programs, informative programs, entertainment, dramas and so on.

The role of media for political communication means that media use to communicate (by political leaders, institutions like parliament, governments, the state, pressure groups, terrorists and others) to inveigle people in the hope of involving them or making them aware of current situations. All these activities are doing for the participation of people in politics. The role of media in politics cannot be deniable. As McQuail (2005) said that the organization of democratic politics, nationally and internationally, depends on media and commonly there are no social issues which are addressed without media.

Objectives of the Study

1. To know about the role of social media in voting turn-out in general elections.
2. To investigate that, does social media gives the political awareness to the public.

Research Questions

1. What is the role of social media in general election turn-out?
2. What is the role of social media in creating awareness regarding democracy?

Rational of the Study

The basic purpose of present study is to explore that social media is more effective than other factors like political leaders, political parties and Biradarri etc to increase the voting turn-out. Researcher notice that in Pakistan, mostly channels are news channels and broadcasting mostly political news and Talk shows. So it is question in the mind of researcher, did media motivate the people to participate in the political system or political leader, political party and Biradarri are more influential.

Scope of the Study

This research will point-out the new modes for the researchers to conduct advance study in this field. This study will also explore the role and effectiveness of social media in increasing voting turn-out. This study determines the futuristic role of media to ensure the participation of people in political system.

Literature Review

A research conducted by Bushra H Rehman (2014) entitled “Conditional Influence of Media: Media Credibility and Opinion Formation” at Punjab University Lahore. This research finds the connection between media usage, credibility and political attitude construction amid literate Pakistani youth. The relationship is studied under the principle that as reliance plays central role in all areas of social life. It will control the opinion of the target public. Following the same logic, the research anticipated that reliance in media would help media's usefulness in creation of opinion. The study finds that heavy watching of news channels does not matter in relationship between media and public, the perceived reliability of media is necessary in the formation of public opinion.

Muhammad Anwar, Mirza Jan (2010) conducts the study on “Role of Media in Political Socialization: The Case of Pakistan. The basic purpose of this study was to explore the new trends of political promotion in media and its special effects in formation of political opinion. To understands political socialization through media. To examines the effects of media on voting behavior. This study develops outline of political socialization in Pakistan. This research explores, explicates and investigates political socialization through media. Media is a helping hand

of socialization. This research explains the political socialization and political communication. The field of political communication interrelates between media and political methods at local, domestic and global level. In democracy person who have not participate in election but he can give his opinion by vote. The study particularly emphasis on the election campaign, voting attitude and role of media in formation of political awareness.

Graber (1976) says that mass media not only inform us about daily concerns, but also explain clearly and forecast all the incoming possibilities. So media not only inform us but also play an important role I creation of political opinion in democratic system. Noman Yaser, Muhammad Nawaz Mahsud, Sajjad Ahmad Paracha (2010) conducts a study on, “Correlation between Media’s Political Content and Voting Behavior: A case Study of 2008 elections in Pakistan” This research investigate correlation between audience member’s usage of media political content and their vote casting attitude during 2008 election in Pakistan. The study concludes that people mostly watching political contents on television and also read the newspaper for this purpose. However mostly respondents got political information from television as compare to radio and newspaper. Most respondents reject the dependency on community leaders for obtaining political information and taking vote casting decisions. The findings indicate that television is seeming as most favorite medium for obtaining political information and taking voting decision as compare to radio and newspapers, during general election 2008.

Social media is that means that employs mobile and web based technology to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and community share, co-create, discuss and modifies user-generated content (Kietzmannn, 2012). Ellison and Boyd (2007) define social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to construct profiles, display user connections, and search and traverse within that list of connections. A social media is an online service or platforms that focus on facilitating the building of social network among people who share interest, activities and background on real life connections. It is a website that allows users to share information within a selected group. It is a great way to stay connected and a convenient way to share photos from trips (Fewkes, A. and McCabe, M., 2012).

Theoretical Framework

Uses and Gratification Theory and Diffusion of Innovation theory belong to media and political background. The present study is to know about the effects of social media on turn-out in general elections. According to Uses and Gratification theory, why and how people actively seek out specific media to gratify specific needs and Diffusion of Innovation theory seeks to clarify how, why and at what rate new ideas and technology spread. So the researcher has chosen the theoretical support for the present study “Uses and Gratification” and “Diffusion of innovation” theories to test the theories that according to this study, these theories are valid or not.

Hypotheses

- H 1: It is more likely that social media has positive effects on turn-out.
- H 2: It is more likely that social media is more effective than other factors in increasing voting turn-out.

Research Methodology

Research methodology is the significant part of the research process. It is more necessary for conduct a research and without this, research completion is impossible. Research methodology is espousing the researcher to make a technique for their judgments and result. Due to adopting this way the researcher can effortlessly obtain their assignments. The survey research methodology for the present study was used and a sample of 200 respondents was selected as stratified random sample technique including males and females form 18-60 years from Bahawalpur. Survey method was used for data collection and questionnaire was prepared including 15 close ended questions.

Data Analysis

The target study based on questionnaire method and a scale designed by the researcher used to collect numerical data. The collected data compiled for results in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Table 1. Frequency distribution according to Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percent
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Male	100	50.0
Female	100	50.0
Total	200	100.0

Note. The above table shows frequency distribution of overall sampled population according to gender.

Table 2. Frequency distribution according to Education

Education	Frequency	Percent
Matric or under	15	7.5
Intermediate	7	3.5
Graduation	62	31.0
Master	111	55.5
M.Phil	5	2.5
Total	200	100.0

Note. The above table and graph show frequency distribution of overall sampled population according to education.

Table 3. Social media is Pro-Democratic

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	78	39.0
Agree	76	38.0
Uncertain	17	8.5
Disagree	23	11.5
Strongly Disagree	6	3.0
Total	200	100.0

This frequency distribution table shows the opinion of overall respondents which are selected in sample towards the statement. From the overall sample 39% people are strongly agree and said that the social media is pro-democratic, 38% people are agree, 8.5% people are uncertain, 11.5% people are disagree, and remaining 3% people are strongly disagree with the statement.

Table 4. Social Media is a good source of Creating Political Awareness

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	112	56.0
Agree	68	34.0
Uncertain	7	3.5
Disagree	12	6.0
Strongly Disagree	1	0.5
Total	200	100.0

The above frequency distribution table shows the opinion of overall respondents towards the statement. This statement is about the political awareness and 56% people are strongly agree, 34% people are agree, 3.5% people are uncertain, 6% people are disagree, and remaining 1% people are strongly disagree with the statement. So, maximum people are agreeing with the given statement that social media is a good source of creating political awareness.

Table 5. Social Media can Motivate the people to cast Vote

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	68	34.0

Agree	83	41.5
Uncertain	11	5.5
Disagree	27	13.5
Strongly Disagree	11	5.5
Total	200	100.0

This frequency table indicates the responses and opinion of overall respondents towards the statement. This statement is about the motivation to casting of votes through social media in country. 34% people are strongly agree, 41.5% people are agree, 5.5% people are uncertain, 13.5% people are disagree, and remaining 5.5% people are strongly disagree with the statement. So, maximum people said that social media can motivate the people to cast their votes.

Table 6. Social Media has influence on Increasing Turn-Out

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	65	32.5
Agree	65	32.5
Uncertain	23	11.5
Disagree	42	21.0
Strongly Disagree	5	2.5
Total	200	100.0

The above distribution table represents the responses of overall respondents towards the statement. 32.5% people are strongly agree, 32.5% people are agree, 11.5% people are uncertain, 21% people are disagree, and remaining 2.5% people are strongly disagree with the statement. Hence we conclude that maximum people think that social media has significant influence on the increasing of election turnout.

Table 7. Social Media Educate the Public about the Importance of their Vote

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	90	45.0
Agree	81	40.5
Uncertain	7	3.5
Disagree	17	8.5
Strongly Disagree	5	2.5
Total	200	100.0

This frequency distribution table shows the opinion of overall respondents towards the statement. This statement shows information about the role of social media to create public awareness towards importance of their vote. 45% people are strongly agree with the statement and said that media educate the public and create awareness and highlight importance of vote, 40.5% people are agree, 3.5% people are uncertain, 8.5% people are disagree, and remaining 2.5% people are strongly disagree with the statement.

Table 8. Social Media Played Watch Dog Role in the General Elections

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	37	18.5
Agree	45	22.5
Uncertain	43	21.5
Disagree	51	25.5

Strongly Disagree	24	12.0
Total	200	100.0

This frequency distribution table shows responses of overall respondents towards the statement. From the entire sample of 200 people 18.5% people are strongly agree with the statement, 22.5% people are agree, 21.5% people are uncertain, 25.5% people are disagree, and remaining 12% people are strongly disagree with the statement.

Table 9. Social Media aware you about the power of your Vote

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	72	36.0
Agree	75	37.5
Uncertain	7	3.5
Disagree	31	15.5
Strongly Disagree	15	7.5
Total	200	100.0

This table shows the frequency distribution of opinion of overall sampled people towards the statement. From the sample of 200 respondents selected at random 36% people are strongly agree, 37.5% people are agree, 3.5% people are uncertain, 15.5% people are disagree, and remaining 7.5% people are strongly disagree with the statement.

Table 11. Do you Satisfied with the role of Social Media?

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Yes	110	55.0
No	83	41.5
Don't Know	7	3.5
Total	200	100.0

The table shows the frequency distribution of opinion of overall sampled population towards the satisfaction of people with the role of social media. The given statement indicates the satisfaction of target population with role of social media and awareness of people of Pakistan in elections process. From the selected sample of 200 people 55% respondents are satisfied, 41.5% people are not satisfied with the role of social media and the remaining 3.5% people replied that they don't know about the satisfaction.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study explores the effects of social media on turn-out of general elections. The study was conducted in Bahawalpur to know the opinion of people about role of social media in elections. The sample sizes of 200 respondents were selected randomly on the basis of available and convenience. Data were gathered from 100 males and 100 females. Result shows that most of the respondents were master and graduates. Questionnaire was prepared in well-mannered that consists of 15 close ended questions. Respondents take interest in answering the questions that proved helpful in concluding results. According to the geographical area, Bahawalpur is considering the heart of Sothern Punjab and now included in Metropolitan cities of Pakistan. Southern Punjab is less developed area because most of the budget is used by the upper Punjab. Due to non-equally distribution of funds and less administrative representation, the movement of Southern Punjab has been started. Anyhow, Bahawalpur is well established city as compare to other cities of Southern Punjab and considered expected provincial capital if the movement of Southern Punjab succeeded. The basic purpose of conducting research was to know the opinion of people about the role of social media and people contribution.

Research Questions 1: What is the role of social media in general election turn-out?

In the present era, most people get political information from the media like print media, radio, social media and television. Social media is easily accessible in urban areas however, in rural areas, access to social media is relatively low as compare to urban areas. For concluding the result of research question, researcher asked the relevant question to his respondents that “Do you think social media influences in the increase turn-out of general election”. Result shows that 32.5% are strongly agreed and 32.5% agreed that social media has influence in increasing turn out in general elections. They said that people get up to date political news from the social media in the present era and have ability to understand the reality. 11.5% respondents said that they have no idea about this question, meanwhile 21.0% disagreed and 2.5% respondents strongly disagreed and said that social media have no influence in increasing turn out of election 2013. Researcher asked another question to the respondents that “Do you think social media can motivate the people to cast vote?”. Result shows that 32.0% respondents strongly agreed with this statement and 41.5% agreed, 5.5% respondents said that they have no information about this. On the other hand, 13.5% disagreed and 5.5% respondents strongly disagreed that social media cannot motivate the people for vote casting. Researcher asked a question that “Social Media show the portrayal of previous government work that awakes your mind to vote for the country?”. The result shows that 25.5% respondents strongly agreed and 35.0% agreed. 10.0% respondents have no information about this question on the other side 17.0% disagreed and 12.5% respondents strongly disagreed to the question.

Research Questions 2: What is the role of social media in creating awareness regarding democracy?

Literacy rate in Pakistan is not very high so people rely on different source for political awareness. After the birth of Pakistan, different elections conduct in Pakistan for the promotion of democracy but the general elections of 1970 considers more reliable and non-controversial. After a long time, Pakistani politics make a big change in its history. After consider atomic power in 1999, Pakistani politics gain more importance in the world. It is because of 1st Muslim Atomic power in the world but still have different question marks on its democratic system and foreign policy. For taking the answer of research question, the researcher asked the relevant question to his respondents that “Do you think that social media is a good source of creating political awareness in its viewers?”. Result shows that 56.0% respondents strongly agreed and 34.0% agreed. 3.5% respondents said that they have no idea about this question. 6.0% respondents disagreed and 0.5% respondents strongly disagreed that social media is not a good source of political awareness. They said that there are other factors which play an important role in creating political awareness like political leader, Baradari etc. Another relevant question asked by the researcher that “Do social media aware you about the power of your vote?”. Result shows that 36.0% respondents strongly agreed and 37.5% respondents agreed that social media aware them about the power of their vote. Moreover, media awake the people to get rid of corrupt system. According to the respondents, social media is playing watch dog role in political system and highlighting negative points of any political party in well manner. 3.5% respondents said that they have no idea about this question and have no interest in political system and hopeless. 15.5% respondents disagreed and 7.5% strongly disagreed that social media has not aware them about the power of vote. They said that political leader and Bradariism are more powerful sources as compare to media which plays important role to aware about the power of their vote. They said that social media is biased and social media sells of different political parties promote specific political party or candidate. Due to this reason less educated people make the theme that they should give vote to that leader or party which is expected winner at social media.

Hypothesis 1: It is more likely that social media has positive effects on turn-out.

In the present era, most people get political information from the media like print media, radio, social media and television. Social media is easily accessible in urban areas however, in rural areas, access to social media is relatively low as compare to urban areas. To examine the hypothesis, the most suitable question asked by the researcher “Do you think social media influences in the increase turn-out of general elections”. Result shows that 32.5% are strongly agreed and 32.5% agreed that social media has influence in increasing turn out in general elections. They said that people get up to date political news from the social media in the present era and have ability to understand the reality. 11.5% respondents said that they have no idea about this question, meanwhile

21.0% disagreed and 2.5% respondents strongly disagreed and said that social media have no influence in increasing turn out of elections. The above discussion on hypothesis is true.

Hypothesis 2: It is more likely that social media is more effective than other factors in increasing voting turn-out. Researcher asked the relevant question to check the hypothesis “Do you think social media is more effective than any other medium to motivate the people to cast vote?”. Result shows that 32.0% respondents strongly agreed with this statement and 41.5% agreed, 5.5% respondents said that they have no information about this. On the other hand, 13.5% disagreed and 5.5% respondents strongly disagreed that social media cannot motivate the people for vote casting. The main objective of the social media was to aware the people about the performance of previous government. Different slogans were used to increase the turn- out e.g. vote for education. Another question shows the interest of people about the motivation of social media. “Social media show the portrayal of previous government work that awakes your mind to vote for the country?”. The result shows that 25.5% respondents strongly agreed and 35.0% agreed.10.0% respondents have no information about this question on the other side 17.0% disagreed and 12.5% respondents strongly disagreed to the question. After detail discussion, it is concluded that hypothesis is true.

Recommendations

The results of my study shows that social media effects the turn-out of elections. During my research, I noticed that there is a flurry of false news on social media which does not reach the common man with correct information and therefor he cannot make the right political opinion. My suggestions for future researchers is that they should study on the quality of social media information.

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