

## Analyzing the Role of Social Media in Strengthening Democracy in Pakistan

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### Abstract

*Modern innovation in communication has changed patterns of socializing. Advance forms of communication are paving ways for people to convey their ideologies to others. This study attempts to analyze the role of social media in strengthening democracy in Pakistan and highlights the importance of media in democratic states by an extensive review of the literature. The core concern of the study was to observe how mass media contributes to the socialization of democracy. Quantitative research methodology opted, and research findings concluded that social media advocates the public on general political issues that increase the political efficacy and resulting in more political participation in Pakistan. Web 2.0 platforms such as Twitter and Facebook provide new opportunities to create a political environment in Pakistan. In the presence of these platforms, a bridge is developed between the citizens for strengthening a strong democratic setup.*

### Key Words:

Social Media,  
Democratization, Political  
Awareness, Political  
Efficacy, Political  
Participation

### Introduction

Mass media shaped public decisions. It shapes the political and social ideology of the people. Media advocates political and social awareness among their users. It does not only fulfill the basic requirements of information but also connect the people with the world of knowledge (Anwar & Jan 2010). The citizen's satisfaction with democracy is an interlinked universal process that develops a true political process (Zhai, 2018). Democracy requires a particular physical place and arrangements for democratic concerts. Certain arrangements make democracy more valuable among citizens (Parkinson, 2012; Buchyn & Mushchenko, 2019; Doorenspleet, 2012). Mainstream media and new media have different dependencies for democratic satisfaction. Good democracies make sure citizens are able to use these rights in voting, organizing and protesting for their interests (Mustapha, Mustapha & Anafi, 2018; Pällinger, 2018; Diamond & Morlino, 2005). Democracy is a system that is considered as the government of the people, by the people, for the people. Citizen's satisfaction with the democratic process is linked with the appreciation of people for their government and its performances (Canache, Mondak & Seligson, 2001; Linde and Ekman, 2003). A quarter-century ago, liberal democratic citizens were more satisfied with government and institutions. They were proud to live in a democratic state as compare to an authoritarian state (MOUNK, 2018). Social networking sites (SNSs) usage increases political expression and participation in both online and offline activities. People get information through interpersonal communication and Facebook, which encourage them to take part in political protests (Awad & Farghaly, 2018; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012; Dalton, Jou & Shin, 2007; Lu, 2013) and this democratic knowledge provide general citizens with a proper lens to see the valuable advantages of democratization and examine the level of democracy in their respective societies. This advance means of technology allow citizens to criticize and challenge democratic government (Esarey & Qiang, 2011). Diplomatic communication of democracies leads by the actors for the political system. Voters desire to be aware of the political issues, political parties and issues of the democratic state (Meer & Yousaf, 2018; Dick, 2012). Egypt revolution is the best example which was held by the users of social media. President Hosni Mubarak had lost his political worth among his citizens (Habeeb, 2012). Many political movements of the world like Ankara, Cairo, Tripoli, Moscow, Kiev, Athens, Madrid, New York, Ferguson, Missouri, Los Angeles, Hong Kong and Istanbul these political movements utilized Facebook and Twitter to spread their voices with the rest of the area (Jost et al., 2018). Facebook pages and groups work throughout conflicts, and Twitter was used to connect politicians and citizens for

political electoral information (Loxbo, Hinnfors, Hagevi, Blombäck & Demker, 2019; Borah, 2014; Cogburn & Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011; Johnson, 2011; Pole & Xenos, 2011; Ronzhyn, 2016). Obama's Political movement used Facebook for personality upgrading and to engage the followers in a political campaign (Gerodimos & Jakup, 2014). The use of new media expresses destructive estimates for political cynicism (Hanson, Haridakis, Cunningham, Sharma & Ponder, 2010). Valtysson (2013) highlighted the importance of and use of social media usage in revising the Icelandic constitution that ensured the general participation of the public. Citizens who think political and electoral rights are basic requirements of democracy are satisfied with the current democratic system, where social media penetration has a significant relation with democracy. It provides a platform for the participant's democratic activities (Zhai, 2018; Beetham, 2004; Herrmann, 2016; Jha & Kodila-Tedika, 2019).

### **Purpose and Rationale of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to analyze the role of social media in strengthening democracy in Pakistan as to how social media play its role in political awareness, Efficacy and Participation. The study highlights the importance of social media among youth to take part in different political activities and strengthen their internal and external political efficacy. As per the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, more than half the population of Pakistan based on youth which is (60%). The study is the focus to analyze the youth of Lahore regarded social media (Facebook and Twitter) role for political awareness, efficacy and participation. Today Societies have become more social, and they are globally interlinked through Social Media (Riaz, 2010, Hassan, 2004). For the last few years, media studies actively examine the pros and cons of Facebook and Twitter in different media studies. Democratization is promoted by the use of social media. It is so easy to socialize from region to region and discuss the ongoing political happenings with others. Likewise, today all around the world majority of the political parties, democratic participants communicate with their national and international followers through Facebook and Twitter. Digital technologies and applications are changing the way individuals, governments, and non-governmental organizations are interacting today (Spinner, 2012). Currently, it is debatable that social media is successfully generating a great involvement in political participation among youth for the strengthening of democracy in the world (Siluveru, 2015; Sohl, 2014). The problems and prospects of democracy in Pakistan have been studied by many researchers, but there is very limited researches have been done on social media and its role in democratization, especially the participation of youth. However, this study explores the role of social media in building political awareness, efficacy and participation to explore the contribution of these variables in the Democratization of Pakistan.

### **Review of Literature**

#### **Digital Communication and Democratization in Pakistan**

In Pakistan, for the last few decades, social media is educating the citizens about their Political democratic rights. The unstable economy and lack of proper literacy ratio create unclear democratic awareness among the rural public of Pakistan. Along with Twitter, social media also has the power to engage people for social movement as well as it can provide the ability for citizens to take part in protest (Prokhorov, 2012). Social Media involve young people in political participation in Pakistan. Most people get all the political information about ongoing issues of the state. Social media is a new and irreplaceable platform to transfer social and political issues with the world. Social media has an essential platform for student activists and their groups to communicate, share personal opinions as well as to express political ideology and issue-based discussion (Ali & Ali, 2014; Enjolras, Steen Johnsen, & Wollebæk, 2012; Valenzuela, Arriagada, & Scherman, 2012). Today, It is true that Social media makes its unique identity in Pakistani society. In the initial time, it was difficult for Pakistani people to involve in social media for politics, but now the majority of the youth are using it for political participation that strengthens the democratic process (Zaheer, 2016; haq 2010). The emerging platform of new media is widely used for political awareness in Pakistan Karamat & Farooq, 2016; Muzafar, Choudhry & Afzal, 2019; Shaheen, 2008). Facebook is used as the famous socializing app among rather than the other apps like Twitter, Blogs and my space and encourages the participants for online and offline political activities (Eijaz, 2013, Zaheer, 2016; Michaelsen, 2011)

Although democratization is also a part of the Pakistani government setup. Pakistani people actively get political awareness, they take part in political participation, and they have a certain political efficacy about Pakistani democratic setup. No doubt that socializing applications are the greatest option to get information (Abbott, 2014; Auger, 2013; Bulovsky, 2018; Ellison & Hardey, 2014; Prokhorov, 2012; Schulz, 2005). Social media is generating dialogue for democracy and facilitating the citizens for democratic participation (Barber, 1998b; see also Buchstein, 1997; Dahlgren, 2013). It is considered as a network of socializing which allows all participants to get informed, enhance their knowledge and take part in collective actions (Shirky, 2008, 2011). The social media is an ideal tool

for the democratic process because it allows its citizens to interact, participate and promote democratization (Price, 2013).

### **Internet, Social Media and Political Awareness**

It is considered as a process that passes the ongoing political happenings among the people who politically involve and are a part of a particular political system. Social media platforms are the largest forums that disseminate every political information all around the world every second. Facebook and Goggle have a great influence on politics, like elections and political opinion building (Mosco, 2018). The world most famous politicians, political leaders are highly active on Twitter to share their political knowledge with their followers. People move towards the usage of new media innovation to express their political ideology, get political information shared by other users (Glynn, Huges, & Hoffman, 2012; Weeks & Holbert, 2013). The new media has a great and powerful influence among citizens for party-political education and necessary tool to get a political education about political movement (Andi, Aytac & Çarkoğlu, 2019; Doris, 2014; Emruli & Bača, 2011). Internet leads people towards Political knowledge and provides them with quality content. Likewise, the internet increase users' level of Politics (Bimber & Davis, 2003; Jennings & Zeitner, 2003; Xenos & Moy, 2007). Facebook and Twitter used by various Politicians for their Political needs. Especially Twitter is the source through different Political events can be discussed. Likewise, digital media firms are the agents that contribute in a political process (Stier, Bleier, Lietz & Strohmaier, 2018; Jungherr, Schoen & Jürgens, 2015; Kreiss, & McGregor, 2017).

### **Modern Technology and Political Efficacy**

Technology and media both linked to serving society. Social media is considered as the moderate form of media because it engages the people in various activities like socializing, sharing of contact. Today people are more easily communicate with each other by the use of computer technology (Karamat & Farooq, 2016). The sentiment of efficacy is linked with the political participation of citizens in political activities and their perception of the government and its policies. Peoples' ideology, mindset and thinking have countless influence in building internal efficacy. Internal efficacy is considered as the self-exposure, self-knowledge to examine the political system and how to involve own self in different political activities (Campbell, Gurin, & Miller, 1954; Holbert, Lambe, Dudo, & Carlton, 2007). External efficacy is importance for political activities (Gil de Zúñiga, Diehl & Ardévol-Abreu, 2017; Zaheer, 2016). It enhances the Political efficacy of people for better relations among others and makes officials more answerable (Kenski & Stroud, 2006). Social media is more progressive and give more attention to political discussion. Through social media, politicians are becoming more and more active (Biswas, Ingle, & Roy, 2014). Social media provides citizens with the most significant information and is strengthening political participation and efficacy (Mc Nair, 2011; Ahmad, Alvi & Ittefaq, 2019; Jiang, 2016).

### **Role of Social Media for Political Participation**

Politically active people are more likely to involve in political participation. World democratic countries like Sweden, Norway, Iceland, New Zealand, Canada, America, Pakistan, and India allow their citizens for equal political participation. Through social media, it is easy for Pakistani citizens to politically socialize with political participants (Khan & Shahbaz, 2015). The active participation of citizens on social media caused tension among politicians to give instant responses to citizens (Doris, 2014). Twitter and Facebook are consuming different communication and informative sources (Velasquez, Wash, Lampe, & Bjornrud, 2014). Technology enhances the social media role in society and gives a chance for citizens to perform collectively (Michaelsen, 2011). Online Political involvement is spreading due to the use of social media (Papagiannidis & Manika, 2016). Social media is an advanced innovation in the field of mass communication, which is also worth as a crucial tool for Political participation (Karamat & Farooq, 2016). It is mobilizing the citizens and inspires them to actively involved in political participation (Siluveru, 2015). Media scholars like (Abdulrauf 2016; Abdu, Mohamad & Muda, 2017; Bimber & Copeland, 2011) defines the social media relationship with politics and explain the importance of social media in different political participation.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Theory as a set of propositions describes the systematic view of any phenomena through specifying association among the concepts and convenient in achieving goals (Perry, 2002; Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). This research work has utilized three theories that provide a strong base to research findings. Uses and gratification, which describes that audience actively participate in media content selection and media work as per the need and gratification of the audience. It frames that audience is active to fulfil their needs and receive self-satisfaction (Mc

Quail, 2010). Media Richness theory explains that individuals also select the appropriate channel of communication to get rich information about the topic (Brinker, Gastil & Richards, 2015; Daft, Lengel & Trevino, 1987; Dennis, & Kinney, 1998; Sheer & Chen, 2004; Wright, Schwager & Donthu, 2008). Prahalad & Ramaswamy's (2004) driven model of co-creation to constructs Social Media Engagement theoretical framework is used to know how the social networking sites can facilitate its users for social Interaction and develop an engagement process. (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016; Jensen & Aanestad, 2007; Kettinger & Lee, 1994; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Wixom & Todd, 2005).

## Methodology

In this study, a Quantitative research methodology has applied, and a survey has used to collect data among the respondents. The youth of Lahore, Pakistan, was selected as the population for the study because it is considered as the highest populated city of Punjab amongst the 40<sup>th</sup> largest city in the world. Moreover, It is considered the second largest urban city in Pakistan. Data were collected by random sampling. According to the HEC 2015 university ranking report, Lahore five top public sector universities, Government college university, Punjab University, University of Education, Kinnaird College for women and Lahore college for women university, were selected by random method. In the second level of sampling, youth were selected through the convenience sampling method. The sample involved 700 respondents included male and female consist of 350 each gender. Selected Respondent's ages were 15 to 29 as per the United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) 2019 Report. The questionnaire was developed by the use of a likert scale (summated rating scale). Whereas, Scale internal consistency was measured through the Cronbach's Alpha which value was  $\alpha = 0.935$ .

## Findings

**Table 1.** Descriptive Analysis

	Mean Value	Std. Deviation Value	N
Usage and Consumption	3.5379	.81198	700
Political Awareness (PA)	3.5461	.80747	700
Political Efficacy (PE)	3.5823	.77943	700
Political Participation (PP)	3.4683	.88706	700
Valid N			700

Table 1 describes that the mean value of (Usage of social media) is 3.5379, PA (Political Awareness) is 3.5461, PE (Political Efficacy) is 3.5823 while, PP (Political Participation) is 3.4683. Moreover, the standard deviation of (Usage of Social Media) is .81198, PA (Political Awareness) is .80747, PE (Political Efficacy) is .77943. While PP (Political Participation) is .88706.

**Table 2.** Correlation Among the Variables

	Usage & Consumption	Political Awareness	Efficacy	Participation
Usage & Consumption	1			
Pearson Correlation		.594**	.587**	.588**
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
N	700	700	700	700
Political (PA) Awareness		1		
Pearson Correlation	.594**		.760**	.662**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
N	700	700	700	700
Political Efficacy (PE) Pearson			1	
Correlation	.587**	.760**		.716**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
N	700	700	700	700
Political Participation (PP)				1
Pearson Correlation	.588**	.662**	.716**	
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
N	700	700	700	700

Table 2 specifies that Usage of Social Media correlate with Political Awareness at .594, Political Efficacy at .587 and correlate with Political Participation at .588.usage of social media shows Moderate positive association among the Political Awareness, Efficacy and Participation The p significance value is (.000), which indicates that there is the value of p is less than (value of  $\alpha$ , alpha) ( $p < 0.05$ ).

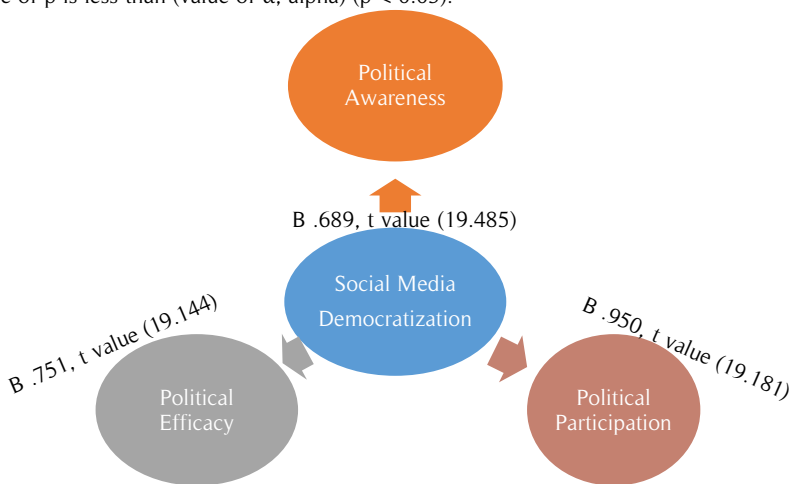


Figure 1: Research Results

### Discussion and Analysis

Social media has become a part of society and is being used for different purposes of Interaction, and it has also become a part of the political system. It is used as multitasking media during Political activities and playing an important role to strengthen the democratic process (Bulovsky 2018; Carroll & Hackett, 2006; Clark, 2015; Dick, 2012, Doorenspleet, 2012; Wang & Tchernev, 2012) were evaluated that Social Media can play a crucial role in Democratic Participation. Does the youth consume social media for getting political information, opinion building, and participation in political activities? The majority of the respondents were strongly agreed that usage of social media increases their political activities. Facebook & Twitter is widely used for Political updates and information. The findings are supported by literature (Ceron, Curini, Iacus & Porro, 2014; Cacciatore et al., 2018; Doris, 2014; Guess, Munger, Nagler & Tucker, 2018; Hasell & Weeks, 2016; Jarrar & Hammud, 2018; Kruikemeier & Shehata, 2016). Does Social Media create Political Awareness (Voting Process, Information about Political Parties, leaders and activities) to the youth of Lahore for strengthening democratization? Results of the study found that youth get information about political parties and their manifestos through Social Media (Facebook & Twitter). Moreover, youth get voting awareness, information regarding political parties and leaders through Social Media (Andersen & Medaglia, 2009; Borah, 2014; Kobayashi & Ichifuji, 2015; Bekmagambetov et al., 2018; Baum & Groeling, 2008; Boulianne, 2011; Gottfried, Hardy, Holbert, Winneg & Jamieson, 2016). Does Social Media construct Political Efficacy (Opinion building, Beliefs, Awareness and decision making) among the youth of Lahore for strengthening democratization? Respondents are strongly agreed that by the use of Social Media (Facebook & Twitter), they have Political opinion and particular point of view about the Politics of Pakistan. Youth strongly agree that usage of Social Media can enhance my decision making power to join a Political party and support Political campaigns, regulate political content. While the majority of the respondents strongly agreed that they know about the political agendas of different political parties, and it strengthens their thoughts about the current political situation. While the majority of the respondents strongly agreed that Social Media is a platform that makes them aware of their Political democratic rights. Facebook pages were used in Political campaigns to change the beliefs of voters for their candidates (Bronstein, 2013). Social Media political campaigns, messages can play an important role in building the Political knowledge and beliefs of users. The Earlier studies (Abdelzadeh, 2014; Ahmad, Alvi & Ittefaq, 2019; Bimber & Copeland, 2011; Chan, 2015; Chan & Guo, 2013, Graham, Jackson & Broersma, 2014; Kaid McKinney & Tedesco, 2007). Does the youth use Social Media for Political Participation (discussion, debates, like, share and comment on political pages and groups about politics, politicians, rallies, jalsa etc.) to strengthen democratization? Youth take participation in political activities through Social Media. Most of the respondents are strongly agree that Social Media is the best platform to communicate with political representatives. The findings

were also supported by literature (Abdu, Mohamad & Muda, 2017; Bekafigo & McBride, 2013; Enjolras, Steen-Johnsen & Wollebæk, 2012; Eady, Nagler, Guess, Zilinsky & Tucker, 2019; Delli Carpini, 2000)

## **Conclusion**

Social media is considered a strong functional tool for Political communication all around the world. In Pakistan, it has also changed the way of Political discourse. Social Media applications Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, have provided political personalities with a way to discuss political issues with their community (Golbeck, Grimes & Rogers, 2010; Gueorguieva, 2008; Lassen & Brown, 2011; Papacharissi, 2009). Social media is the best tool to create democracy in a better way (Sunstein, 2018). Moreover, in the last few years, it made Political leaders more accountable in democratic regimes. Social media is now providing a better understanding of the Political system of Pakistan for their youth. The findings of the study supported that Social Media is actively used by users, especially youth. Both male and female youth are actively participating in Social Media for Politics. Moreover, youth are using Social Media for Political awareness related to the voting process, political leaders and Political parties, which make democracy more strengthen in Pakistan. Study findings suggested that majority of the youth use Social Media which make their Political beliefs and opinion even more strong. This study worked under uses and gratification, media richness theory and social engagement theories.

The study concluded that Social Media strengthen democratization in Pakistan, so it extends the existing body of literature available in the domain of social media and democratization (Christensen & Groshek, 2019; Danju, Maasoglu & Maasoglu, 2013; Ellison & Hardey, 2014; Gillespie, 2013; Lemke & Chala, 2016; Mosco, 2018; Mustapha, Mustapha & Anafi, 2018). Social media usage develops an engagement among the Youth and Political system, which strengthen the democratic setup in Pakistan. In the light of literature, theories and findings, the study also suggests that positive use of Social Media in the Political system of Pakistan can create a more strong democratic system.

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