

Impact of Social Media on Voting Behavior in Pakistan: A Case Study of 2024 Elections

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ABSTRACT

The fast pace of development of social media has altered the way political communication in Pakistan has been undertaken especially in the 2024 General Elections. This paper will examine the role of social media on voter behaviors of university students in the three aspects of political awareness, engagement, and voting. The mixed-methods approach will be used to collect data from 160 students using an online questionnaire with close- and open-ended questions by using SPSS. Additionally, qualitative data will be collected through semi-structured interviews with 10 respondents. This paper will apply the Uses and Gratification theory, which describes how people use social media platforms for their own motives. Results will clarify that social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter/X, TikTok, WhatsApp, and YouTube has a major influence on the political awareness, political discourse, and voting behavior of students. Nevertheless, issues of misinformation, propaganda, and unbalanced access to digital devices each became apparent. The paper provides a two-fold benefit of social media as an instrument of political empowerment and a possible source of manipulation to inform policymakers, educators, and political actors on how to promote digital literacy and healthy online practices and reinforce democratic representation in Pakistan.



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Introduction

In Pakistan, the social media has completely revolutionized the way people interact with their political leaders and political participation. Such applications like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter/X, Tik Tok, WhatsApp and YouTube have moved beyond entertainment as some of the most important platforms to engage in politics especially in the 2024 general elections where such platforms played a significant role in the way the citizens learned and understood about politics, assessed the candidates and voted.

The benefits of social media are enormous because the voters can get the information very quickly and can communicate with political content instantly. Such online platforms have been particularly useful to young voters, first time voters and women who were able to engage in political discussions without the physical, financial or social constraints of doing so. The field of political campaigns has also gone through changes, where the traditional modes have been augmented with online methods of marketing, live events over the internet, and influencer campaigns. Platforms also help parties to provide real-time updates short videos reach large numbers of audiences in a short period of time and WhatsApp groups provide mobilization on a community level.

Social media is a challenge even though it offers these opportunities. The misinformation, fake news, and propaganda are easily spread due to the rapid spread of information. Algorithms-based platforms encourage sensational content, which form echo chambers where people are exposed to information that reinforces their current beliefs distorting the opinion of the masses and influencing voting behavior. Other obstacles involve inequality in accessing technology, lack of digital literacy, and inequality in the internet connectivity among the rural and urban communities. False information may disorient and distrust political institutions, weakening the inequalities in political communication.

The 2024 elections showed that social media is two-sided in the political campaigns. On the one

hand, due to the active involvement of politicians, political platforms positively influenced the political awareness and turnout by staging the campaign in an engaging and attractive content, interactive activities, and the use of influencers, which was carefully designed by the political actors (Putra & Nugroho, 2025; NatCen Social Research, 2024). Conversely, extensive disinformation, propaganda, and amplification of misleading material, respectively, significantly affected the electoral space, thereby making it quite difficult to receive legitimate political information and undermining the faith in democratic processes (Freedom House, 2024; Knight First Amendment Institute, 2024). This two-sided situation depicts on the one hand that social media is empowering political action, and on the other hand, that it is being used to cheat and manipulate elections.

One of the most significant groups of people to comprehend the political influence of social media in particular can be university students. Being technology-aware, politically conscious, and able to exercise critical judgment of content they encounter online, their interaction trends and impact on the overall social networks can offer helpful information as to how the digital platforms are influencing political awareness and political behavior among young voters.

Despite the quick growth in social media application during the 2024 elections, there is little empirical data available that has been able to prove the actual impact of these media on voter participation in the political process and the number of people who have been voting. This study will fill this gap by examining the role of social media in voter attitudes, awareness and vote behavior. The research focuses on the role of platforms in increasing political awareness, the level to which the content of the social media affected the voting process, and what influenced the level of voter confidence in the political conversation.

Through targeting university students, this study sheds some light on how the digital age is reshaping the nature of electoral communication

and provide some practical value to researchers, politicians and the political organizations. Considering both positive and negative aspects of social media: the growing access to information and the simultaneous threat of misinformation, propaganda, and digital inequalities, it is possible to work out recommendations regarding how individuals can use social media safely, become more digitally literate, and create the policy that will make Ethical Political Communication possible. This study serves the way regarding social studies on digital democracy in developing societies, informing institutions of learning, civil society, and policymakers on how to empower the population to participate in politics wisely, counter the threats of misinformation on the internet and to ensure social media enhances democracy instead of undermining the democratic processes in the changing democratic context in Pakistan.

Literature Review

The high rate of social media has changed the way of political communication and voter participation in Pakistan especially the youthful voters who are gradually depending on online communication to get information on politics. Through the 2024 General Elections in Pakistan, the social media turned out to be a significant arena where political campaigns, debates, and dissemination of political narratives took place. This development has posed some crucial issues regarding the role the social media plays in voter awareness and voting behavior during the recent elections.

Hussain, Farooq, and Iqbal (2023), in their study founded that the impact of social media on political participation based on interviews with ten participants where five dimensions of the impact of social media on political participation were identified, which are information access, facilitation of political discussion, mobilization of campaigns and causes, amplified political efficacy and catalyst effect on offline political participation. The results underscore the opportunities of social media as a political engagement tool, a way of sharing information, and mobilizing people in the democratization process. However, the research

article also identifies the significant issues of misinformation and filter bubbles which may restrain the quality of political discussions. The implications indicate that media literacy education and policy methodologies should be implemented to exploit the potential of social media and address the shortcomings to enable the meaningful use of social media in political participation in the digital age.

Ahmed and Yousaf (2023), in their study analyzed the role of the social media in political awareness and participating in the elections within the context of the Uses and Gratifications approach is explored on a sample of 1,431 university students in Islamabad, and the result is a positive link between the usage of social media and the political awareness level, where Facebook has been found to be the most successful platform (60.6%). The study determined that though social media has made people more politically aware and enabled them to access more information, they are more utilized in sharing academic news content and social connectivity rather than discussing more significant academic or political content, and platforms remain more treated as entertainment than educational media in Pakistan. Some interesting facts, which are worth noting, are that online communication is more attractive to the users of social media perceptions as compared to in-person communication, and the research raises some serious issues regarding the presence of misinformation, fake news, manipulations of the mass's opinion, and targeting vulnerable groups via the online web. The paper finds that the ability of social media to engage in politics is conditional, with responsible media consumption being dependent on awareness of the perceived risks that users must overcome, accompanied by searching reliable and valid sources of information to help them feel effective and safe using the digital media in politics.

Shami (2023), in the study explained the important role that social media has played in fighting electoral rigging in the recent elections in Pakistan through the survey data that sampled the Punjab voters stratified by age, gender, occupation and location and found that there was a close

relationship between the use of social media and the political awareness among the young urban voters. The results show that such platforms as Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Twitter are widely spread in the work of spreading party agendas, positions, and exposing electoral violations, and respondents agree that social media politics has a strong impact on the direction of voting and expands the discussion to their family members and social groups, whether they are users or not. The analysis has indicated that social media is more efficient than the traditional electronic campaigning in mobilizing the populace politically and this is an effective way of bringing about transparency and accountability as it results in electors using all means available to report irregularities and malpractices of the election. Critical measures that are advised in the paper are that to ensure continuous internet access during elections, laws need to be enacted to guarantee the access of media platforms, civil society organizations should be strengthened through digital literacy programs and in particular rural areas, to create well-informed voters that can critically evaluate information and avoid misinformation and propaganda.

Saleem, Hayat, and Akbar (2024), in their study examined the critical role of social media in determining voting trends in Pakistan under institutional theory of Stimulus Organism Response which a quantitative survey of 167 responders found that social media has a significant influence in voting patterns, especially new voters and women who are not able to visit conventional campaigns. The paper illustrates how social media offers direct communication between candidates and voters, which is both accessible and affordable through the channels of diverse demographics to participate in the political content and sharing opinions, and the results have shown how the trust in social media and its increased use in 2024 versus 2018 elections have evolved, with artificial intelligence-generated videos and audio clips being the most striking examples of innovation in campaign relationships and their power. Nevertheless, the study also takes into consideration duality of

social media, as it has the potential to increase political participation, but on the other hand, it can be very dangerous as a source of providing false information by false news and manipulative propaganda that can be detrimental to individuals and used against human psychology. Some of the recommendations that the paper makes include the governments and political parties creating new engagement platforms, responsible use of social media, regulation that prioritizes facts and privacy protection, media literacy education to evaluate information critically, transparency in online activities, and a digital environment that improves political engagement and reinforces democratic values to improve society.

Afzal, Siddiqui, and Naveed (2024), in their study discussed how social media affects voting, opinion making, and election in the 21st century political system and offers a critical overview of case studies, statistical data, and theories to present a pluralistic view of how digital democracy is developing and also considers the threats and opportunities presented by social media in improving the aspect of democratic participation. The paper finds that social media has transformed the democratic sphere by introducing more political participation especially among the younger generation due to the availability of the tool that allows immediate distribution of information, connectivity with political movements, cause mobilization and empowering the voices of the marginalized providing more inclusive political sphere with higher awareness of social issues and collective actions. Nevertheless, the study identifies serious problem areas such as misinformation dissemination that skews the public perception and destroys the trust in the democratic institution, prioritization in the news algorithm that increases polarization and generates an echo chamber, discourse fragmentation that jeopardizes constructive dialog and informed judgment during an electoral process. The article highlights how important it is to have policymakers tackle the loopholes in regulation by introducing content moderation policies, digital literacy, increasing transparency in information sharing, and developing alliances

between social media firms, civil society, and educational establishments to establish a responsible digital environment that ensures the exploitation of the benefits of social media and minimizes harms, and recommends concerted efforts to balance regulation and innovation to ensure equity in voting and enhancement of democratic foundations in the age of new technology.

Abbas, Farhan, and Intizar (2025), in their study examined the transformative nature of social media in the 2024 Pakistan General Election, where more than 73 million active users, half of whom were under 35, used social media platforms such as Facebook, Tik Tok, Twitter/X, WhatsApp, and YouTube to restructure traditional campaigns to provide young, first-time, and women voters with increased voter engagement strategies despite imposed bans and restrictions. The study that combines the Stimulus Organism Response and Agenda-Setting theories shows that social media has a dual nature in a socio-political situation in Pakistan, as the low-cost devices allowed widespread engagement with politics, but there were issues of urban-rural digital divide, echo chambers, viral disinformation, hate speech, orchestrated propaganda, state-imposed internet blackouts in potentially significant voting times, and high-tech manipulation of digital platforms far outweighing fact-checking services. The paper highlights that the effect of social media on governance relies on the quality of governance, digital literacy of the citizens, as well as moral responsibility of political leaders and portals, and its effects are limited by socioeconomic inequities in access, digital literacy, and information asymmetries, and its influences escalate youth engagement and diversity at the cost of unlimited spreading of extreme content. The study concludes that the future of electoral mobilization in Pakistan is determined by the technological progress and active policy frameworks such as digital literacy, political advertisement, tight cooperation between technology and democracy through sensitive tech industry to combat misinformation, protected access to internet resources during elections, ethical follower

culture, fair infrastructure development and freedom of expression versus safeguarding democratic processes in emerging democracies.

Despite the fact that some studies have been conducted to identify the connection between social media and political participation in Pakistan, a few studies have been research-based on its impact on voter behavior during the 2024 General Elections. The majority of the research available dwells on the general political awareness or participation of youth without directly connecting the use of social media with the actual voting vote. Although other studies have taken the dangers of misinformation, propaganda, and the impact of algorithms and social media on electoral behavior, the negative aspect, few studies have offered a deeper analysis that entails both the negative and positive effects of social media on voting behavior.

Besides, few studies have integrated quantitative information on social media consumption patterns with qualitative information on how and why people use political content using online platforms. The bulk of research is based on large surveys or small case studies, yet there is an absence of a mixed-methods approach that is able to identify the trends numerically and at the same time express the personal research experience. In addition, little attention has been given to university students, who are digital natives, politically conscious, and a highly influential population, though their contribution to the formation of political discussions and engagement is increasing. The current work fills these gaps by exploring the impact of social media on the political awareness, attitudes and votes among university students regarding the possibilities to engage with one another, as well as the limitations of misinformation, digital disparities, and polarization. In such a way, it gives a more in-depth picture of the impact of social media on voter turnout in the 2024 elections in Pakistan.

Theoretical Framework

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) will be utilized as the main theoretical framework of this paper and will describe how social media

influences the level of political awareness, political attitudes, and voting behavior in university students during the 2024 General Elections in Pakistan. The theory states that audiences do not merely receive any media message passively, but rather, they actively select and utilize media platforms to fulfill specific needs and motivations. In digital terms of political communication, UGT assists to understand the fact why university students prefer to use social media to get political information, communicate with each other and be involved in the political dialog.

Elihu Katz, a communication scholar, was the pioneer of the Uses and Gratifications Theory which was presented back in the 1970s. The theory has come as a reaction to the previous models of mass communication in which the audiences were perceived as passive receivers of information, which is presented by the media institutions. On the contrary, Katz had suggested that audiences are active and goal-directed participants that willfully choose media channels to satisfy certain psychological and social needs that include information seeking, socializing, entertainment, identity, and the restatement of existing beliefs (Katz, 1974).

In the context of the 2024 General Elections in Pakistan, the UGT is a pinpoint source of understanding how voters- especially the university students- had been proactive in social media in order to engage in politics. The election period often resulted in digital news platforms being visited by students who were primarily using Facebook, Instagram, X, Tik Tok, WhatsApp, and YouTube to receive political news, follow the election news, engage in discussions, and share their views. Through these platforms, users also get the benefit of information on politics and interactive communication space that satisfies their informational and social needs.

Based on UGT, political awareness is formed where people make conscious efforts to get information through media sources. During electoral processes, voters frequently rely on social media to have updates regarding the political parties, politicians and the election

process. The constant exposure to campaign messages, debates and political discussions aids the user to process the political events and develop political insights. Reports of the application of UGT to new media contexts suggest that new media platforms offer new types of gratifications, including interactivity, agency, and participation, which enhance the involvement of the users in political information (Sundar & Limperos, 2013).

UGT can also provide information on the correlation between the social media and voter turnout. According to the theory, people are likely to choose media information that favors their prevailing beliefs and ideology orientations. Social media, therefore, tends to support already established views and not entirely shift political orientations. By following the political leaders, publishing the campaign posts, and participating in online debates, the university students strengthen their political identities and affiliations. These interactive platforms in digital setting enable citizens to engage in political discourse, express their opinions publicly and build political engagement (Papacharissi, 2010).

One more significant point in UGT is connected with the idea of the reinforcement of the belief and trust of political communications. People tend to watch the media material that supports their already formed points of view and ideological standpoints. Trust in political discourse can thus be based on peer endorsement, ideological compatibility, as well as repetition of exposure to similar information in social media context. Sharing of the political content by friends or people in an online community may make the user feel that it is credible once it is shared without necessarily having to verify independently. This new process of belief and verification may influence political perceptions and shape attitudes to political actors and issues to do with electoral matters.

In spite of the explanatory power, UGT also possesses limitations when used in the contemporary digital media surroundings. Although the theory is useful in explaining the

motivation of users to choose a specific media platform, it fails to help fully explain structural properties of social media systems like algorithmic filtering, echo chambers and quick dissemination of false information. The way social media works can often focus on content that fits the likes of the user and prioritize content that experts have encountered before and this restricts access to a range of different viewpoints and instead increases polarization of ideologies. Moreover, politically attractive or deceptive politically content can be spread across online networks, and this has the potential to affect political views beyond the motivational factors as discussed in the UGT.

Uses and Gratifications Theory is quite useful in explaining the process by which the 2024 General Elections in Pakistan showed the use of social media by university students. The theory emphasizes the active nature of the media consumers in choosing and using the platforms to access political information, debate and express their identity. Simultaneously, recognizing the weaknesses of UGT assists in placing the given study into the wider scope of the digital political communication, according to which technological frameworks and persuasive means of communication also influence the political awareness, attitudes, and voting patterns.

Research Methodology

The research design of the study is a mixed method because it will focus on the influence of social media on voter behaviour in Pakistan, specifically in regards to the 2024 General Elections. The mixed-method choice is justified by the necessity to identify the quantifiable trends and qualitative insights devoted to the research issue. The political awareness, perceptions and attitudes are created and shaped in the social media as well as information is gathered through the social media. Hence only the quantitative or qualitative techniques would not be adequate enough to comprehend its role completely. A mixture of the two directions will enable a more sophisticated and well-rounded investigation into the impact of social media in the development of

voter behaviour.

The quantitative part of the research is aimed at the determination of the trends of the social media use, exposure to political content, and its impact on the voting behaviour. This was done by way of a structured questionnaire which comprised of close and open-ended questions. The close-ended questions were also meant to collect standardized responses and it is therefore easy to analyze trends involving a greater sample. These questions covered the most important topics including the frequency of social media use, the nature of the content that people see, the degree of trust in the information about politics and the extent to which social media affected the voting choices. The structured format provided consistency in the responses and made it possible to conduct a statistical analysis of the data.

Besides the numerical data, qualitative data was gathered using the semi-structured interviews. This method enabled the respondents to express their experiences and views using their words and at the same time focusing on the primary goals of the research. The interviews helped to find answers to the way people perceive political content, determine its credibility, and have opinions depending on their social media exposure. Semi-structured interviews were also flexible thus enabling the ability to record detailed responses and unravel them to bring out underlying meaning that cannot be explained solely using numerical data. Such a mixture of approaches makes the entire research more powerful as it has depth and breadth.

The research design can be termed as the descriptive one since it will describe and analyse the current relationship between social media and voter behaviour without controlling any variables. Using the case of the 2024 elections, the study offers a contextualised insight into the behaviour of real-life politics. This will enable the study to address the way social media affected political awareness, engagement, and voting decisions during a given electoral time. The descriptive aspect of the research is to guarantee that the results of the study are based on real experiences

as opposed to speculations.

Students in the public universities in Pakistan eligible to vote in the 2024 elections comprise the study population. These people were chosen based on the fact that university students are one of the most prolific social media users and are more inclined to use political content online. Their presence in the digital platform presents them as a suitable group in researching on the connection between social media and voter behaviour. Students are also in a position where they are becoming politically aware and as such, they are shaping their opinion of political parties and candidates. Interaction with the social media contributes to these opinions largely.

The research involves both urban and rural participants so that there is diversity in the sample. This is necessary to include, as the access to social media, the trends of usage, and exposure to political content could differ in the urban and rural regions. The diversity will increase the credibility of the findings and offer a more detailed insight into the research issue.

The study relied on a purposive sampling method in selecting study participants. This is the approach that would be used to select individuals according to certain criteria that are pertinent to the research objectives. Here, the sample was chosen according to the criteria of a university student, the right to vote, and the use of social media. There were 160 students who were picked in the quantitative survey. This was deemed as enough sample to uncover patterns and trends as far as the usage of social media and how it affected voter behaviour. Participants who were selected in the various universities were also varied, which contributed to different responses.

The participants of the survey were also selected as 10 respondents to undergo qualitative interviews. These respondents were mainly university teachers and M.Phil and BS graduate students. Their inclusion was also able to give the study depth since they could give more informed and insightful views on the purpose of social media in the electoral process. The qualitative sample was chosen critically to make sure that

those who respond can add valuable information. The mixed method used in the survey and interview participants enabled the research to strike a balance between the general trends and intricate explanations.

The study used online questionnaire based on Google Forms to collect data that would be used in this research. Having an online platform offered a number of benefits such the availability of an easy distribution, low cost and access to many more respondents in a given period of time. The questionnaire link was distributed over the digital platforms to students of government institutions like Must University AJK, FUUAST University Islamabad, and the University of Sargodha, Sargodha. This method enabled the respondents to respond at their convenience and increase the rate of response.

The questionnaire was a combination of close-ended questions and open-ended questions. Structured data which can be analyzed statistically was collected through the close-ended questions. These questions were based on the frequency of using social media, the content that was accessed, and the impact on the voting behaviour. The open-ended questions gave the respondents a chance to give their opinions and experiences using their own words. This provided the data with additional depth and gave information about the way people interpret and perceive political content on social media. Besides the questionnaire, qualitative data were gathered through interviews which were semi-structured. The interviews relied on a series of guiding questions though gave flexibility to the respondents to expound their responses. Such a methodology helped the researcher to examine subjects of credibility of information, perception impact, and political involvement at a deeper level.

The SPSS was used to analyse the quantitative data obtained through the survey. The descriptive statistical methods were used to summarize the data and determine the patterns in social media use and voter turnout. This implied the application of frequencies and percentages to provide the findings in a clear and organized way.

The analysis assisted in the realisation of the relationship between various variables and the impact of social media on the voting behaviour.

The obtained qualitative data in the form of interviews was examined with the help of the thematic analysis. It was done through examining the responses and formulating the occurrence of common themes and grouping the data as such. This analysis identified themes like political awareness, information credibility, perception influence and political content engagement. Thematic analysis gave a structured approach of making sense out of qualitative data, and it assisted in making sense of the implied meaning of experiences of the respondents.

This research has a strength in the integrated approach to quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative results give a general picture of the general trends whereas the qualitative ones give a detailed explanation and context behind the results. This combined strategy makes the research more valid and gives great insight into the effectiveness of social media on voter behaviour. Through the synthesis of both data, the research can offer a balanced review of the research problem.

The ethical issues were upheld during the research. The study was conducted on a voluntary basis and the respondents knew the aim of the research and participated in it. The choice was given to them to quit at any level so that their involvement would have been informed. All participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity and no personal information was provided.

The information gathered was not applied to any other purpose other than to an academic effect and the researcher acted with responsibility when handling it. These were done to safeguard the privacy of the respondents and to make them give sincere and unbiased answers. The ethical standards were necessary to obtain the credibility and reliability of the study.

Although it has advantages, the study has weaknesses. The study is restricted to the university students, which may not be a good

representation of the rest of the population in Pakistan who are the voters. Moreover, online questionnaires can also lock out those people, whose access to the internet is low, or who do not use the digital environment as actively. The qualitative element is entrenched in few interviews, meaning that the results might not be generalized. Nonetheless, qualitative research aims at offering depth and not generalization and the information gained on these interviews is valuable nonetheless to the research.

Although it has advantages, the study has weaknesses. The study is restricted to the university students, which may not be a good representation of the rest of the population in Pakistan who are the voters. Moreover, online questionnaires can also lock out those people, whose access to the internet is low, or who do not use the digital environment as actively. The qualitative element is entrenched in few interviews, meaning that the results might not be generalized. Nonetheless, qualitative research aims at offering depth and not generalization and the information gained on these interviews is valuable nonetheless to the research.

In general, the research methodology will be used in such a way that it gives an in-depth analysis of the effects of social media on the voter behaviour. The mixed-method approach enables the research to focus on both patterns and personal experiences that can be measured. Using purposive sampling, data collection via the internet, and the systematic analysis of the data, the study gives a clear picture of how social media affected political awareness and voting behaviour in the 2024 general elections in Pakistan.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Questions: N=160

This paper has explored how the content of social media, which is political campaigns, political news, videos, and discussions, has had an impact on the voting patterns of university students in the 2024 General Elections in Pakistan. The primary research question was as follows: How far the content of social media can affect the voting patterns of voters during the 2024 General

Elections in Pakistan? Mechanisms by which the social media influences voter behavior were comprehended by the subthemes of political awareness and trust in political discourse.

Findings revealed that Instagram 45.0%, Tik Tok 34.4%, YouTube 10.0%, Facebook 9.4%, and X/Twitter 1.2%, as visual-based platforms, were the main channels through which the political content was accessed, implying that the dominance was held by the former two. Students devoted much time to social media, 35.6% of them spend 3-4 hours daily and 31.9% spend longer than 4 hours indicating that they have a high exposure to electoral information. Although the primary goal of social media use was entertainment 55.0%, a third of the respondents indicated that they use the websites to access news and information, which suggests that they were engaged in studying political content.

In the case of political awareness, 19.4% of the respondents indicated that they were highly aware, 33.8% that they were moderately aware, 33.8% slightly aware and 13.1% that they were not aware. These results support the fact that news updates and political videos played a great role in helping students to learn about electoral processes and candidate positions, although active discussion was not prominent, and 45.0% of students never discussed politics on social media.

Regarding trust in political news, the respondents indicated the highest level of complete trust in political news 5.6% and moderate trust 35.0% slightly trust with 38.1% and no trust with 21.3% respectively. Misinformation was also frequent with 15.0% frequently faced and 33.8% occasionally faced, this could be the limiting factor to the persuasive nature of social media in the voting process.

Regarding voting behavior, 10.6% had responded strongly influenced, 23.1% moderately influenced, 33.1% slightly influenced and 33.1% influenced not at all. News and updates 55.0%, political videos and memes 25.6%, party campaigns 10.6%, and candidate messages 8.8%, were considered the most effective types of content. All in all, half of the respondents 55.6% described the

impact of social media on voter behavior as somewhat positive, with 31.9% being somewhat negative.

Overall, the results indicate that social media is the most common tool and means of increasing political awareness and access to electoral information. Although there is a hesitant nature in trusting the content in politics and a high level of exposure to misinformation, there is a moderate impact of it on the voting habit. The findings can be explained by the Uses and Gratification Theory, according to which students actively learn about social media, striving to meet cognitive and informational needs, and the effects of exposure, type of content, and trust on electoral choice mediate the effect.

Qualitative Questions: N=10

The qualitative data implies that social media had a radical impact on political communication, the awareness of voters, and electoral campaigning in 2024 General Elections in Pakistan. Majority of the respondents concurred that social media emerged as more important source of political information because of its speed, accessibility and capability to update politics in real-time. Election news, political speeches, campaign activities and political discussions were largely followed over social media sites like twitter, Facebook, You Tube and WhatsApp. According to one respondent, *"Social media helps people stay informed about politics, but they should always check information from reliable sources before believing it"*, which is a cause of concern in terms of misinformation and trustworthiness of online political information.

The results also reveal that social media played an important role in political campaigning and shaping of narratives. Political parties engulfed digital platforms to hold online political rallies, generate political trends and reach out to voters directly. According to respondents, the politicking field was taking an ever-increasing trend of ground-level political competition to digital political communication. According to one of the respondents, *"it became a significant channel of political campaigning and political awareness as the social media enabled one to have direct contact*

with voters". Nonetheless, the respondents have also had experience of the propaganda-driven political content and biased accounts, and it is necessary to critically analyze the political information to reach a conclusion.

Moreover, social media helped in raising the level of political discussions and political awareness to the youth voters. The respondents revealed that emotional and narrative-oriented political content enhanced political interest and voter turnout but it did not necessarily result in physical political participation. An additional respondent added that, *"through social media, a great deal of political opinions and updates have been provided, however, voters have to critically think before making opinions"*. The data also indicated that the social media was viewed as less controlled and less free compared to traditional media which was sometimes related to the state manipulation and censure. Generally, the results indicate that social media played a major role of an awareness and political communication resource, shaping voter attitudes and political debate as opposed to having a direct effect on the voting votes.

Results and Implications

This paper analyzed the influence of social media content such as political campaigns, news, videos and discussions on the political awareness, trust on political discourse and voting among university students in the 2024 General Elections in Pakistan. Students used the visual-based platforms, especially the Instagram and Tik Tok, as the main platforms to get political information, and YouTube, Facebook, and X/Twitter were less common. Students had spent a large percentage of their time on social media meaning they were exposed to a lot of electoral content. Even though the use of the social media was mainly aimed at entertainment, a significant proportion of students also visited news and politics updates, which indicate that they actively listened to the political information.

In terms of political knowledge, the majority of students gave moderate or high scores on their awareness of political matters and position of the candidates. The news updates and political video

especially succeeded in increasing the knowledge, whereas the active discussion of politics on social media was restricted. There were different levels of trust in political information: some students stated that they had a high level of confidence in the content, but many said that they had a slight or moderate level of trust, and the exposure to misinformation was a limiting aspect. Online platforms like X/Twitter supplied timely information and opportunities to discuss, although the overall use was so minimal that they did not impact the trust and engagement.

The impact of social media on election turnout was mediocre. News and updates, political videos and memes were found to be the most convincing materials, and formal party campaigns and messages of candidates had less influence. The findings show that social media majorly serves as a channel of political awareness and narrative-making, and not necessarily as a platform that dictates an election.

These results are of various implications. Social media can be used to offer transparent and factual information to young voters so that they can make informed choices by policy makers and electoral authorities. Another way in which universities can encourage students to be responsible in how they assess political content is by encouraging digital literacy and critical thinking. In the effort to attract young voters, political players ought to focus more on the credible and informative message instead of the emotional and viral messages. The variables that might require examination in future studies include peer influence and exposure to algorithms to gain a deeper insight into the subtle way various social media platforms, such as X/Twitter, affect political behavior.

Altogether, the impact of social media on increasing the level of political awareness and discussion is significant among the students of the university, whereas the influence on the increase in the turnout is moderate and depends on the type of content, trust, and the interest of the user.

Conclusion

The 2024 Pakistan General Elections showed how social media is being actively involved in political

communication, particularly among the university students. Facebook, Instagram, X/Twitter, Tik Tok, WhatsApp, and YouTube were the chief channels of accessing the political information, following the campaign progress, and participating in discussions. Using the Uses and Gratifications Theory, this paper demonstrates that students had an intentional aim to use social media to fulfill their informational and cognitive requirements and this led to political awareness, stimulated discussion, and had an impact on voting intentions. Meanwhile, students experienced such issues as misinformation, biased content, and unequal access to the digital technologies, which showed that social media could empower people but at the same time be a source of manipulation.

This research is limited in a number of ways. The study targeted very few participants of 160 students at a university, and this might not be the overall electorate. Only ten respondents were interviewed to provide qualitative data, which has reduced the transferability of the findings. The issue of self-reported data allows us to believe that there could have been biases of social desirability or recall and the disparity in internet access and digital devices did influence the use of social media by the students. Also, the research has only explored one electoral year and further insight into the long-term trends of political media consumption would be limited. Lastly, as much as the study factored in the aspects of misinformation and propaganda it failed to quantify the way which algorithms or fake news spread affected voter opinion.

Despite these constraints, the research is quite clear that social media has been at the center of political awareness and involvement among the Pakistan university students. These insights can help policymakers and educators to improve digital literacy, support credible political news, and engage with online information critically, in turn, facilitating sound political participation and empowering the democratization of the process.

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