Emerging Role of Social Media in Political Activism: Perceptions and Practices

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ABSTRACT

Social media is a tool that allows people to create and share different ideas, information and pictures/videos. It is an online way of communication to develop interaction and collaboration among people. Thus, social media might be changing the attitude and behavior of youth. It also spreads awareness among people by creating different online pages and accounts for sharing their agendas and information via these mediums. Role of social media in building the public perception is being analyzed. The study also examines the role of Facebook and Twitter in influencing political activism. It also intends to assess the level of empowerment due to awareness through social media. Survey method was used as a strategy to collect primary data. This study will enable us to understand the emerging role of social media in political activism and significant role of the online social media in political change.
Key Words: Social media, Political Activism, Perceptions, Facebook, Twitter

Introduction

There was a time when people have to wait for daily newspaper to see about occurrences of their nearby and worldwide. To acquire the information and update, public was reliant on newspaper, TV or Radio for different matters. However, these days public is more connected by the world everywhere because of the convention of computers/phones. As there is much progress in communication tools, it has brought ease to develop link among people, family, associates, friends plus other communal artists. People have switched from the older communicational mediums like TV, newspaper and radio by consuming the services of advanced media such as Text messages, E-mails, Facebook, Blogs, Myspace, Twitter and so on, the innovative information tools of enabling speedy interaction and intellectual cross sections.

Social media is a modern innovation all over the world as well as it is essential source of political activism so it has significance to be considered and trail on. It is functioning through its platform comprising of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other social websites. It got the influence to transform the methods through which political as well as social activities are prepared and implemented.

Most significantly, media has the capability to give back control in the hands of voters. It suggests enthusiasm, aptitude and chance mainly in students very much. In prospect it would play the important role in the politics. Pakistan is the 2nd biggest Muslim country in regard of population (180 million). It is a country where we can say that political activism show up in early 2007. Vali Nasr, an intellectual of Middle East as well as foreign policy mentor of the White House, in his latest book, The Expendable Nation, states that those who trust that the continuing political and economic crisis of Pakistan could create a "Pakistan Spring," might be challengeable. He further stated, "Pakistan had its spring in 2008 when its lawyers, media, students, and civil society joined hands to send General Musharraf packing."

However in Pakistan, the Internet first made its appearance in 1995. According to the Internet World Stats of 2013 the country positions 8th on the list of highest 10 Internet users among the countries in Asia. The social media sites like YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, and other social and political blogs are obtaining recognition, mostly by youth of the Pakistan as well as the internet literate public. In June 2010, the statistics of Internet consumers extended to 20 million in the country by an 11.5% penetration proportion as per given by the Internet World Stats of 2013.

This penetration varies abruptly by the registration ratio for graduate studies in the Pakistan that is 6.4 % according to the Global Education Database of 2009. So we can say that the internet approval level in Pakistan is approximately dual the amount of the advance education level. English language capability is the core cause for associating internet dispersal with higher literacy rate in Pakistan. As English is the main language over the cyberspace, the literate masses in Pakistan are earning the maximum from this communication tool. Unlike the remaining population of the country, these net users can interconnect effortlessly in the English language. Objectives of the study are to analyze role of social media in building the students' perception. It also intends to examine the role of Facebook and Twitter in influencing political activism. Furthermore, to assess level or degree of awareness among students through social media.

Research Hypothesis

Social media might have played role in bringing about changes in perceptions of students regarding political activism.

Social media is a tool that allows people to create and share different ideas, information and pictures/videos. It is an online communication, a way dedicated to develop interaction and collaboration among people. Thus, social media might be changing the attitude and behavior of youth. It also spreads awareness among people by creating different online pages and accounts by giving their agendas and information via these techniques. This study will enable us to understand the

emerging role of social media in political activism, also the significance and association of online social media in political change.

Now, there are some main podiums of social media which are Facebook and Twitter. Facebook is very common stage now days as well as very significant platform of social media. It was launched by student of Harvard, Mark Zuckerberg in 2004 as a medium to remain connected with friends and families. Firstly it was implemented by high school and then college students, but in 2012 Face Book has full grown to 845 million active universal users.

Twitter was launched in 2006. It is another social media site and also a micro blogging facility which has increased to more than 300 million users from 2011. Usually, user can upload the photos, videos and/or text of 140 characters maximum. It is known as very important platform of social media. The platform given by social media is also giving new means to motivate citizen commitment in politics as well as in political mobilization. There is a discussion in the works of researchers on social activities as representatives of democratic contribution, communication and the political mobilization. It is agreed that social media is playing very positive role in developed countries like UK, USA, Italy, Australia, Finland and Canada etc. Its role can't be avoided all over the world.

Awareness of social media seems quite necessary for students but also for other people for the reason that it is dominant all over the world, because of this the popular revolutions in the Arab world have happened and were really intimidating long rooted dictatorships as well as authoritarian regimes ended. The revolts have also been labelled as the Facebook and/or Twitter revolutions, emphasizing the role of the social media in political activism and transformation. The utilization of the social media in joint action in Arab states is not a new marvel, since the tools of social media have clear arbitrated politics in the region during the last decade.

Various thinkers suggest that Syrian protesters did not utilize social media in the revolt against the administration, however the inverse is valid. On the other hand, the Syrian revolution is thought to be one of a kind in that it was creative in its utilization of online networking, and this in itself ought to be inspected. At this point, it is not suggesting that the Syrians are novel or distinctive, however essentially expressing that **"need is the mother of invention"**, and that because of the brutality and mistreatment of the Syrian administration notwithstanding media power outages, the Syrians imagined better approaches to utilize social media to their advantage and to assist their revolution.

To discuss that whether social media is beneficial for political activism or not, there are few examples which go in the favor of social media from latest history as concerning to political activism. Protests in Bahrain, Egypt and Syria, these massive dissents were held because of mobilization of common people by social media. Its role endures to be worthwhile in activating and mobilizing people to emphasis on matters which are observed as main issues and in preparing public opinion between various people to get involved in the political procedure of power and democratization.

Review of Literature

Mass media has been serving the people all across the world by different means. However, further apart from mass media; social media has been taken by general public for interaction and entertainment. With the passage of time, newer technology is coming in more convenient way. Thus, people can gain immediate comments and feedback. Empirical studies that have been done in the past until now shows that media surely influence youngsters in many different ways, for instance their attitude and behaviors.

As indicated by Kugelman (2012) social media in Pakistan as a specialized apparatus is utilized as a part of five ways; breaking stories disregarded by conventional media; preparing individuals for social and different causes; advancing and arranging humanitarian portions of problems and issues; dissident for social reasons; and quickening correspondence in the middle of government officials and their masses. Since there is a development of TV in Pakistan and electronic media need to be appreciated of providing an extraordinary level of opportunity, group of spectators more often than not satisfy their instructive needs from these channels. Online networking is basically used to mingle consequently the part relies on its utilization designs**.**

The article of Rita Safranek (2012) gives an honest analysis on the emerging role of social media in the dissent phenomenon unveiled over the globe in 2009 and then onwards. The protest marvel holds various popular and penetrating issues ranging from the demands for social developments, absolute rage against industrial as well as bureaucratic corruption, conviction of austerity measures which were taken by different governments on expenses for social facilities and the request for political enclosure in past autocratic countries. As per Okorie and Tunji's (2011) assumption, the youth uses social media so actively that the sites which are being used are a part of their daily activities. A study reveals that one half of the youth aged 12-17 logs on to their social networking websites daily. One fourth logon many times per day and the rest logon to Facebook at least one time a day and some logon to Facebook around five days a week.

A study proposes that new media instruments advance opportunity, speed up the procedure of democratization and engage activists to battle against authoritarian administrations (Aday et al. 2010). Web journals, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube as new media structures have assumed a notable part in political clashes especially with reference to Middle East governmental issues. "Middle Easterner Spring" has promoted the idea of online networking influencing governmental issues. As indicated by the World Internet Users and Population Stats, Egypt falls in the main twenty nations with the most elevated number of web clients. Lewis (2010) observed that people who use social media aren't just mere users but rather they create or produce information. Facebook, YouTube and Twitter give people the right to communicate and share the news all around the world. Loreto (2009) analyses that social media possess a nature which makes it

easier for the people to communicate. It has the means for people to interact with each other and not only that but people can instantly give their feedbacks. This knowledge is not only amongst adults but also teenagers and through this they are becoming more informed. Chadwick (2009) says that the internet's influence belongs to the capability to deliver by a sovereign arena of communication. In it, citizens can autonomously take part in discussion farther from the supervisory power of state, enormous media organizations as well as arrangements of social inequity that enforces on their everyday lives.

Emerging media innovations has significantly impacted the political correspondence in the entire world (Saqib Riaz 2007). On the other hand, its belongings are more obvious in the created parts of the world where this technology is effectively accessible. In any case, it has additionally affected the practice of political correspondence in the emerging nations. These states are presently giving more attention to the spread of advanced technology like internet and cellular telephones and so forth. It has been found that the new media innovation has changed the political states of mind and practices in the nations where it is utilized regularly. The developing countries can also embrace the same approach to get a positive change in the political states of mind and attitude of their community. The wide-extend accessibility of the internet in the far-away country territories of the Third World States including Pakistan is a remarkable test in such manner. When, this trial is met, there will be an enormous positive change in the general public. It will advance a society of patience and understanding. This society of political resistance would then lead Pakistani society to the way of improvement, development and political solidity.

Another analysis suggests that online activist groups have appeared as an essential innovative space in politics as well as culture in which diverse groups and individuals have utilized emergent technologies to deliver novel social associations and methods of political prospect (Kahn and Kellner 2004). Consequently, those keen in politics should be obvious on the significant role of new public spheres and should mediate consequently, whereas critical cultural philosophers has the concern of enlightening students in the cultural or subcultural frameworks that eventually add up to the abilities that will empower them to take an interest in the continuous battle essential in politics.

Significance of Social Media for Politics

Governmental policies along with related issues and media get influenced by social environment and consequently has its effects on the society. Social media has brought about more extensive types of social, economic as well as cultural variations which include; a movement from advancement to post advancement; escalating procedures of globalization; a substitution in the West during the industrial period of development by a "postindustrial" information era; the decentering of built up and incorporated geopolitical commands. Information technology has hugely encouraged the communication development and mass

media has risen as universal and covering plans of politics. Simba (2009) in his research related to Obama's political movement acknowledged that Obama magnificently involved new voters through utilizing social media and online networking that encouraged great backing.

Usage of new media in the sphere of politics can be assessed by a study referring to social media utilization in Pakistan by Kugelman (2012) is connected in the area of politics that are:

Breaking Stories Ignored by Traditional Media

Social media can break news stories disregarded by the customary media and sets motivation for other media. New media has presented the idea of digital circle which is complicating and mixing the boundaries of local, national and international communities. Individuals can transfer, offer, deliver, course, and consider political material from anyplace whenever they want. Consideration looking for systems lead to the era of new and representation in matter that shows up on other new media. For instance news story on Malala Yousafzai effectively caught the concern of social media clients and provoked the era of other related issues on different media including Blogs, YouTube, Facebook, TV channels and so on.

Mobilizing People for Social and Other Campaigns

Individuals are utilizing new media for campaigns, inspiring and assembling individuals to make desired move. Restoration of judiciary in 2009 is an obvious case of this activation. NICL, Steel Mills, Hajj Scam are a couple of cases that confronted feedback and weights from online networking.

Promoting and Coordinating Humanitarian Aspects of Social Issues

"The YouTube video of soldiers engaging with the local population, playing football with children and saving a kidnapped Iraqi is an effort to humanize an inhuman war." Among the calamities like earthquake of 2005 and 2010's flood, new media helped individuals to spread and direct sympathetic aspects.

Activist for Social Causes

New media advances are empowering individuals to conquer the points of confinement of space and time, belief system and personality. Individuals can contribute in political issues through new media that outcome in the development and coordination of political exercises in a borderless world. Petitions and support battles have been started by clients of online networking for distinctive reasons. Blasphemy issue, Dr. Aafia Siddiqi case and so forth have been advanced through petitions and support movements on social media.

Accelerating Communication between Politicians and Their Publics

Concerning political differences, Zaller (1999) writes, "In the old days, political disagreements were settled in backroom deals among party big shots… But in the new environment, disagreements are fought out in the mass media and settled in the court of public opinion. The weapons of combat are press conferences, photo opportunities, news releases, leaks to the press, and 'spin.' When the stakes are especially high, TV and radio advertisements may be used. Politicians still make backroom deals, but only after their relative strength have been established in the public game of media politics." New media has facilitated this procedure and gave greatest chances to individuals to take an interest in this change**.**

Effect of New Media on Pakistan's Politics

Aday et al., (2010) suggest to evaluating the effects of new media on five levels; individual transformations; intergroup relations; collective action; regime policies; and external attention. The effect of new media on the elements of Pakistan politics is investigated on the above-mentioned five levels**.**

Individual Transformations

Social media has given the chance of expanded awareness at all levels with ease. Individuals are getting messages on their mobiles by political gatherings. PTI presented the idea of getting its enrollment through SMS. Election Commission of Pakistan is additionally utilizing mobiles to confirm people in voter list. A smart phone empowers its client to unite with the world in endless ways and encourages being multi-tasking. Individuals can watch news on TV and can interface with social media in the meantime. Information gaining arrangements are more dynamic. Remarks and response on political issues and occasions surface and socialize all the while.

Intergroup Relations

Pakistan is a mixed country with horizontal as well as vertical cleavages. New media has functioned as a medium where individuals from different backgrounds and dissimilar ideologies can cooperate and interact. Petitions and promotion movements have been started by consumers of social media for various reasons. Social media has been playing a part in increasing communication among politicians and their people.

Collective actions

Individuals are utilizing new media for introducing movements, rousing and assembling individuals to extend intended move. In 2009, Restoration of Judiciary

is an obvious example of this activation. Social media is encouraging the procedure of accountability. The defilement of National Insurance Corporation Limited (NICL), Steel Mill fraud case, rental power project corruption, wrongdoing of trusts by service of religious undertakings (Hajj scandal) in 2011 are some of examples that demonstrate individuals' cautious investment through social media. Disrespect laws and related issues connected with numerous individuals to reflect and take an interest. Request for Aafia Siddiqui on social media was marked by more than a million clients.

Regime Policies

New media has allowed viewers to report political disputes and occasion which influence the policy making procedures. The agenda setting theory of media proposes how media motivation moves onto open public motivation and after that influences upon strategy agenda. With the innovative media, public is more enabled and can possibly influence on standard media agenda as well as strategy plan. Ashraf Chaudhry composed on Facebook, **"**Can I burn Raiwind and Bilawal House and then pay rupees 2 lacs to Nawaz and Zardari? Rulers have zero shame quotients**."** Social media once in a while updates news.

External Attention

Innovative media has presented the idea of cyber circle that is not quite the same as Habermas' idea of 'public sphere' as well as 'private sphere.' Cyber circle is obscuring and mixing the divisions of worldwide and local; changing local into worldwide and worldwide into local. Because of channel and decision situated environment media demand to look for viewers. Now if it is "Lal Masjid", "Drone attacks", 'Salala check post' or 'Malala issue' this new media may welcome the impact of worldwide characters by the advantage of being universal.

Research Methodology

This study aims at identifying and examining the emerging role of social media in political activism particularly the role of Facebook and Twitter with reference to the perception of university students. Survey method is used to collect the relevant information. Questionnaire was developed for the collection of primary data.

Students of two main public sector universities of Lahore were recognized as population that are Government College University Lahore (GCU) and University of the Punjab (PU). These students were precisely taken from the department of Political Science, History, Economics, Urdu and English Literature to meet the criteria of the study. The sample was selected by using the technique of convenience sampling. Only M.Phil students were selected for the research survey. It includes both male and female. Descriptive statistical analysis was applied to the collected data.

Political Activism through Social Media

To analyze the emerging role of social media in political activism, perception of university students was analyzed. In regard with social media, Facebook and Twitter were mainly focused as most of the students use these web sites to interact with their friends and family or to get information and share information. Particularly M.Phil students were taken as the population and research questionnaire was distributed among them to analyze their perception. Statistical analysis is given in frequency table and graphs for representation.

The students were asked about their use Facebook and Twitter. After analyzing the data it was observed that 84% students use only Facebook while remaining answered that they use both Facebook and Twitter and no one use only Twitter. The finding through survey presented in Figure 1 shows that the popularity of Facebook is more than any other social media site among the youth of Pakistan. Perhaps, various fun elements attract the youth more than the Twitter. It is observed that every student has almost 150-200 friends on their Facebook profile which keep them socially active and provide them satisfaction to maintain these online social links. Facebook, unlike twitter allows its users to manage their profiles by adding their personal interests, photos, videos, religious and political views, favorite book to favorite movies and to develop virtual image of their personality.

Figure 1: Representation of Percentages of the respondents stating use of social media, 2015.
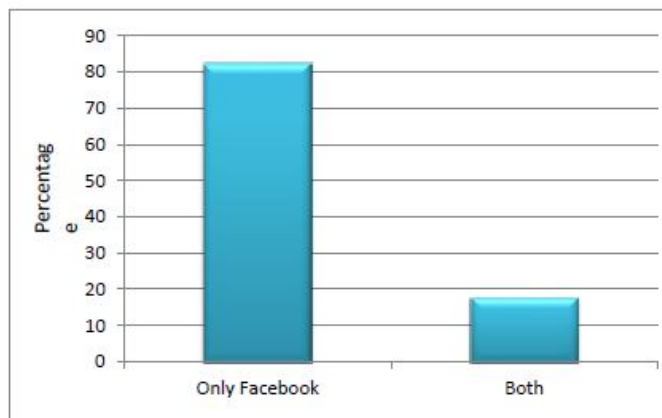
In response to the question regarding frequency about use of Facebook to express political views. A very few stated once in a week, three-fourth use it said 2-3 times in a week and rest of them never used Facebook to express their political views. The outcome of findings given in Table 1 indicates that they participate in political discussion on Facebook 2-3 times in a month. Facebook is making youth to become politically active and they do take interest in politics related matters which keep them involved in political issues on social media.

When asked regarding frequency of using Twitter to express their political views, about one-half of them found to do so 2-3 times in a month whereas 37.5% never used Twitter to express their political views. The findings are shown in Table 1. It indicates that they participate in political discussion on Twitter 2-3 times in a month. However, this site is used less as compared to Facebook to express the political views. People do share tweets, reply to them and follow the politicians. It is also making them politically informed and participative. They also share and spread information on this site.

Table 1: Percentages of the respondents stating use of Facebook and Twitter to express their political views.

Response Categories		Facebook Frequency	Facebook Percentages	Twitter Frequency	Twitter Percentages
Valid	Once in a week	4	3.3	57	47.5
	2-3 times in a month	71	59.2	0	0
	Never	27	22.5	45	85
	Total	102	85	102	15
Missing	System	18	15	18	15
Total		120	100	120	100.0

When asked about following any political pages on Facebook and Twitter about one-half of the students said yes while rest of them did not follow such pages. Youth not only use these sites for the purpose of entertainment or to connect with friends but they also follow the political pages on these sites as shown in Table 2. This study shows that youth do read the information being presented on the social media sites regarding politicians. Promoting political activities is famous among youth according because it brings the platform for the students to use it for fair and balanced political activism. It means that these sites have not only changed their views but also politics related pages on it increased their insight regarding politics and make them politically active by posting articles, sharing photos and videos and participate in the discussion. So through these pages they not only get information but also share it with others unlike newspaper on which they can't give their own views on any news.
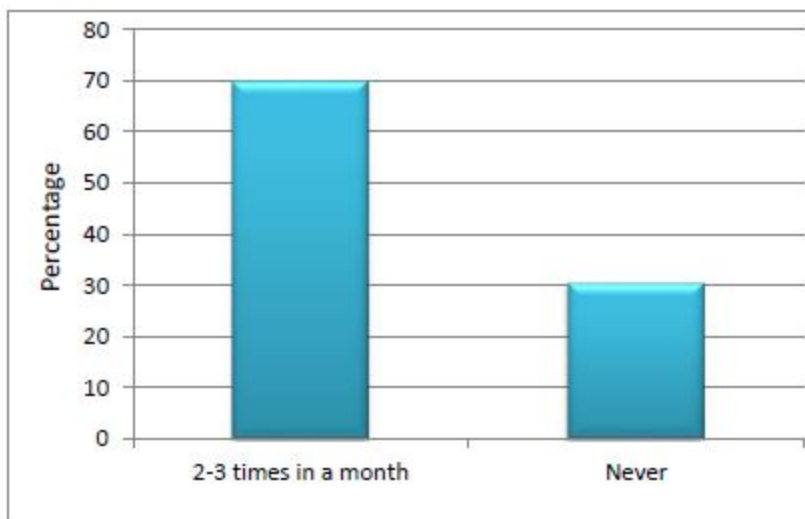
In response to the question regarding asking friends to participate in political events/actions which they support on Face book and Twitter slightly less than half responded positively while 37.5% said no. They do not only follow these pages but also invite their friends to participate in political events/ actions which they themselves support on Facebook and Twitter as shown in Table 2. This indicates their interest regarding the politics.

Table 2: Percentages of the respondents stating those who follow any political pages and ask their friends to participate in political events/actions on Facebook or Twitter.

Response Categories		Follow Political Pages Frequency	Follow Political Pages Percentage	Ask Friends to participate Frequency	Ask friends to participate Percentage
Valid	Yes	57	47.5	57	47.5
	No	45	37.5	45	37.5
	Total	102	85	102	85.0
Missing	System	18	15	18	15.0
Total		120	100	120	100.0

A question was also asked about how often the respondent use these sites for promoting political activities. About two-third use these sites 2-3 times in a month while 25.8% said that they never used these sites for this purpose. They not only participate in political discussion on these sites 2-3 times in a month as well as promote the political activities as shown in Figure 2. Facebook and Twitter are making youth to become politically active and they do take interest in politics related matters which keep them involve in the political issues social media. So we can say that these sites are now making youth aware about the political as well as social issues. These sites are platform for the students to spread political information at faster rate than before. Most of the political discussion revolve around the performance of political parties and loop holes due to the poor management of the political system.

Figure 2: Representation of Percentages of the respondents stating promotion of political activities on social media sites.

In response to the question regarding engagement of the respondents in political activism before using Facebook and Twitter, about one-fourth stated yes while the majority said did not use it before that. By time computers and internet became an integral part of the society. Students who were not interested to get involved in any kind of political activity become more interactive in political issues. Social media has potential to make people participate in the different issues whether they are related to politics, social or economic. It has become a tool for the activism. From the result of the survey as given in Figure 3 indicate that before social media (Facebook and Twitter) youth was less inclined towards politics.

Figure 3: Representation of Percentages of the respondents stating engagement in political activism before using Facebook and Twitter.
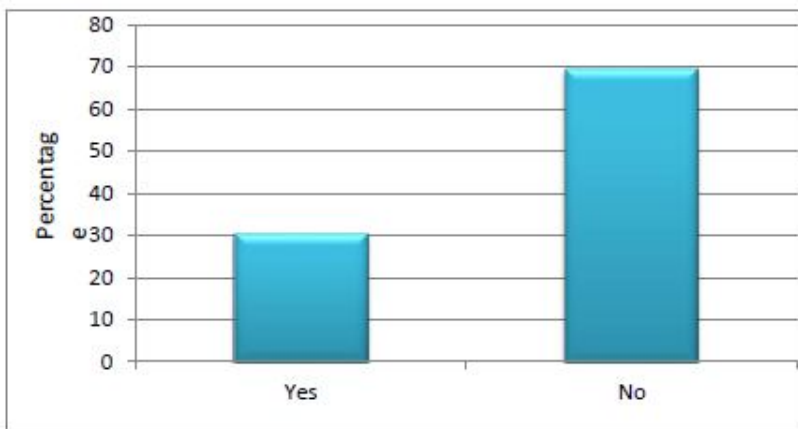
Asking about their view on the main medium in which they usually find out about political news or information, 63.3% said that they found about news on newspaper, 11.7% said news channels and 10% said that news on the internet. As most of the time of the students spend in universities and libraries they read newspaper there and get required information regarding politics from newspapers as shown in Table 3 rather reading it on internet.

In response to the question regarding perceived better source of information over half of the respondents were of the opinion that newspaper is the better source of information, 15% said news channels while remaining follow news on the internet. Students depend on newspaper as more reliable source of information as given in Table 3 because in universities, more emphasis is given on the print media rather than social media. They were of the opinion that these sites always do not always post authentic information and sometimes become just means of propaganda.

Table 3: Percentages of the respondents stating main way in which they usually find out about political news or information and better source of information.

Response Categories		Find out about news Frequency	Find out about News Percentages	Better source of information Frequency	Better source of information Percentages
Valid	Newspaper	76	63.3	72	60.0
	News channels	14	11.7	18	15.0
	News on the internet	12	10	12	10.0
	Total	102	85	102	85.0
Missing	System	18	15	18	15.0
Total		120	100	120	100.0

Their opinion was asked about role of social media played role in voters turn out in general elections of 2013 about one-third agreed and almost the same proportion disagreed whereas a few were of the opinion that to some extent social media played role in voters turn out. Social media is contributing in increasing the voters' turnout. According to the results of survey shown in Table 4, in the last general elections of 2013 the elections were highlighted through the social media activities which definitely increased the voters turn out. These sites gave an opportunity to the people to choose their future Prime Minister and its cabinet by following their agenda and activities on social media.

They were asked about their opinion regarding results of the general elections held in 2013 and its similarity to the political movements on social media, one-fourth stated yes, 35% said no and 25% thought that it was the case to some extent. The results of these elections were not that much similar to the polls conducted on these sites as indicated in Table 4 because the opposition party claimed that elections were rigged and they take the case to the Supreme Court.

Table 4: Percentages of the respondents stating role of social media in voters turn out and similarity of results in general elections of 2013 with movements on social media.

Response Categories		Social media's role in voters turn out Frequency	Social media's role in voters turn out Percentages	Similarity between 2013 elections with movements on social media Frequency	Similarity between 2013 elections and movements on social media Percentages
Valid	Yes	44	36.7	30	25.0
	No	42	35	42	35.0
	To some extent	16	13.3	30	25.0
	Total	102	85	102	85
Missing	System	18	15	18	15
Total		120	100	120	100

Their opinion was asked about perceived benefit of these websites for youth in Pakistan to be politically active, some of them thought that these web sites were beneficial to great extent, 68.3% were of the opinion that they were beneficial to some extent while rarely not at all was stated. According to the survey results, these sites are to some extent beneficial for the youth of Pakistan to be politically active as shown in Figure 4 because social media provides awareness among youth regarding different social and political information and also helped them to create events as well as groups for the awareness of other people about various issues. It has also become voice of the youth and also provides different kinds of entertainment like videos, photos and keep in touch with their families living abroad and within the country.

Figure 27: Representation of Percentages of the respondents stating whether these websites are beneficial for youth of Pakistan to be politically active.
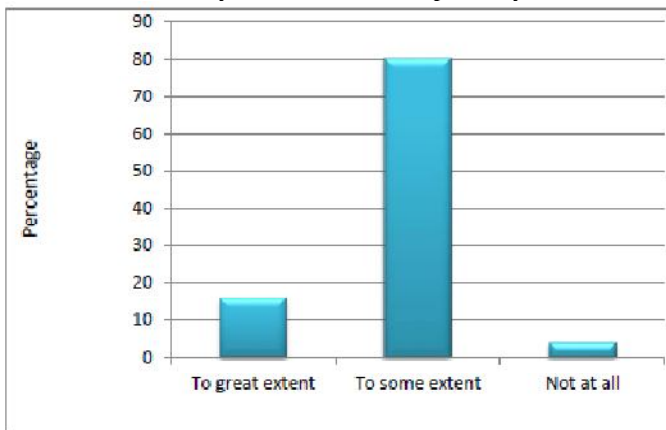
Conclusion

In the era of technological revolution, the enormous popularity as well as dependence on social media has doubled since the last few years. From the time when the use of internet was a decent yet occasional mean of communication till today, the impact of internet networking has not only doubled, but also doubled in terms of its impact on the society. Today, we rely on the internet for almost every piece of information as well as means of communication and socializing with those we wish to.

In the present research it has been proved via political revolutions and outraged caused not by a siren and tanks but a simple social media website has so much power to change perspectives as well as temperament of certain individuals participating in social debates. There is no doubt that social media has provided a platform to both young and old to be a part of an ongoing political revolt or to be a promoter/ ambassador through social media.

Therefore, we can conclude from the above analysis that online networking has turned into the most effective way of getting information. It has taken over through the stages of Facebook and Twitter. Social media has turned into a critical asset for the preparation of the aggregate activity and the creation, association and usage of social empowerment around the globe. It has become a medium to be up to date about the socio-political happenings around us as well as for getting and sharing information. It has become a platform for the people to express their political views.

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