

Social Media's Impact on Youth Political Socialization: A Multan Case Study of Opinion Formation and Attitudinal Shifts

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Abstract

The research under discussion examines how social media affects young people's political socialization in Multan, Pakistan. It assesses how youth utilize social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to acquire political preferences, become politically conscious, and participate in political activities. Research among college students shows that social media significantly affects political knowledge and involvement. According to the study, 57.3% of young people use social media for political knowledge, and 89.7% of them use it to spread political information. The article's findings, however, demonstrate that even a reliance on social media does not indicate a greater degree of political engagement or expertise. Social media use has given Multan's youth a fresh outlook and a democratic political conversation. However, social media use may also lead to a number of obstacles, including political division and the spread of misinformation.

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Introduction

The Internet, digital communication, and social media have reached every part of the world today because of computers and networking technology. Communication is how people share new ideas with each other. Communication can be powerful and aims to get the reactions we want from what we say. The media is a key source of news, helps people understand politics, and can change how they vote. Today, the media's ability to influence people has grown rapidly in recent years because of new technology. Print, online, and social media influence the community and people's relationships with each other. The technologies used for social media came after computer-based communication. The word "technology" usually brings to mind the machines and tools used in different processes (Shakeel et al., 2025).

These days, a variety of campaigns use internet media platforms to rally their supporters. Youth students, who are now the primary consumers of media applications, have seen a shift in their lifestyles as a result of the present media's digitalization. The media is extremely important in today's connected world for spreading knowledge and keeping people up to date on global events. Communication has strongly affected people's lives in many different ways throughout history. Social media is a big part of our lives today. Technology will keep getting better every day. The world is moving to a new way of using media. Traditional media is being replaced by social media. These days, it's an important part of life; it helps people talk and connect with each other. Social media has a

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growing impact on people and society, affecting our daily lives, social standards, and social norms in many areas, including the economy (Khan & Shahbaz, et al., 2015).

The world feels smaller now, like a global village, mainly because of social media's big impact on connecting people everywhere. The world is moving into a modern time with new types of digital media. Digital media began early in the 21st century and quickly became a popular way to communicate. Social media can have both good and bad effects on its users (Safdar & Abbasi et al., 2025).

This article evaluates specifically at how social media sites impact the public and politicians in Pakistan. It explored how social media influences the public and democracy in the country. Social media plays an important role in promoting democracy in Pakistan and helps political parties share their ideas and plans. Social media allows users to connect quickly, and it has become very important for political parties. All parties actively use it to reach their goals (Aslam et al., 2021).

People have shifted from reading newspapers and watching TV to using digital media. Social media has different features like talking with sound and video, texting, sharing pictures, and sending live updates. Social media is a place online where people can talk to each other about news, information, learning, and entertainment. It depends on what people choose and like. This is a place where they can share their thoughts, opinions, and preferences freely. Social media is easy to use and quick to access. Signing up for social media is very simple, and you can agree to the terms with just one click. Young people can talk to others online using social media. They can send messages, chat with friends and family, share pictures, post ideas, make comments, and do other activities. Twitter and Facebook are two well-known social media sites that quickly share information (Haq et al., 2025).

Many people think these sites are important for influencers, businesses, government organizations, political groups, and famous people. Twitter and Facebook have become places where people share political information and discuss politics. People tend to connect with others who share their beliefs. On Facebook, you can click the "like" button, which helps people and groups with similar ideas talk to each other. People who use social media can follow their politicians and get updates whenever they post something. Every day, more people are using Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. This helps students easily find information on almost any subject. When young people get involved in their communities today, it shows they will likely be active in the future (Malik et al., 2026).

Youth generally refers to people aged 17 to 26 who are going through a period of change from being a child to becoming an adult. Although meanings can differ in different places, young people are usually seen as energetic, flexible, and willing to try new things. University students was often seen as important part of young people. They usually have access to gadgets like smartphones and laptops, as well as the internet, which help them get involved in politics today. In politics, young people are becoming more and more important. Young people are actively taking part in political demonstrations and discussions. Early involvement is a sign that they will continue to be interested in politics, which makes them valuable members of political parties. Despite their contributions to politics, young people do not take part in the formal political decision-making process. As a result, it is getting harder for them to develop their abilities and leadership (Salam & Jamil et al., 2024).

Social media platforms have grown in importance as a means for young people to voice their political beliefs. Politicians in Pakistan used Facebook and Twitter to interact with young people during the 2013 election. Social media provides young people with a way to support politicians, participate in politics, and start public conversations. However, the dissemination of false information and phony action is another problem with social media. Research conducted in Multan reveals that "the social networking media has great influence on social and political learning of its users". A study examining the "linkage of political consciousness and social media" among higher education students in Multan found a positive correlation between social media usage and political consciousness, with a significant effect of social media usage on both political consciousness and political involvement (Boyd & Ellison et al., 2007).

Social media is quickly becoming a vital platform for political activism and interaction. It is a contemporary type of communication and information technology that is currently developing quickly. Instant advances in new media technologies have enabled previously passive mass media customers to become active content producers on digital media platforms. Millions of Pakistanis have profiles on different social media sites and the social media usage is fast expanding throughout Pakistan. Social media platforms are not just available in Pakistan; they also enable young Pakistanis to maintain social connections with people from other nations and to engage with young people around the world. All social media platforms have user-generated aspects, which are defined by openness and collaboration. Political views and opinions must be expressed clearly online if social media campaigns are to succeed. Social media users can interact with one another online by posting political criticism on blogs and social networking sites as well as sharing multimedia feedback (Clarke et al., 2010).

Social media influencers have emerged as powerful opinion leaders for Pakistani youth. Research exploring the connection between following social media influencers and trust in them for opinion building found that "a majority of the students prefer to access Internet sources for news and information". The study identified a significant correlation ($\beta = .58$) between use of political influencers and opinion building among followers. This represents a substantial effect, suggesting that influencers have become more influential than traditional political actors in shaping youth political views. Even non-political influencers who occasionally discuss political issues can shape political opinion among their followers, leveraging trust built in non-political domains (DeSilver et al., 2014).

Research on the effects of political visual images on social media found that "political visual images shared by political leaders on social media significantly influence the political attitudes, socialization, and engagement of young users". In simple words: photos, videos, and memes on social media have a powerful effect on how young people think about politics. A 30-second TikTok video can teach more about politics than a one-hour TV debate (Kamau et al., 2017).

Studies conducted in Multan have confirmed that Facebook's visual content related to political and social issues has significant psychological effects on youth. Research examining how university students in Multan interpret social media platforms found that "sensational and emotionally charged material could change people's viewpoints and impressions" (Anum, & Zulfiqar et al., 2024).

Statement of the Problems

The current study investigates "Social Media's Impact on Youth Political Socialization: A Multan Case Study of Opinion Formation and Attitudinal Shifts." Social media usage has been explored in different studies in relation with other variables related to politics. Political consciousness is a different concept from political engagement or political participation. Furthermore, it is not necessarily true that all who are politically engaged and influential via social media are also politically conscious. Therefore, it was imperative to examine the relationship between political consciousness and the use of social media in Pakistani higher education. Additionally, social media's role in political polarization is important as social media allows its users to read and examine selective content. The format of social media promotes sensationalism as well as dissemination of disinformation, which ultimately results in increasing polarization among youth.

Research Objectives

The research has been conducted to investigate the following objectives:

1. To evaluate the relationship between social media usage and political consciousness among youth in Multan
2. To identify how social media facilitates opinion formation and attitudinal shifts.

Hypothesis of the Study

H₁: There are no significant relationship between social media usage and political consciousness

H₂: Social media is no significant effect on political involvement

Significance of the Study

The results of the study will have theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, the study can be a part of the improvement of knowledge regarding the influence of social media on political socialization among youth in Pakistan. This study fills gap in literature specially in Higher Education sector of Pakistan thus it provides light on the impact of social media on political awareness, political awareness of university students in offline activities and what are the issue Pakistani students discuss on social media networks. The findings will practically support the process of creating strategies to effectively leverage the social media and to limit the impacts of polarization and disinformation on the process. The findings also contribute to the understanding of how to mobilise young people via digital means.

Research Methodology

The study was used quantitative research method. Quantitative research design is a systematic and structured way of data collection, analyzing, and interpreting numerical data to answer research questions and to test Hypotheses. This study used survey research methods to collect data from students.

Population of the Study

The target population of this study was higher education students in Multan. The universe for the present study was the students of higher education institutions in Multan, focusing on those who are users of social networking media.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The sample consisted of 160 students from Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, who were registered students of BS and Master Classes. Participants were selected from students. A survey method was employed to collect the data from the youth of Multan who are the users of social media.

Method of Data Collection

The data collection method used for this study was the survey method. Survey method was employed because it is an appropriate method for measuring respondents' opinions and attitudes towards political socialization. The data collection tool used to gather facts and findings from sample respondents was a questionnaire.

Research Instrument

The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire. The questionnaire was prepared in English and designed to collect information about demographic characteristics and social media usage patterns in relation to political consciousness and political involvement.

Validity and Reliability

For validation purposes, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts from the field of media studies and social sciences. For reliability purposes, respondents' responses were tested using Cronbach alpha process. Based on pilot testing, the instrument was found to be reliable and valid for the study.

Data Collection Procedure

The article collected data through questionnaires and personally visited the concerned departments. During data collection, the confidentiality of the participants was assured by using the data only for research purposes and keeping their identities hidden. The first and primary phase in the data collection process was to get motivation of the subjects to complete the questionnaire by self-introducing.

Data Analysis

The article analyzed data through descriptive statistical tools. Based on the responses received from respondents, SPSS was used to calculate the results. The article used appropriate statistical tests to examine the relationships between variables and test the hypotheses.

Results

A study conducted among 160 participants in Multan examined how young people use social media for political purposes. The results provide valuable insights into the political socialization of youth in Pakistan.

Table 1: Usage of Social Media by Youth for Political Purposes

Purpose of Social Media Usage	Other Purpose	Yes %	No
I share political information on social media	3.8	89.7	6.5
I use social media to get updates of political ion	1.7	57.3	41.0
I use social media groups where members is politics	2.7	48.5	48.8
I use social media to post, comment, share, like al views	3.5	61.0	35.5
I enjoy politics more than any other topic d on social media	4.9	52.2	42.9
I use social media to share political updates ny friends	3.2	19.6	77.2
I joined different political groups due to use of media	3.9	68.1	28.0
I invite people to participate in political y on social media	5.6	63.0	31.4
Social media motivates its users to engage in al activities	5.5	59.4	35.1

Purpose of Social Media Usage	Other Purpose	Yes %	No
There is significant content about politics on media	2.9	53.3	43.8
I prefer to watch a political video posted on media	1.7	65.9	32.4
I feel out of touch with politics when I have not been on social media	2.3	31.4	66.3
I feel that social media is a trustworthy source of political information	3.6	62.3	34.1
Average	3.87%	56.3%	47.1%

The table below shows the frequency of respondents using social media for political purposes. The overall results demonstrate that the respondents use social media for accessing, sharing and consuming political information. 89.7% of the respondents said they share political information on social media while 77.2% said they share political updates with their friends on social media. Likewise, 68.1% reported that they had joined other political organizations due to the use of social media, and 65.9% said they liked more political videos on social media.

The results also suggest that 63.0% of the respondents use social media to invite individuals to political engagement and 62.3% regard social media as a reliable source of political information. Moreover, 61.0% said they post, comment, share, or like political views on social media and 59.4% said social media encourages people to participate in political activities.

Some respondents, however, said they were less likely to be politically active via social media. For instance, 48.8% said that they did not use social media groups where people talk about politics, while 48.5% said they do. Likewise, 42.9% said they don't have a favorite topic on social media besides politics. Overall, the average response rate of other purposes is 3.87%, with an average of 56.3% saying "Yes" and 47.1% saying "No". This suggests that social media has a significant impact on respondents' political information dissemination and engagement.

What Predicts Political Engagement on Social Media?

Table 2: Social Media Influence on Political Participation of Youth

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Age	0.135	0.102	0.055	1.324	.186
Gender	0.258	0.110	0.093	2.347	.020*
Level of Education	-0.010	0.009	-0.039	-0.951	.341
Political Knowledge	-0.482	0.170	-0.115	-2.836	.005**

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Political Efficacy	-0.134	0.056	-0.099	-2.389	.017*
Interest in Politics	-0.195	0.046	-0.193	-4.239	.000***
Interpersonal Discussion	0.273	0.051	0.248	5.372	.000***
Social Media Dependence	0.225	0.021	0.405	10.312	.000***

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

The regression analysis looks at the effects of demographic and political variables on the dependent variable. The results indicate that the age and level of education are not statistically significant, but gender, political knowledge, political efficacy, interest in politics, interpersonal discussion and social media dependence are statistically significant.

The dependent variable ($B = 0.258$, $\beta = 0.093$, $t = 2.347$, $p = .020$) is positively correlated with the independent variable (gender), suggesting that gender is a significant predictor of the dependent variable. Political knowledge has a negative and significant effect ($B = -0.482$, $\beta = -0.115$, $t = -2.836$, $p = .005$). Similarly, political efficacy also shows a negative significant relationship ($B = -0.134$, $\beta = -0.099$, $t = -2.389$, $p = .017$).

Interest in politics has a negative and highly significant effect ($B = -0.195$, $\beta = -0.193$, $t = -4.239$, $p < .001$). In contrast, interpersonal discussion has a positive and highly significant effect ($B = 0.273$, $\beta = 0.248$, $t = 5.372$, $p < .001$). Social media dependence is the strongest predictor in the model with positive and highly significant relationship with the dependent variable ($B = 0.225$, $\beta = 0.405$, $t = 10.312$, $p < .001$). It has a standardized beta value ($\beta = 0.405$) indicating that it has a stronger contribution to the dependent variable among the other predictors.

However, age does not have a statistically significant effect ($B = 0.135$, $\beta = 0.055$, $p = .186$), and level of education is also not significant ($B = -0.010$, $\beta = -0.039$, $p = .341$). In general, the results indicated that social media dependence and interpersonal discussion are significant positive predictors, while the variables of political knowledge, political efficacy, and interest in politics have significant negative relationships with the dependent variable.

Gender Matters

The research revealed that gender is a key predictor in political engagement through social media. There was a higher proportion of males than females amongst the respondents who were actively involved in political activities on social media. This may be due to social roles or confidence in digital world. This assertion is supported by research that shows "males are more active in participating in political activities as compared to females.

Interestingly, those with a greater level of political knowledge were LESS inclined to get involved in politics on social media. This could be due to the fact that knowledge base trust social media as reliable sources. They may prefer traditional media, such as newspaper or TV news (Malik et al., 2026).

It was shown that interest in politics was a negative predictor of participation in politics on social media. This is a bit confusing initially. Why do individuals who care about politics refrain from discussing politics online? This is one of the reasons because it is called "political fatigue." Perhaps people are weary of internet discussions. They may prefer more formal means of involvement in politics (Salam & Jamil et al., 2024).

The study found that people who frequently discuss politics with friends and family are much more likely to participate politically on social media. This is a demonstration of how offline conversations and online political activities reinforce each other. There is a strong potential link between offline and online political discussion when individuals discuss politics face-to-face. There is a strong potential link between offline and online political discussion in the case of when people discuss politics face-to-face (DeSilver et al., 2014).

Social Media Dependence is the greatest factor.

The most powerful predictor of online political participation was social media dependence. Those who are heavy users of social media for information and communication are significantly more politically active on social media (Kamau et al., 2017).

The Good Side of Social Media

More Political Awareness

Social media use has raised young people's political awareness to previously unheard-of levels. They are aware of the events taking place in their individual nations. They are informed about political matters. They can talk about the politicians and the policies. A survey of university students in Multan found that there is a "positive correlation between social media usage and political consciousness" among young people. This indicates that young people's awareness of politics increases with their usage of social media. Additionally, there is a "significant effect of social media usage on political consciousness and political involvement" among young people.

Social media use has given people who didn't have a voice before one. It has made it possible for minority groups, women, and young people to voice their ideas. For each change, they are able to arrange themselves. According to research on young activism during Pakistan's 2024 general election, "the use of social media significantly enhances political interest, which in turn is a strong predictor of youth activism (Aslam & Latif et al., 2021)."

Quick Mobilization

When something important happens, social media helps people organize quickly. Campaigns like the **Aurat March** movement used social media to spread their message and organize events (Kamau et al., 2017).

The Dark Side of Social Media

Political Polarization

Social media may compel individuals to form extreme opinions. The algorithm presents content to us that we agree with. Consequently, this leads to "echo chambers" where one sees only one opinion about the matter. The study regarding polarization in politics in Pakistan shows that social media users tend to believe that "they are more likely to be surrounded by like-minded views on their social media platforms," particularly when it comes to TikTok. Moreover, having stronger populist beliefs is associated with higher levels of affective polarization, and a homogeneous social media environment strengthens this association (Ahmad & Diesner et al., 2012).

The research titled "The Relationship Between Social Media Usage and Political Socialization Among Youth In KP" discovered that social media usage has "a strong correlation to attitudes ($r=0.991$) and participation ($r=0.986$)."

Misinformation and Propaganda

Fiction is disseminated much faster than truth on social media sites. According to a study done in Multan, "60% of respondents feel that being repeatedly exposed to propaganda through social media influence their perceptions¹⁵".

According to the study, "students with higher levels of education are better equipped to detect propaganda methods" (ANOVA Test $p = 0.001$). This implies that uneducated youth are at greater risk of being deceived. The results of the Chi-Square test ($p = 0.001$) clearly revealed a strong correlation between social media usage and the spread of propaganda.

"Disinformation and Political Polarization" study proves that social media is a very important element in forming political biases in Pakistan.

Clicktivism vs. Real Activism

The fact of hitting the "like" button on an item and acting is very different. Many youth believe that spreading the information is enough for them. However, the true action is needed to bring about changes and not just hashtags.

As found by research conducted among college students of Sialkot, "majority of respondents showed increased awareness, but few converted this awareness into offline political participation. Moreover, exposure to alternative viewpoints was also hindered because of misinformation, partisanship, and echo chamber phenomenon." It clearly shows that "even though social media networks may aid in increasing awareness, it does not ensure the effective involvement in civic activities (Wang et al., 2018)."

According to the correlation analysis, there were no significant correlations found between social media dependence and factors such as political knowledge, efficacy, and interest. It appears that heavy usage of social media is not directly associated with involvement in politics. Some digital actions taken by people could just be shallow or for show.

Discussion

In particular, interpersonal discussion emerged as one of the most significant predictors of political participation on social media. The result indicates that political participation is socially facilitated. Those who talk about politics with their friends and families tend to participate politically by expressing themselves through the Internet.

Dependence on social media turned out to be the most important predictor of political participation on the web. With social media turning into main sources of information, they do not only provide users with the opportunity to see something political but also encourage them to engage in some actions.

However, there are no clear associations among social media dependency, political knowledge, efficacy and interest, which means that the two are relatively independent of each other. A person can be very dependent on social media for different reasons (socializing, entertaining, reading news) and still not be politically savvy, interested and efficacious. That is, social media is used as more of a means of exposure and performance than of ideology or engagement⁹.

According to studies conducted and presented at IAMCR 2025 conference, politics in Pakistan has always been populist in its character and younger generations tend to hold more populist political views. The greatest degree of polarization is seen in supporters of Imran Khan's PTI party, and the participants reported feeling surrounded by people who shared their political views on social media. TikTok played a major role in forming homogeneous political communities.

Conclusion

Social media has a significant impact on political knowledge and involvement, according to research conducted among college students. According to the study, 57.3% of young people use social media for political knowledge, and 89.7% of them use it to spread political information. The study's findings, however, demonstrate that even a reliance on social media does not indicate a greater degree of political engagement or expertise. Social media use has given Multan's young a fresh outlook and

democratic political conversation. However, social media use may also lead to a number of obstacles, including political division and the spread of misinformation.

Summary of Findings

This study explored the factors influencing political participation through social media among Pakistani youth. The key findings are:

- 89.7% of young people share political information on social media, and 57.3% use these platforms to stay informed about political events.
- People who rely heavily on social media are much more likely to participate politically on these platforms.
- People who discuss politics with friends and family are more likely to express their views online.
- People with more political knowledge may avoid social media for political discussions, possibly due to distrust of online information.
- The lack of correlation between social media reliance and political knowledge, efficacy, and interest suggests that online political actions may sometimes be superficial or performative.
- While social media plays a role in political socialization, its capacity to shape opinion and influence political activity is limited. However, political actors cannot ignore the opportunity provided by these platforms in the voter mobilization process.
- Students with more education are better suited to spot propaganda techniques, highlighting the importance of digital literacy.

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