LINKAGE OF POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN A POSITIVIST PARADIGM

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ABSTRACT

As a major medium for getting connected with each other and making oneself aware of different things, social media has been used by a lot of people, especially young people, to share information with each other and make oneself aware globally. In this study, social media usage was examined in relation to political consciousness and political involvement. The data has been collected using survey techniques among higher education students in Multan, Pakistan. Structured questionnaires have been disseminated among the students between the ages of 18-35 years. Based on the responses received from respondents, SPSS was used to calculate the results. A positive correlation between social media usage and political consciousness has been found. Also, a significant effect of social media usage has been sought on political consciousness and political involvement. The study findings suggest that another study may also be conducted in the future under different cultural contexts and adding a mediating or moderating variable such as the gender between these variables to achieve a different outcome.
Keywords: Political Consciousness, Political Involvement, Social Media, Youth, Positivist Paradigm, Linkage

Introduction:

Information and communication technology profoundly changed the course of history a decade ago. Social and political debates have been impacted by new media and technology. For instance, digital media has changed interpersonal interactions and communication patterns. There have been dozens of studies on key aspects of how social media is used by scholars in the fields of communications and media, political science, sociology, and international relations (Golan, Arceneaux, & Soule, 2019). It is essential to keep the public informed about current events, engage users, and motivate them to participate in offline political activities through the Internet. One of the biggest ways social media is affecting politics is by getting people involved. In a relatively short amount of time, politicians have learned that they need to establish social media presences in order to be taken seriously; at minimum, candidates must maintain popular public

hashtags. And so it's easy for anyone to watch any political figure—at any level—perhaps live, on her phone or tablet. Political discourse and participation have become impossible without the Internet. Political parties used the Internet to educate the public one-way initially. The internet and social media platforms have grown in importance as a means of spreading political information (McAllister, 2015). Certain academic discourses continue to spark considerable discussion over the political spectrum's growing usage of social media. Apart from election campaigns, social media evolutions are fostering an unparalleled degree of knowledge about modern global politics. Political Involvement encompasses a variety of behaviors through which citizens actively organize, discuss, or influence political events and systems. These activities may include voting, running for office, campaigning for a cause, serving as an activist, etc. They may be formal or informal; legal or illegal; peaceful or violent; successful or unsuccessful in achieving their goals. In the US 2016 presidential election, use of social media was a fundamental component of a strategy to spread Donald Trump's message. The campaign used social media like Twitter and especially Instagram to share small-scale personal moments with voters in a way that made it feel less detached from their experience. Some data scientists have identified the interactivity, low barrier to participation, and visual format of platforms like Instagram appealing for politicians. As a result of social media, the political scene has substantially changed, and the information liberation process has been accelerated faster than conventional media (Dutta and Bhat, 2017).Digital technology has become an integral part of our political processes. The growth of virtual platforms have not only allowed us to participate in political processes more easily and actively but they have also changed the nature of our participation, shaping and informing both the ways we conduct ourselves in public politics and the public perceptions of political elites. It is vital that we understand how this technological shift impacts upon the world around us. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Whatsapp are usually thought to have significantly more vital communicating ways than ever existed before. As one of the most rapidly growing industries worldwide, social media has influenced communication modes around the globe. Howard (2011) indicates that the introduction of new ICTs was important both to initiating democratic processes as well as to enforcing them in some countries**.** Although the assumption that the Internet delivers this component is seen as an intellectual mirage in participatory democracy (Hand & Sandywell 2002). In essence, the emergence of digital activism and the use of social media for political campaigns has given new elements to the rapidly changing political landscape of recent years. Ideally, the expansion of digital technologies and their influence on everyday life might reaffirm the 1990s trend toward individualization of politics (Almqvist, 2016).

According to Karamat and Farooq (2016), a recent research, social media has a significant political influence on people in Pakistan .New media is actively used by students to get political information, such as exchanging thoughts and debating political topics with their peers and other members of the community. Social media has become an important medium for political participation. People use social media as a way of gathering information, posting, organizing protests and voicing opinions. The defining characteristics of social media are being able to be instantly connected to the whole world and to interact with people from all cultures. Instagram is a powerful tool for political communication, including continuous updates and the feature of sharing similar interests, ideals and arguments to engage in conversation. (Arshad & Hassan, 2014).

In both developed and developing nations, new technologies and social media have an influence on political communication, with developed countries seeing a greater impact than developing ones due to a greater spread of the Internet (Riaz, 2010). The benefits to citizens' political consciousness of the new media is obvious. The Internet allows new voices to be heard, it lets people compare ideas and analyses, share articles and create an international, community-wide discussion that would otherwise never have happened. This is a particular benefit for news like the current crisis in Syria, where mainstream media chooses to censor reports about the destruction of civilian groups carried out by the Syrian government, leaving many citizens unaware of what is going on.

According to research (Khan & Shahbaz, 2015), social networking services (SNS) significantly impact social and political learning among users, particularly young people. The Internet has been called the greatest force for democracy since universal suffrage. At least one country, Estonia, claims to have established a digital voting system that is 'tamper-proof' and 'able to withstand military-level cyberattacks.' And what's more, it was created by a bunch of geeky kids.Facebook is more popular than other social media platforms such as Twitter among Pakistani youth for political information and discussion. According to a recent study, Pakistan has the second-largest population of young people in the world, after Yemen. This population boom has had a significant influence on the dynamics of Pakistan's political landscape (Ittefaq and Iqbal (2018)

University students' participation in politics on Facebook has an impact on their offline activities that created political conscientious and it is connected to how much time they spend and participate in politics on the social media platform. According to the findings of the research, the political actions of Punjab University students, as well as their perceptions of politics, have changed with the help of this platform (Zaheer, 2016).

As this study fills a gap in literature, particularly for Pakistan's higher education sector, it sheds light on the effects of social media on political awareness, how university students become politically aware via online and offline activities, and what topics they discuss on social media networks. Also examined in the study were the effects of the participants' online political involvement and their role in real-life politics. The effectiveness of this knowledge and its role in politics have also been explored .Several previous studies

examined the role social media plays in political participation within different sectors of society including education, health, and politics. However, marginalized areas such as higher education are not studied in terms of the political roles individuals play and their political identities by most researchers. We therefore examined the use of social media in political sphere in the lower Punjab area of Pakistan in the higher education sector.

Problem statement:

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.

Literature review:

A person's state of mind when it comes to politics is called their political consciousness. The state of mind that informs this is determined by one's individual awareness of politics, one's position in the political system and history, and actions one perceives as within his or her capability to affect the political reality within which he or she operates. It is worth noting that political consciousness is closely connected to concepts such as political identity, participation in politics, politics culture, and the social contract between the people and their government (Ariely et al., 2014) The study by Rankin (2013) found that students consistently show a high level of interest in national politics and international affairs. Individual disengagement, or what Rankin refers to as "distant politics," does exist, despite the widespread interest in the subject (p.107). In other words, students are interested in big national and international events, but they are unclear of how to translate their interests into concrete actions that would benefit society. In a similar vein, many Scholars said that they make an effort to keep up with news or policy and that they believe themselves to be relatively well educated, especially when it comes to news that is relevant to their research. Examples are reports regarding housing or academics that capture the attention of Scholars with HFA or TLC on a daily basis. According to the preceding paragraph, Scholars also discussed the links they perceive between service and politics, with some mentioning the relevant discussions they have with their peers regarding this relationship. Many Scholars, however, said that they carefully segregate their service work from what they consider to be political activity, which seems to be in direct opposition to their acts. For lack of a better term, there is a gap between the growth of political consciousness and the actual participation in political activities. The difference in these perspectives is crucial in examining the ways in which academics link their service work with broader notions of political consciousness and politics and how these relate to social media use (Harker, 2016)

A knowledgeable mass citizenry's political awakening and development of political consciousness is an essential weapon in achieving social and political change.

Fundamentally, political consciousness of an individual is viewed as a crucially required factor for the passage of well-thought-out political decisions, particularly in the execution of important responsibilities such as elections, under this view.

To a broader degree, political consciousness might be defined as the perception and idea framework of a person who is linked with politics. And, perhaps most significantly, actions such as the formation of a political action framework (Balue and Kaminchenko, 2015).

Some experts, such as Boulianne, believe that the efficient use of social media may increase involvement and engagement as well as awareness, which in turn alters public narratives for the purpose of understanding public affairs (Boulianne2015; Amin and Mahmud, 2017).

In the perspective of Castells and colleagues (2005), political attitudes and political behavior are formed in the domain of communication. Balue and colleagues (2015) discovered that social media may aid in the forming and altering of views toward both social and political institutions, according to their results.

Certain researchers have claimed on several occasions that political consciousness and engagement seem to be very low in certain civilizations, largely as a result of a high degree of political indifference. In this respect, social media active users, who are mostly comprised of young people, often have a strong tendency to utilize social media to plan their future in a more engaging and productive way (Gil de Zunigal et al., 2014)

According to the earlier studies, social media platforms becoming vital instruments for political transformation and social media in a wider sense seems to be a significant ingredient for not only building an group for the public, but also for forming an organization for the private sector. Political engagement reflects individuals' general attitude toward and willingness to participate in politics and measures the extent to which people use social media for political purposes. The findings of one study indicate that social media users are substantially more involved in politics than those who do not use social media. Furthermore, among Facebook users, the highly engaged are significantly more likely than the less engaged to take advantage of Facebook's political features. Overall, instead of detracting from political engagement, we found that social media is positively related to all three dimensions of political engagement (Baluev,2013;CakarMengu et al., 2015). However, it facilitates involvement in these groups by raising the degree of consciousness and awareness creation in overall among those who are involved. Political campaigns are often performed with the usage of social media, which aids in the induction of new followers. In today's world, social media has become a popular median for public figures and political figures to convey their message, engage followers and as well as attract them (Bahorik & Yuen. 2011;Baluev, 2013).

Many regions of the world, especially developing countries, rely on the media to raise people's awareness levels, and specifically their understanding of democracy, e.g., information technology is used to promote participation in politics (Farnen et al., 2014).

Facebook, one of the most popular social networks in the world, has been a major social media for political participation for some time. A recent event that happened at UCSB was a part of the worldwide Women's March (Ellemaa and Laakso 2017) in which many students attended. Before this event, very little research has been done on how student use Facebook and other social media platforms to participate politically. Davis (2014) reflected in his study that social media may be utilized effectively in election campaigns to motivate supporters as well as further persuade those who are reluctant to vote. In a similar vein, user-generated material, in essence, aids political candidates in their ability to circumvent the routines of traditional media creation. Because of this, politicians have the opportunity to attract supporters who have made, uploaded, and shared clips and photographs from the campaign trail to raise awareness about a certain candidate and/or political party throughout the election campaign.

According to Bright et al. (2017), social media does certainly have the ability to facilitate "personal connection" between a candidate and their potential voters. Furthermore, it is said that the usage of social media sites by politicians and voters has the potential to result in direct exchanges between them. This, on the other hand, would not be achievable via the mainstream news media, which is handled by the government.

Several research studies, including Soeung (2013), asserted that social media has in fact facilitated the development of a more emerging and diverse online political environment in such a way that it enables and fortifies the expression of wildly different political viewpoints in a way that is more democratic. A prediction was made that the emergence of essential political participation during elections, such as criticism and heated political conversation, might have an influence on the political behavior of the younger generation over time.

There has been some evidence for the argument that mass media, including social media, has the capacity to impact voter attitudes, particularly when it comes to critical occasions such as election campaigns, in certain studies . Different studies explores how political engagement and Facebook usage are related. Recently published research confirms this conclusion. The authors also explain why people engage politically on social media instead of other venues, like face-to-face interaction or joining political parties. They suggest possible explanations for how political engagement fits into a larger social media pattern of life (Alotaibi, 2013).

According to Ahmade et al. (2017), social media is a powerful platform that has the ability to influence public opinion. It may, in fact, pave the way for more critical debate to arise among the general public and even among legislators as a whole.A number of previous studies have attempted to critically explore the political component of social media sites, and they have openly claimed that politicians do often utilize social media platforms while looking for political employment in government. Furthermore, it goes on to suggest that, of course, voter excitement is a possible signal (Fernandes& Bowes, 2010;Utz, 2009).

Following are some hypotheses derived from the above literature:

(H1): social media usage have a significant relationship with political consciousness

(H2): social media usage have a significant relationship with political involvement

(H3): Political consciousness and political Involvement have a significant relationship with each other

Methodology:

The participants in this research are students at Bahauddin Zakariya University in Multan, Pakistan, who have been the target population of this study. We selected 200 respondents (males and females for both groups) from BS students (Hons) and Masters Students (both males and females). In order to get better findings, the quantitative survey approach, along with its data-collection procedures, has been implemented. The data from the chosen sample of research respondents was gathered via the use of Qualtrics software, which was distributed to students at BZU Multan for the purpose of data collection. A 5-point Likert-type scale (summated rating scale) was also included in this study's questionnaire which is comprised of multiple options, with 1 representing "always," 2 representing "rarely," 3 representing "sometimes," 4 representing "often," and 5 representing "never." Each question was answered by selecting just one choice from a drop-down menu. Both the independent and dependent variables in this research were derived from previously published studies, which were then operationalized and adjusted. The independent variable in this study was social media use, whereas the dependent variable was political awareness. We utilised the Zaheer (2016) scale, with a few modifications, and in accordance with the requirements for evaluating items such as political consciousness and social media usage. Social media usage is shown to provide support for the political consciousness of the dependent variable based on the concepts of the study. The degree of political consciousness shows a respondent's political beliefs, their political ideologies, and their understanding of the political system. Numerous researchers have used social media use and online social activities to examine youth's political knowledge and participation and their pre-existing understanding of politics.

Consciousness about politics is usually acquired by watching political content on social media and by understanding the ideologies of different parties. Different political parties and their supporters use social media platforms such as twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and snap chat to engage the youth in political engagement. Different groups and pages of known political parties are available on social media where one can find all types of information. Furthermore, online pooling is also available on these platforms that keep youth engaged and informed about political issues. Our study examined the relationship between social media usage and political awareness among young university students in Pakistan. Data collection was initially difficult due to Covid 19 circumstances all over the

world as well as universities switching from physical to online classes. This made the data collection process rather challenging. Following this, data has been collected from online surveys and by physically visiting numerous departments. The link to the survey was distributed through our personal contacts, What Sapp, Facebook, and email. Our survey was distributed to all departments of BZU University, Multan, Pakistan. We ran several descriptive statistics results in the post-data collection phase to identify errors and discrepancies. We ran several descriptive statistics results in the post-data collection phase to identify errors and discrepancies. The data was analyzed using the statistical package for social science (SPSS), and the hypothesis was tested using regression analysis, correlations, and descriptive statistics. We used simple random sampling and probability sampling techniques in our study. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2011), a probability sample requires numerical calculations, whereas a random sample employs the unit of population, the element, and the subject. Thus, students pursuing bachelors and master's degrees are selected in a random sampling method and are considered as youths. A quantitative survey study design was used in this study. Wemmer and Dominick (2011) discuss how different survey methods have been used for quantitative research.

Table1.RelationshipofSocial media usage With Political consciousness (*N*=200).

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	*SE* of the estimate
1(PC)	.298[a]	.092	.087	.44212

Note. PC = political consciousness; SMU= Social Media Usage SE = standard error.
[a]Predictors: (Constant), SMU.

Table2.Relationshipofsocial Media Usage With political Involevement (*N*=200).

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	*SE* of the estimate
2(PI)	.396[a]	.094	.099	.61036

*Note.*PI=Political Involvement;SMU=social Media Usage;SE= standarderror.
[a]Predictors:(Constant),OA.

This study's hypothesis 1 states that social media use has a significant relationship with political consciousness; Table 1 displays political consciousness (Pc) with a R value of .298, R2 value of .092, adjusted R2 value of .087, and SE of the estimation of .44212. In conclusion, the study results support H1, that there is a significant relationship between social media usage and political consciousness. We applied a regression analysis square test to find out if the H2 of this study is true, i.e. social media usage has a significant relationship with political involvement.

According to Table 2, political involvement (PI) has R value of .396, a R2 value of .094 an adjusted R2 of .099, and a SE of. .61036.Using the combined scales of Verba and Nie (1972) and Cao (2008), we have created the scales for political involvement and political consciousness used in this study. We used a 7-item scale to assess political consciousness and involvement (α = .756). A Likert-type scale was applied, with responses 1 = Always, 2 = rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, and 5 = Never. Findings from the study support H2, that there is a significant relationship between social media usage and political involvement.

According to hypothesis H3 of this study, i.e., political consciousness and political involvement are associated with one another, the correlation test has been run on the data. As shown in Table 3, social media usage (SMU) correlates with political consciousness (PC) at .286 and significant at .000, while political involvement (PI) correlates at .066. A significant relationship between political consciousness and political involvement was found in the study, thus supporting H3.

Table3.RelationshipbetweenPoliticalParticipationandPoliticalEfficacy.

	SMU	PC	PI
OA Pearson's correlation	1	.298**	.69
Significant(two-tailed)		000	.365
	200	200	200
N			

*Note.*SMU=Social Media Usage;PC=politicalconsciousness;PI=political Involvement.

**Relationshipbetweentwovariables.

Table4.Sample's DescriptiveStatistics.

	M	SD	N
SMU	3.9328	.26302	200
PC	3.8672	4.2142	200
	3.6421	.2168	200
PI			

*Note.*SMU=Social media usage; PC=political consciousness; PI=political Involvement

Based on Table 4, SMU correlates with PC at .286 and significant at .000, and in addition, with PI at .066. PC, however, is correlated with PI at .316. A correlation of .01 exists between these three variables. Half of the students were undergraduates and half were graduate students. As for age distribution, 41.0% of respondents were between 18 and 23 years old, while 57.0% of respondents were between 24 and 28 years old. There were 51.0% men and 49.0% women among respondents. Among those who participated in the survey, 51.0% strongly agreed that they are aware of how they can participate in politics via social media, while 31.5% stated that government and politics seemed too complex to them. As a result of the survey, 68.0% of respondents talked about political activities with their friends and 57.5% of respondents watch online video channels (e.g., YouTube) daily to view videos about local candidates or party members; additionally, 64.0% follow Twitter accounts for parties, leaders, or local candidates, family, friends, and others, while 10.0% of respondents had not visited a political party meeting.

Conclusion:

As the first variable of the study, PC relationship through SMU, the majority of participants strongly agreed that they use social media and feel politically consciousness and concerned about issues. According to the majority of respondents, social media platforms are used for political information and discussion. Students of all ages use social media extensively and are politically aware, but students of age 24 to 28 years use social media more actively than students of age 18 to 23. As a whole, this study suggests that social media usage plays a significant role in shaping political consciousness. Based on the results of the second variable, political involvement (PI), social media usage shows that respondents actively share political content and use social media to discuss politics with friends, family, and colleagues. However, many respondents had few interactions with political representatives*.*

Furthermore, the third variable of the study, social media usage (SMU), indicated that most students browsed political websites and also blogs of politicians, political leaders, and local candidates.

The findings of this study indicate that social media usage has a significant influence on students of higher education universities in urbanarea. All of the respondents showed a high degree of political consciousness. Students who use social media frequently are better able to understand about government affairs. They are actively engaged in various political activities, discuss and share political content online, and stay up-to-date with political content. Using Facebook, they communicate with politicians and candidates. .Social media usage has a large influence on political consciousness and involvement. A significant relationship exists between social media usage and political involvement, and political consciousness is strongly correlated to all three variables.

Our study has shown that Pakistan's urban youth, particularly university students, are very engaged on social media, participating both online and offline in protests and rallies. An even larger sample would have been better for Punjab Pakistan. Researchers should include more universities in their studies in the future to gain different results. Our study comprises only one university.

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