Politics In The Digital Age: Measuring The Impact Of Twitter On Pakistani Youth

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Abstract

This study aims at measuring the impact of Twitter to generate the awareness regarding political affairs among youth in Pakistan. The participants included in this research comprised of the 300 male and female graduate students of Government College University Faisalabad and The University of Lahore. For collecting the data, researcher used non-probability sampling method whereby close-ended questionnaires were distributed. The findings of this study showed that Twitter has a great amount of influence on youth and it plays a key role in providing political awareness. Twitter has a great deal of impact on teenagers and help them to acquire knowledge regarding their fundamental political and social rights. Findings reveal that political messages through Twitter influence the respondent's political orientation and it helps them to decide whom to vote in elections. In this age of information, twitter is making life easier for the voters to select the right political party. Findings also show that Twitter has become an excellent source of connectivity to political leaders and their voters. By analyzing the approaches of political leaders and youth behind the use of Twitter, this paper contributes to the continuing research of the political influence on social media especially twitter.

Key Words: Twitter; Pakistani Youth; Political participation; Social Media

1. Introduction

Social media and innovative communication methods have without a doubt changed the way individuals interface and communicate with one another (Muntean, 2015). The impact of social media in mobilizing the individuals for dynamic interest within the political prepare like getting the votes enlisted and inquiring the individuals to stand up for degenerate hones cannot be disregarded. Websites like YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook are advancing what is called a "participatory culture". Not as it were can the common open devour what is displayed by the diverse political parties but can moreover connected by giving their comments conjointly by creating political substance as within the case of blogging and micro-blogging

(Kurt & Karaduman, 2012).

In the recent political communication, digital media isn't a modern marvel. The web has steadily created and communication channels with time have advanced. Two decades prior, there were websites of distinctive parties with as it were one way to spread political messages. Amid election campaigns, modern apparatuses for sharing data and intuitively discourse were advertised by Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube (Fox & Ramos, 2012; Murthy, 2011).

Before social media television was the main source of political engagement among political leaders and their followers and

voters (Hayat et. al. 2015). Since then, social media comprise a critical exchange of political mobilization and socialization. Additionally, social media are effective in influencing political actions and attitudes of individuals such as in the case of the antigovernment protest in Iran, Occupy Wall Street, and Gezi Park protests (Gokce, Hatopoglu, Gokturk, Luetgert & Saygin, 2014).

In the past few years, mainly Internet including different social media platforms like Facebook, Twittter and Youtube have drastically transformed the understanding of political communication (Gibson and Römmele, 2001).

Raoof, Zaman, Ahmad, and Al-Qaraghuli (2013) analyzed social networking sites usage as a mode for political change. They stated that social media was extensively used as an interaction tool between voters and candidates.

Since its emergence in 2006, Twitter is one of the widely used social media platforms all around the world. Several studies have been conducted to study the data available on Twitter (Wu, Hofman, Mason & Watts, 2011). Twitter served as a platform for communication and exchanging that can be either pictures, videos or thoughts (Java, Song, Finin, & Tseng, 2007).

Biswas, Ingle, and Roy (2014) observed the influence of social media of voting behavior in India, it was revealed that social media is helpful in creating linkages with political parties.

Twitter is serving as an important tool in terms of virtual politics (Alonso-Muñoz, Marcos-García & Casero-Ripollés, 2017). In recent years, many politicians have used Twitter for promoting themselves; 577 politicians have signed up Twitter accounts,

three quarters of them in 2009 (Caplan, 2013).

Twitter has emerged as a mode of political communication which broke the traditional way of communication in which political actors were majorly dominated and mass media where the citizens were least participated (Micó and Casero-Ripollés, 2014). This one-way flow of communication by the political parties has been diminished due to the emergence of Twitter as a communication platform, where the general audience can freely interact with the political actors without using media filter for exchanging communication (McNair, 2011; Chadwick 2013).

Furthermore, Twitter is a major social media platform used by the politician to discuss political issues, government policies, and community activities. For instance, the politician uses Twitter to disseminate information, accommodate aspirations, and also interact with the wider community.

Twitter has become an important channel for political communication activities. Political communication is the relationship concerning citizens, politics, and the interaction mode that join these groups to one another (Abu Bakar, Mohamad, Halim, Subramaniam, & Choo, 2018). The relationships are built based on logos, ethos, modes of persuasion, and pathos. In this political communication with the followers, media can be used to create and exchange opinions and ideas between related entities, political institutions, public officials, and citizens. It contains dialogue during political dispensation in international, national, state, and local political systems and how information can be leveraged to achieve political goals.

Politicians globally as well as different researches concluded that have stated that Twitter has become an emerging and most

widely used tool for political communication and is extensively used by the political candidates in the United States of America, Finland, Australia, Sweden, United Kingdom and New Zealand to communicate with the masses worldwide (Ahmed, & Skoric, 2015).

The use of social media among masses is not only popular in developed countries; but in developing countries also. In Pakistani context, individuals and politics parties both are actively using social media for to get and transfer information respectively for voting purpose (Michaelsen, 2011). Social media usage is helpful amongst students in terms of exchanging ideas and discussing issues related to politics with other students (Arshad & Hassan, 2014).

In Pakistan, digital media is serving as a communications instrument in five distinctive ways. Firstly, they increase and frequently break stories that conventional media are incapable or unwilling to cover. Then, digital media provides communication platform by disseminating information regarding various protest campaigns and other social developments, subsequently playing a mobilizing part. Thirdly, it plays its role as communicator in humanitarian aspects.

Nowadays, social media has become a potential platform on humanitarian grounds as various organizations are collecting charity during the difficult times. Fourthly, social media in Pakistan is being used for communication and promoting various social causes. Lastly, social media is helping to stimulate the political communication. In this regards, leading Pakistani leaders and politicians from across the spectrum have joined the bandwagon of Facebook, Twitter and other applications. This advancement in the communication procedure has contributed a lot in the development of the marketing communication. It means that social media has eased and promoted the

process and the propagation of the political messages, which impelled the followers and voters of certain political parties to embrace the idea of political marketing and its components including political promotion and the adoption of the modern communication means to promote and propagate their manifesto, gain political supporters, and change the political scenario in the country.

In comparison with the various developing countries, many Pakistani political leaders and their parties have joined the Twitter recently. Steadily, the political leaders and their parties have started feeling that they can promote and propagate their political narrative and attract the youth of the society through social media particularly the Twitter. This process of utilizing social media for political means is called 'Virtual Politics.' In Pakistan, this is an emerging phenomenon as Twitter users crossed 12 million that makes it an interesting area of research not only for communication analysts but also for political campaign strategy managers. The main purpose behind conducing this research is to measure the political impact of Twitter on Pakistani educated youth.

According to Vaccari and Nielsen (2013), there exists no relationship between online popularity on Twitter and voting behavior of the voters. Moreover, Baxter & Marcella (2013) examined that in the case of 2011 Scottish Parliamentary Election, a very low ratio was found between social media usage and voters' decision on voting.

2. The rationale for Selecting Twitter

Approximately, 336 million people possess their personal account on Twitter all over the world (Brockmann, Steiglitz, & Xuan, 2012). Twitter is considered to be an influential medium for self-flattery by

providing political actors the facility to connect with a huge population and provide them with the updated information about their political activities nearly on time, hence connecting themselves in direct political PR (Aharony, 2012). Similar to other western democracies, the use of micro-blogging service (Twitter) by the politicians of Pakistan is increasing with the passage of time. Their accounts on Twitter shows that they are very much alert of the importance of this medium as a perfect carrier of their message. As per research, around 25 % of Members National Assembly used different social media platforms to connect with their potential voters. It has been observed that in Pakistan, the politicians are relying on Twitter largely to disseminate any information, to create a direct link and communication with the people of the country. It is easy for the politicians to develop and destroy the reputation, as they can post anything without going through any selection or evaluation process, thus minimizing the role of the gatekeepers.

3. Research Questions

1. Is the use of Twitter helping in creating political awareness among youth in Pakistan?
2. Is Twitter a good source of connectivity to political leaders and their voters/followers?
3. Do the political messages through Twitter influence the individuals' political orientation and choices towards casting their votes?

4. Literature Review

According to Lattimore (2010), social media is an umbrella that covers all media that uses technology in creating open collaboration, interaction, and participation where the users have the opportunities to share experiences, ideas, and opinions in the form of visual material or words. The key to social media in the presence of a collaborative, credible, atmosphere of information sharing among the audience. Therefore, social media such as Twitter depends on its audience in constructing the same meaning by using technology as a tool.

Zhang et al. (2013) studied the effect of various social media platforms on voter's attitude and actions during the 2012 U.S Presidential Elections Campaigns. It was concluded that Twitter can play a key role in shaping the minds of the people if properly used to empower and mobilize their supporter.

Graham et al. (2013) studied UK tweets by the candidates in the 2010 General Election and founded that several candidates preferred using Twitter as a tool for communicating and forming relationships with the citizens.

Twitter has been integrated by politicians as a paramount tool to strategize communication and intensely apply the strategies during campaigns of election (Lopez-Meri, Marcos-Garcia & Casero-Ripolles, 2017). It is well-acknowledged during a political campaign that the image or personality of the candidate has taken precedence over job issues or qualifications in the evaluation of the politicians by the public (Lee, 2013).

Literature shows that Non-Western societies have used new media technologies for creating political communication, enabling the candidates and voters to share ideas to have a social presence and stimulating dominant political or social discourses that is obligatory for promoting solidity and harmony. In the year 2011, Tunisia and Egypt used new media recommends that new media have assisted citizens to be part of participatory politics to achieve wider democratic goals (Aday, Farrell, Lynch, Sides, Kelly & Zuckerman, 2010). In the same way, other researches in

Indonesia have exposed the positive consequences of social media usage and mobile phone usage on sociopolitical dynamics (Nugroho & Syarief, 2012).

Twitter, as a platform is distinctive due to its collaborative nature, story-changing, and story-evolving environment, which leads to a more interactive agenda setting for the candidate and the followers. Gokce, Hatipoglu, Gokturk, Luetgert & Saygin (2014) disclosed that Twitter is good for a well-formed story with verified sources on a very quick notice which is quite difficult conventional media platforms such as newspaper and TV channel.

Twitter is focused on due to its unique character and user-friendly interface to explore the electoral context. The only challenge is the possibility of contributing to public discourse in such a condensed form but its efficiency and appropriateness are strategic tools for political candidates and parties in their attempt to mobilize support and target voters. Gasser and Gerlach (2012) reported that tweets and re-tweets in many countries are already distinctive features of political discourse and are followed mostly by lobbyists, politicians, and journalists. However, there is a need for further attention to the perception of the strategic role of Twitter in the communication of a political candidate (Grusell & Nord, 2012).

Furthermore, Twitter is considered as the third-largest social networking platform (Barnett, 2011; Boland, 2013). The microblogging platforms only allow its users to read and post messages (called tweets) of 140 characters or less. Users can "follow" or subscribe to the Twitter feeds of other users, re-tweet (or share posts), and get followers of their own (Boland, 2013). Twitter, for instance, can be used as a means of disseminating information to all people both known and unknown without necessarily hoping to get a reply or response from readers.

Twitter has become a popular tool for transferring information and it is being used usually by individuals, organizations, and politicians due to its widespread adoption. However, managing and maintaining social networks effectively can be used as political communication tools to gain supports from the peoples in the case of the politician.

In few cases, twitter has played a vital role to imporove voter's engagement. For instance, the candidates and voter engagement on Twitter is relatively high in Korea with Korean politicians having fairly dense Twitter networks (Hsu and Han Woo Park 2011).

Skoric et al. (2012) observed that during the 2011 Singapore General Election, the 'Twitter sphere represents a rich source of data for gauging public opinion'.

Brockmann, and Xuan (2012) mentioned that technological development such as Twitter is considered as low subsidy means of unswerving voter communication that diminshed the costly and high-cost political campaigning of conventional political publicity on TV. At this time, social media is being used widely as compared to other types of media, particularly Twitter endorse possible deviations in community's involvement and political communication (Pingree, 2007).

Similarly, Hayat, et al. (2015) also wrote a study on youth getting political awareness through political talk shows in Pakistan. This study also illustrated that media is a great tool for political awareness and changing the behavior towards casting the votes in general and by-elections (Hayat, et al. 2015).

In the case of Pakistan, there has found to be an increase in the use of social media platforms among youth. According to Kugelman (2012), social media in Pakistan as a communication tool is used in several ways including; breaking stories that are not telecasted by traditional media; mobilizing

people for social and other campaigns; promoting and coordinating humanitarian aspects of issues and problems; activist for social causes; and enhancing communication between politicians and their publics. Since, there is a massive growth of television channels in Pakistan and electronic media enjoy a great degree of freedom, the audience usually gratifies their informative needs from these channels. Social media is mainly used to socialize therefore, the role depends on how it has been used. It may be inferred that the internet is creating an impact in the domain of politics by introducing easy ways to coordinate an event, make donations, and get information (Murray, 2005). To understand the scenario systematically, there is a need to conduct systematic in-depth, rigorously planned study in this area.

5. Methodology

This study aims at examining the influence of micro blogging site Twitter in creating the political awareness on Pakistani youth. Survey method was used to collect data from the students enrolled in The University of Lahore and Government College University Faisalabad respectively. The researchers selected 300 respondents (150 females and 150 males) from The University of Lahore, to observe the impact of Twitter in creating political awareness among youth in Pakistan. As thhe convenience sampling was used to collect data from both, it was sure to include both genders equally i.e., male and female. A close-ended questionnaire was developed and circulated among the respondents to evaluate the impact of Twitter on educated youth using the Likert scale method, whereby the value 1 signifies strong disagreement.

6. Findings:

The results derived from the data extracted suing survey method is elaborated in this part. The results were obtained to answer the research questions that were designed and mentioned by the researchers at the beginning of this research.

Fig. 1 below explains the number of respondents who think a micro-blogging site called Twitter as a source of awareness about political matters in Pakistan. The results showed that 36.3 percent male and 29.3 percent female of the respondents agreed that Twitter is creating awareness regarding political matters, followed by 34.3 percent female and 21.7 percent male of the participants who strongly agreed that Twitter is creating political awareness. However, 19.3 percent male and 8.7 percent female of the respondents stayed neutral and about 10.0% strongly disagreed with the opinion that political talk shows are creating political awareness. However, the results also showed that 11.7 percent female and 9.7 percent male respondents strongly disagree with the notion that Twitter is providing information, increasing knowledge, and awareness regarding political issues in Pakistan.
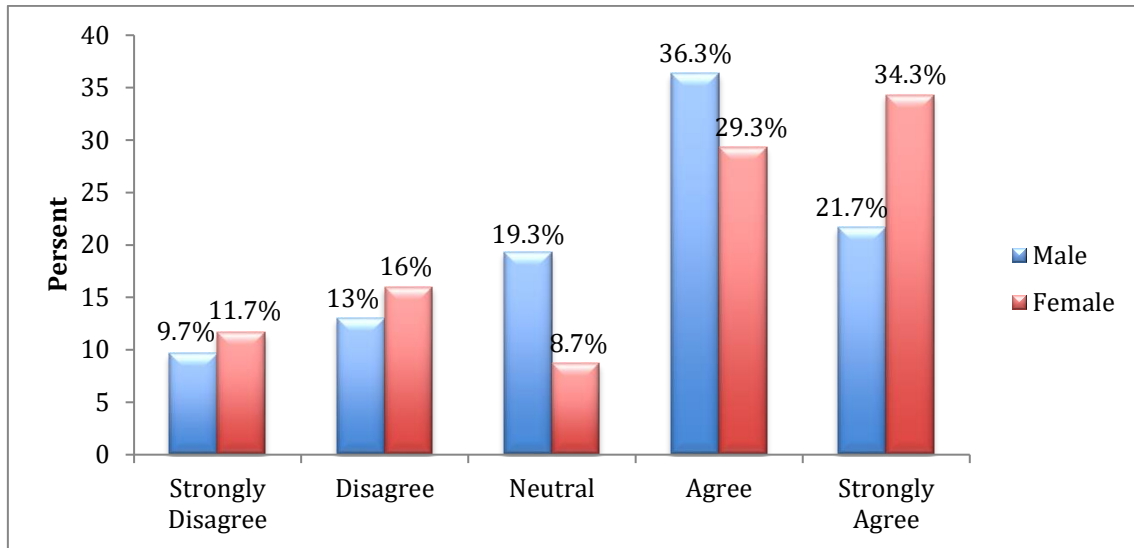
Figure 1. Do you believe Twitter has helped lead to political awareness among youth in Pakistan?

Fig. 2 below illustrates whether the political messages using Twitter influence the individuals' political orientation and choices towards casting their votes or not? This figure shows that 46% of female and 40.7% of male respondents are strongly agreed with the notion that political messages delivered through a micro-blogging site called twitter influence the individual's political orientation and choices towards following a better political party and casting their votes in elections. On contrary, only 11.7% of females and 8.3% of male respondents are strongly disagreed with the above-said statement. However, 15% of males and 9.7% of female respondents stayed neutral.
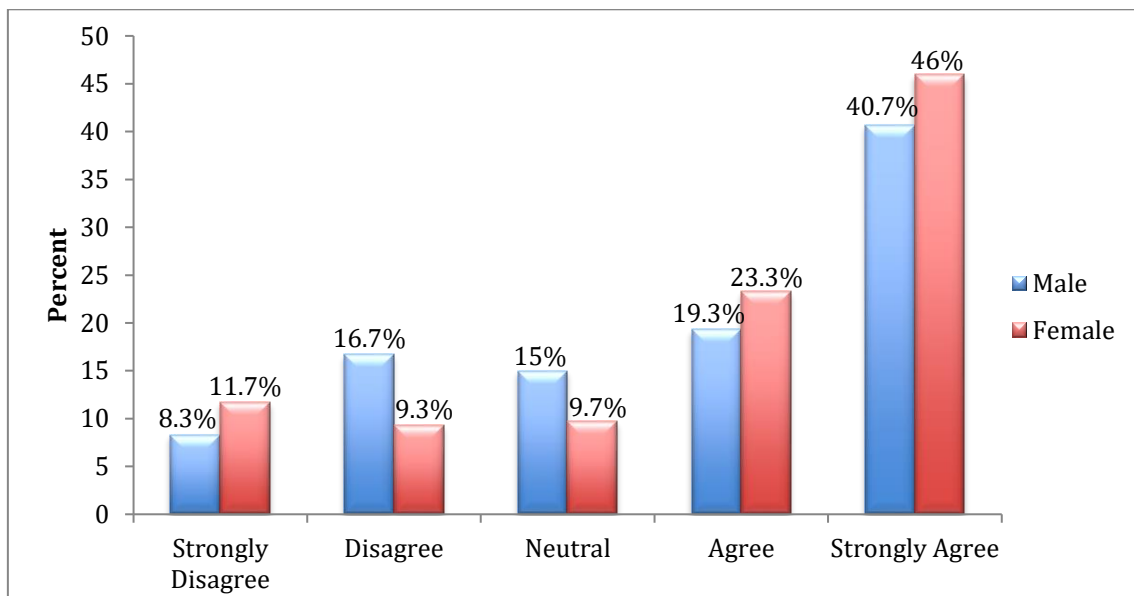

Figure 2. Do the political messages using Twitter influence the individuals' political orientation, and choices towards casting their votes?

Fig.3 below indicates Twitter as the source of connectivity to political leaders and their voters/followers. This figure shows that 32.7 percent of male and 30.3 percent of female respondents are agreed that Twitter is an excellent source of connectivity to political leaders and their voters/followers. On the contrary, 21.7 percent female and 17.7 percent male respondents have disagreed with this impression. Meanwhile, 25 percent male and 13.3 percent female respondents remained neutral.
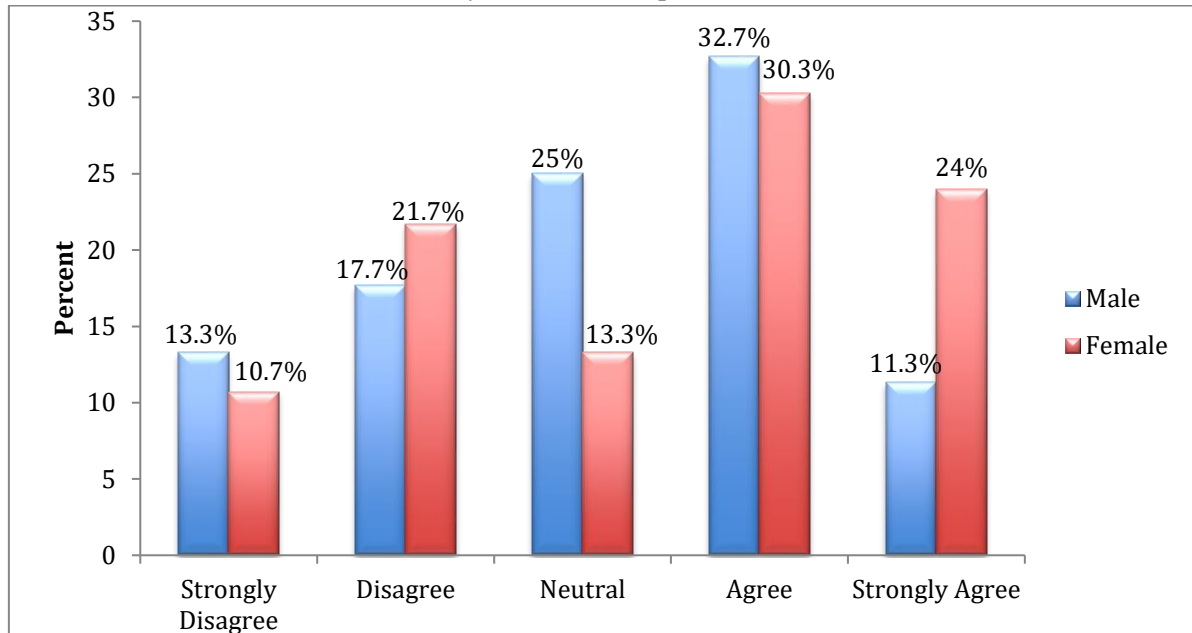

Figure 3. Do you believe Twitter is an excellent source of connectivity to political leaders and their voters/followers?

7. Conclusion:

This is an exploratory study conducted to observe whether Twitter is helping in creating political awareness among Pakistani youth, political involvement, and participation in the political process. The grip and information over political issues and enthusiasm to join and participate in the political process are the most significant aspects of political awareness so the findings of this study explain that it is not a myth rather a truth that Twitter is creating political awareness among the youth. The micro-blogging site (Twitter) brings individuals closer to the political process by providing them the knowledge and understanding of the political process and making them aware that they can make effective contributions by casting their votes. Moreover, Pakistani youth also believe that Twitter is an excellent source of connectivity to political leaders and their voters/followers. They are agreed with the fact that Twitter provides them a very useful platform whereby they can easily communicate with the political leaders and can convey their concerns to them.

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