

Exploring Social Media Role in Political Awareness Among Voters of Peshawar

Abstract: *The study aims to investigate social media's role in political awareness in Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and to understand the voters' perception of social media in political participation. The study is quantitative, and the survey method was used to examine the transition in the political arena in Pakistan during the General Elections 2013 due to the rich participation of social media by political parties and even common citizens. A structured questionnaire was developed with purposive sampling of 260 participants to analyze the voting behavior of Peshawar. This study's results showed that social media enabled political parties and citizens to access information and participate in any political debate. The results also showed that the people of Peshawar responded to the call for demonstrations through social media. The study concludes that citizens got more aware of their political rights with the advent of social media.*

Contents

- [Introduction](#)
- [Research Objectives](#)
- [Research Questions](#)
- [Method](#)
- [Results and Analysis](#)
- [Discussion](#)
- [Conclusion](#)
- [References](#)

Key Words: Social Media, Politics, Voters, Political Awareness, Election Campaign

Introduction

Technology brings the world closer and narrows down the communication distance between people and countries as well. [Minhas S et al. \(2016\)](#) argued that there are a plethora of social networking sites, all of which can be linked to allow for cross-posting. This creates an environment in which users can meet the greatest number of people without sacrificing the quality of their interactions. We can only speculate on what social networking might look like in the next decade or even 100 years, but it appears apparent that it will exist in some form for as long as humans exist. The technology and science landscape has brought yet another networking

platform for our cell phone life. People can use this system to connect with others, and the wireless network supplying businesses assisted later on the conference call. The introduction of new cellular phones with windows, android, or some other operating system brought correspondence to an individual's eyes. It has profoundly improved how the general population thinks. Even people with low literacy rates can use this platform and get very quickly to use social media. Pakistan has 44m social media users, and the total electorate accounts for almost half of the total population. Politicians used this medium in the recent election for their campaign advertisement and Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf is the

* Assistant Professor, Department of Mass Communication and Media Studies, GIFT University Gujranwala, Punjab, Pakistan. Email: shahidihsas@gmail.com

[†] Assistant Professor /HOD, Department of Pakistan Studies, Islamia College Peshawar, KP, Pakistan.

[‡] Assistant Professor, Department of Media and Communication Studies, Female Campus, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

party that received the most value from this evolving technology. That political party struggled to get into parliament but could not get enough public attention. Social media allowed them to get into Pakistan's political system scene and to have a remarkable parliamentary role. This study shows that social media impacts the election very favorably if it is used in the right manner to inform the electorate about the politics of this country. Other parties like PMLN, PPP, and MQM also followed this fashion to compete with their fellow parties in by-elections. In the current situation, PTI rules social media as its chairman reports in Pakistan on Twitter and Facebook. In this process, the PMLN is second. Now, social media is a perfect means of worker contact with the party and its members. Social media's most promising result is that politicians are forced to uphold their pledges or risk detrimental social media activity. Because of social media intervention, numerous social issues have been discussed and addressed. The media houses biasing has also been revealed on social media. Social networking is making itself the greatest ever form of contact in history.

A brief overview of political pages and its leadership reveals that PTI has the highest number of followers, with 56 million on Facebook pages and 40 million. Chairman Imran Khan has the highest number among all the political figures in Pakistan i.e. 70 m on Twitter and 80 m on Facebook, respectively. On the other hand, PMLN is followed by 4 million on Twitter and only 56k on Facebook and the most popular figure of PMLN is Maryum Nawaz Sharif having 40 million followers on Twitter and about 5m followers on Facebook. Other parties like PPP, JI, JUI F, and MQM are struggling to get into the scene of social media. Social media is free and users express their views regarding political parties and political figures freely. Many wrong decisions of the government have been drawn back due to the pressure of social media. In this project, we will see how social media is having an impact on the education and awareness of voters of district Peshawar. [O'Morain \(2016\)](#) noted that the media has a great impact on society and influences voters' decisions. At the end of the project, we will be able to draw a conclusion about what is the talk of the town about the upcoming general elections of Pakistan 2023.

This research is based on the literature on two basic areas one is social media as a tool for communicating the political message and the second is political participation and awareness about their political rights, vote turnout, and women's participation in the electoral process. Secondly, social media applications are leading the role in changing the political state of affairs of this region.

[Peter Riezebos \(2011\)](#) claimed that our goal was to see whether social media affects the understanding and voting activity of political parties. Although the findings indicate a role in generating the attitude of the political party against voting actions the study evidence does not support a substantial effect.

[Zaheer \(2012\)](#) stated that the research aims to explore the use of social media (i.e. Facebook) among the youth/students and their subsequent impact on the extent of their involvement. It was found that there is a significant connection between political engagement and the amount of time spent using Facebook. To put it another way, students who devote more time to Facebook are more interested in using it for political ends. Similarly, students who regularly use Facebook for political reasons are more committed supporters of political events online and offline. Therefore it can be concluded that those students who commit less time to Facebook's political usage are less involved politically, both online and offline, which also contributes to the inference that online political engagement is highly likely to influence the offline political involvement of a person. The more time a student spends on Facebook politically, the more involved he or she may be in seeking standard political change. In terms of age-related political involvement, it was found that there is a strong connexion between offline/online political participation, and in particular, students aged between 18-22 and 23-26 years were found to be more involved in traditional political activities. However, online political engagement in its entirety is not determined/included by age. Similarly, gender is another aspect that has been shown to associate with Facebook users' political engagement. In this analysis, males were found to be more involved in engaging both offline and online. Contrary to this, the extent of female

political participation was observed to be less dynamic. Clearly, the analysis showed that the authenticity of news on Facebook is higher than that of mainstream media news, which is the reason political participation on social media has a greater impact and needs to study.

[O'Morain \(2016\)](#) reported that social media had become a common part of our daily lives. This research study centered on the role of social media in an election campaign, based on the Irish General Election in 2016. Around so saying, the study aimed to examine the relevance of social media for political campaigns and its potential for new elections. The research emphasized the significance of political engagement in a modern democracy and offered a conceptual framework for the citizens' political participation-this project, suggested that social media could be another means of political engagement and discourse on this subject endorsed this view, in particular young people on social media.

[Butt & Awang \(2017\)](#) noted that the more users engaged in social media, the more they are influenced to vote. [Vonderschmitt \(2012\)](#) argued that social media campaigns would help electoral to make local-level use of social media, rather than just national elections. There is no guaranteed winning strategy but a company will spend its time and resources effectively on social media if it meets the guidance given.

Shabir G (2014) said the tremendous popularity, as well as reliance on social media, has doubled over the last few years in the age of technological transformation. Online networking has become the most powerful method of knowledge collection. Social media has become a platform for checking on the socio-political issues surrounding us. It has now become a forum for people to use social media to share their political views.

[Njegomir \(2016\)](#) observed that the results of this research showed that Millennials believe that social media has little impact on their political actions but that it may have more effect than they assumed. Facebook was the most widely used of the three social media platforms analyzed in this report and was also the most prominent according to the topics found in the focus group debate.

[Gayatri W \(2014\)](#) stated that with the growing usage of social media, the present study focuses on using social media as a campaign tool. The study also explores how different social media platforms are used by the general public, as well as what motivates scientists to mine the vast amount of unstructured data generated by user comments (data mining) and then classify the mined data to determine the proper relationship among user reviews and existing parties.

[Muntean \(2015\)](#) said other than that, the results of this research paper show the value of understanding the utility of social media in the political sphere since these outlets are attractive to people towards politics.

[Stefan Stieglitz \(2012\)](#) noted that citizens' engagement and democracy could be aided by social media. The presidential election campaigns in the United States have demonstrated that political players may successfully utilize social media platforms to communicate information to voters. By researching the social media presence of German parties on Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, and YouTube, we want to obtain insight into politics based on social media in Germany. We provide an overview of the importance, possibilities, and challenges of using social media for political engagement.

Research Objectives

The objective of the study is to determine the role of social media in political awareness among voters of Peshawar and to investigate which tool of social media is more effective in enhancing political awareness as compared to others. The study also aims to assess which political party effectively and actively utilizes social media in General Elections in Peshawar.

Research Questions

- Q 1: What is the role of social media in creating political awareness among the public?
- Q 2: To what extent the social media applications were useful in political awareness?
- Q 3: To what extent does the Public respond to social media awareness?

Method

The study was conducted to investigate social media's role in political awareness in Peshawar's voters. The study is quantitative in nature and a survey method was used to collect the data, population of this study was voters of Peshawar, while 260 active users were the sample for this study, 130 male and 130 female users were contacted through the structured questionnaire with purposive sampling technique.

The questionnaire was developed using the Likert scale and distributed through Google forms. Even different modes of communication/social media tools were used to collect data. The link of the survey questionnaire created in Google form was circulated in the WhatsApp groups, social media pages/groups of District Peshawar present on Facebook. The Data on females was a challenge in the area where most the women are barred from the vote. However, this task was completed with the help of my mother, who is a senior school teacher and other women of my family to get an accurate picture of the study. After achieving the target population number, the data was put into a Microsoft Excel sheet for analysis, and Pie charts were used to show the pictorial view of the responses received on the survey questionnaire forms. Likert scale was used to get the result of the survey questionnaire. Total Population of District Peshawar According to the Latest Census report 2017 (518,798), Registered Voters are 210,000 approx. (according to 2013 GE) where active Social Media Users. 100000 approx. Target sampling was 260, of which 130 were female and 130 were male. Fig 1 shows the overview of the participants in the survey.

Results and Analysis

The data reveals that the age group 18-25 leads the pie chart. Second, in this run is the age group 25-35. It amazed me that the conclusion of this study would be of great importance. This means most of the young and mature public answered the survey questionnaire. The target population investigated the basic aim behind using social media. The majority of respondents said that they used digital platforms for many of the purposes it was designed for, such as politics, general

knowledge, entertainment, and personal matters. The general populace also expressed interest in politics, indicating that the target audience was among Peshawar's most active social media users.

The target population was being asked in the survey questionnaire that Social media has ensured access to political information for the common man. About 38 % of the target population agreed, 30 % strongly agreed and 25 % and 2 % gone opposed. Only 5 % of the target population remained neutral in this term.

To check how the political parties are successful in getting positive support on social media in this area, the target audience was questioned if they had developed a leaning towards a certain political party after getting political material via social media. The result in figure 1.4 reveals that about 48 % of the target population favored this question by answering positively concerning agree and strongly agreed. 42 % went on the negative side and opposed the term in simply disagree and strongly disagree terms. Only 10 % remained neutral on the aspect. It indicates social media in this region is not a reason for inclination.

The target population was asked about the propaganda rumors about social media use. About 43 % agreed and strongly agreed with this aspect. On the other hand, 39 % were of the thinking that this is a wrong perception of social media. 18% remained neutral in this term; they expressed that both propaganda and reality are displayed on social media political pictures.

To get an answer on whether social media motivated the general public of Peshawar district to actively participate in politics. Fig 1.6 shows that 59 % of the target population agreed and strongly agreed that social media motivated the voters of this district to take an active part in the politics of this area. 26 % opposed the question expressing that social media is not motivating the public of this area for active participation in the politics of this region. Only 15 % remained neutral in this regard.

A question was put before the target population whether social media is successfully eliminating the Biradari Element from the politics

of Peshawar. To this effect public, about 37 % showed their agreement and about 38 % expressed a decline. 25 % were neutral about this issue. It reveals that yet baradari system does exist in the politics of Peshawar.

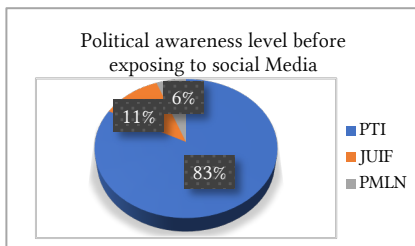


Figure 1: Respondents' Opinion

The target population was also inquired about political awareness levels before exposure to social media. 48 % reveal that it was low before exposition to social media. 45 % expressed that their political awareness level was medium and 7 % were of the view that they possessed a vast degree of consciousness before exposure to social media. The general results show that social media has affected the awareness level of the public in this region positively.

Your political awareness level after exposition to social media. To this effect target population, 53 % reacted as a medium, 40 % answered rise in awareness level, and 7 % went with a low level of awareness. About 73 % of the target population replied . On the other hand, 28 % came with a negative answer. About 49 % confirmed their voting tendency due to social media. 33 % didn't agree with this question and 18 % remained neutral in this respect. To this effect, the public responded positively, up to 72%. Does it mean the public answered question no. 11 also reveals the same? Very low 17 % disagreed with the term and 11 % were of neutral thinking.

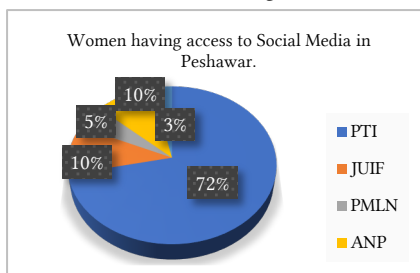


Figure 2: Respondents' Opinion

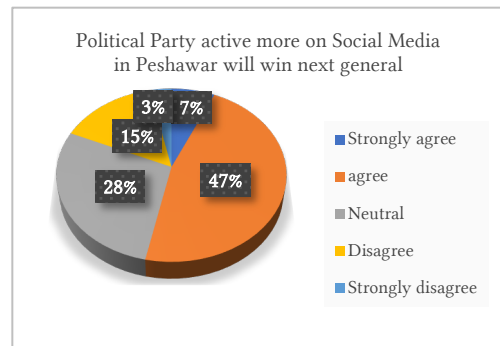


Figure 3: Respondents' Opinion

The maximum population of 72 % simply agreed and strongly agreed. 20 % were not agreed and only 8 % were neutral thinkin Interestingly, in the region where women are barred from the vote, the target population expressed their view that women having access to social media, up to 42% agreed with this term. 31% straight away declined. 27% remained neutral as they were not pretty sure about the accurate news.

This was the point to assess political parties' presence on social media in district Peshawar. 72 % revealed that PTI is leading this aspect. Second, in this run is JUIF which got 10 % third stood ANP with 10% of support and the rest of the political parties don't have much remarkable position?

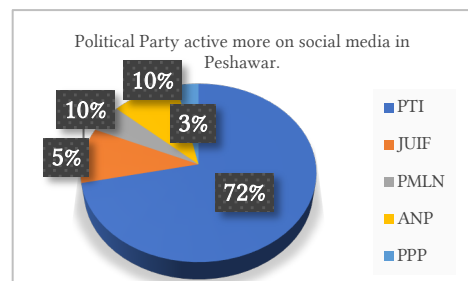


Figure 4: Respondents' Opinion

Political Party active more on Social Media in Peshawar will win the next general election in Peshawar. 43% of the Target population expressed their strong and simple agreement with this question. 25 % were not agreed and the rest, 32 %, remained neutral. The previous result of GE 2013 shows that PTI has secured the maximum number of votes and won a national assembly seat. In this part, the respondent, about 70%,

expressed the monopoly of Facebook in this region. Second in this line is WhatsApp rest of the social media tools were not clicked remarkably.

The answer to this question by 32 % of the target population is remarkable that checks the authenticity of social media material rather than blindly trusting it. 27% revealed they like & comment while 5 % and 6 % relied upon reacting and sharing directly. Surprisingly 27 % expressed no action

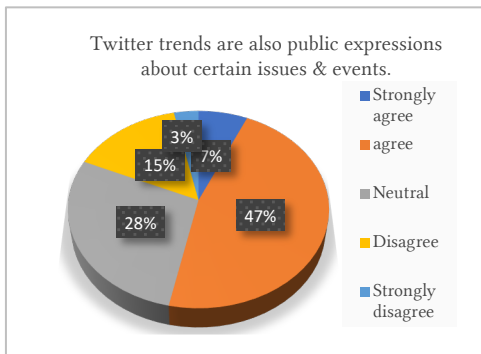


Figure 5: Respondents' opinion concerning the Role of Social Media in Creating Political Awareness among Voters of Peshawar

Interestingly 57 % showed their agreement with this question, while 15 % declined it and 28 % remained neutral in this respect.

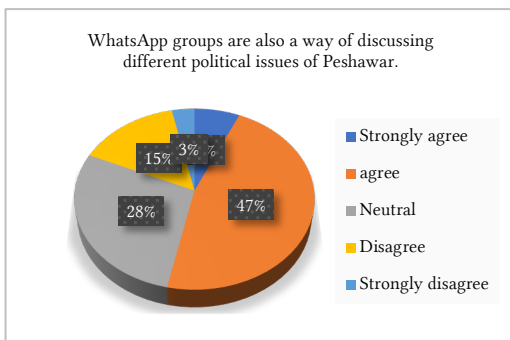


Figure 6: Respondents' Opinion

WhatsApp stood second in the social media tools in this region. To this question, about 68 % of the target population agreed while 22 % remained neutral. Only 10 % disagreed with this question.

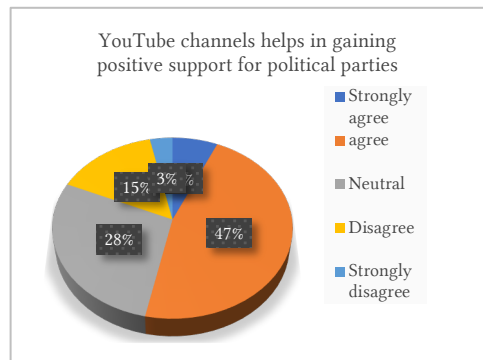


Figure 7: Respondents' Opinion

YouTube channels help in gaining positive support for political parties. In this section, 54 % of the target population simply and strongly agreed. 15 % disagreed while 28 % remained neutral.

Discussion

The study determined that the effectiveness of social media among the voters of this region is getting high with time. Secondly, which social media tool is leading this play concerning traditional media. Thirdly which political party is occupying the social media of this region? After analyzing the data collected, the picture shows that the public of this region is interested in real politics. 71 % of the target population are of the view that social media has helped the common man to get political information. Half of the target population confirmed that inclination happened in their political behavior due to social media. The public also expressed their view that social media is used as a propaganda tool by the political parties. 47 % agreed and 37 % opposed this stance. More than half of the public is of the view that due to social media, now the voters are actively participating in politics. It was also observed that people believe that social media is eliminating the baradari aspect of politics in this region. This study shows that social media is successfully helping the public/voters to be more politically aware than ever before. Among the target public, 72 % revealed that they had voted in the previous general election. Social media has helped them to make their choice to vote. A record voter turnout is expected in the upcoming general elections in Peshawar. People are more

aware of the power of their vote now. As for as the female voters of this district are concerned, the target population shouldn't have a clear stance about women's participation on social media. The previous reports of different election processes observing organizations show that women of this area are barred from the vote. The political party that has gained popularity among social media users of this region is Pakistan Tehrik e Insaf. The runner-up is Jamiat e Ulama Islam (F), followed by Awami National Party and others. Beyond this, the target population is not sure about the possibility of the same result in general elections.

Conclusion

The study concluded that the public is eager to check the authenticity of political material shared on social media rather than believing it blindly. This study also concluded that political awareness was precisely evident in the citizens with the advent of social media. This is the positive approach developed by social media

among voters and a positive change is expected in the politics of this area. Facebook is declared as a source of political awareness and political influence in this battlefield of politics. Whatsapp stands second in this respect. Other tools of social media are found less known in this region so far. Interestingly the maximum public showed their sense of Twitter trends. Visuals have more effect on the minds of people. Youtube is also there in the scene of politics of Peshawar. As per [Muntean, A. \(2015\)](#), political participation through social media has an impact on voters' change in decisions. Thus this study also supports the opinion expressed by the researcher. People expressed their views that Youtube political material is also worth watching. Concluding the study, it is assumed that social media is somehow influencing the politics of this region. The public is gaining more awareness about their political rights with the help of social media. In the future social media presence will be an essential part of politics in Peshawar. In short, it is a ray of light in the darkness.

References

- Butt, J., & Awang, M. (2017). Intention for Voting in Pakistan: the Role of Social Media, Ethnicity, and Religiosity. *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding*.
- Gayatri, & Wani, N. A. (2014). A Survey on Impact of Social Media on Election System. Gayatri Wani et al., / (IJCSIT) *International Journal of Computer Science and Information Technologies*, 5(6), 2014, 7363-7366.
- Shabir, G. (2014). The Impact of Social Media on Youth: A Case Study of Bahawalpur City. *Asian Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities* 3(4),
- Minhas, et al.. (2016). Usage of WhatsApp: A Study of the University of Peshawar, Pakistan. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention* 5(7), 71-73.
- Muntean, A. (2015). The Impact of Social Media Use of Political Participation. Aarhus University.
- Njegomir, N. M. (2016). the impact of facebook, twitter, and youtube on millennials' political behavior. Gonzaga University MA Program in Communication and Leadership Studies.
- O'Morain, H. B. (2016). What is the role of social media in a general election campaign? A case study of the 2016 Irish General Election. Maynooth: National University of Ireland.
- Peter Riezebos, S. A. (2011). the effects of social media on political party perception and voting behavior. The University of Twente, The Netherlands. Drienerlolaan 5, 7522NB Enschede: IADIS International e-Democracy, Equity, and Social Justice 2011.
- Stefan Stieglitz, T. B. (2012). Usage Of Social Media For Political Communication. PACIS 2012 Proceedings. Paper 22.
- Vonderschmitt, K. (2012). The Growing Use of Social Media in Political Campaigns: How to use Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to Create an Effective Social Media Campaign. Western Kentucky University.
- Zaheer, L. (2012). Use of Social Media and Political Participation among University Students. *Pakistan Vision* 17(1),