

p-ISSN : 2521-2982 | e-ISSN : 2707-4587

DOI(Journal): 10.31703/gpr

DOI(Volume): 10.31703/gpr/.2024(IX)

DOI(Issue): 10.31703/gpr.2024(IX.IV)



# GPR

**GLOBAL POLITICAL REVIEW**  
HEC-RECOGNIZED CATEGORY-Y

**VOL. IX, ISSUE IV, FALL (DECEMBER-2024)**

### Article Title

## Political Engagement of Youth on Facebook & Twitter: A Case Study of Pakistan in Perspective of Political Polarization

### Global Political Review

p-ISSN: 2521-2982 e-ISSN: 2707-4587

DOI (journal): 10.31703/gpr

Volume: IX (2024)

DOI (volume): 10.31703/gpr.2024(IX)

Issue: IV Fall (December-2024)

DOI(Issue): 10.31703/gpr.2024(IX-IV)

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### Abstract

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**Keywords:** Youth Engagement, Political Polarization, Facebook, Twitter, Pakistan, Political Discourse, Case Study, Online Behavior

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**Pages:** 50-63

DOI:10.31703/gssr.2024(IX-IV).05

DOI link: [https://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gpr.2024\(IX-IV\).05](https://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gpr.2024(IX-IV).05)

Article link: <http://www.gprjournal.com/article/A-b-c>

Full-text Link: <https://gprjournal.com/fulltext/>

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### Citing this Article

05	Political Engagement of Youth on Facebook & Twitter: A Case Study of Pakistan in Perspective of Political Polarization						
	Author	Sajid Nawaz Abbasi Babar Hussain Shah		DOI	10.31703/gpr.2024(IX-IV).05		
Pages	50-63	Year	2024	Volume	IX	Issue	IV
Referencing & Citing Styles	APA	Abbasi, S. N., & Shah, B. H. (2024). Political Engagement of Youth on Facebook & Twitter: A Case Study of Pakistan in Perspective of Political Polarization. <i>Global Political Review</i> , IX(IV), 50-63. <a href="https://doi.org/10.31703/gpr.2024(IX-IV).05">https://doi.org/10.31703/gpr.2024(IX-IV).05</a>					
	CHICAGO	Abbasi, Sajid Nawaz, and Babar Hussain Shah. 2024. "Political Engagement of Youth on Facebook & Twitter: A Case Study of Pakistan in Perspective of Political Polarization." <i>Global Political Review</i> IX (IV):50-63. doi: 10.31703/gpr.2024(IX-IV).05.					
	HARVARD	ABBASI, S. N. & SHAH, B. H. 2024. Political Engagement of Youth on Facebook & Twitter: A Case Study of Pakistan in Perspective of Political Polarization. <i>Global Political Review</i> IX, 50-63.					
	MHRA	Abbasi, Sajid Nawaz, and Babar Hussain Shah. 2024. 'Political Engagement of Youth on Facebook & Twitter: A Case Study of Pakistan in Perspective of Political Polarization', <i>Global Political Review</i> , IX: 50-63.					
	MLA	Abbasi, Sajid Nawaz, and Babar Hussain Shah. "Political Engagement of Youth on Facebook & Twitter: A Case Study of Pakistan in Perspective of Political Polarization." <i>Global Political Review</i> IX.IV (2024): 50-63. Print.					
	OXFORD	Abbasi, Sajid Nawaz and Shah, Babar Hussain (2024), 'Political Engagement of Youth on Facebook & Twitter: A Case Study of Pakistan in Perspective of Political Polarization', <i>Global Political Review</i> IX (IV), 50-63.					
	TURABIAN	Abbasi, Sajid Nawaz and Babar Hussain Shah. "Political Engagement of Youth on Facebook & Twitter: A Case Study of Pakistan in Perspective of Political Polarization." <i>Global Political Review</i> IX, no. IV (2024): 50-63. <a href="https://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gpr.2024(IX-IV).05">https://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gpr.2024(IX-IV).05</a> .					



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[www.gprjournal.com](http://www.gprjournal.com)  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gpr>



Pages: 50-63

URL: [https://doi.org/10.31703/gesr.2024\(IX-IV\).05](https://doi.org/10.31703/gesr.2024(IX-IV).05)

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## Title

### Political Engagement of Youth on Facebook & Twitter: A Case Study of Pakistan in Perspective of Political Polarization

#### Abstract

This study investigates the political engagement of youth on Facebook and Twitter with a particular focus on the dynamics of political polarization. Facebook and Twitter play a significant role in shaping political discourse, particularly among the younger demographic. In Pakistan, engagement of youth on these platforms is crucial for comprehending the broader political landscape. The research employs a case study approach, leveraging quantitative methods to analyze the online behaviors and preferences of young individuals participating in political discussions on Facebook and Twitter. The study aims to discern the extent to which these platforms contribute to or mitigate political polarization among the youth. The findings of this research reveal that many of the youth are busy sharing political content on Facebook and Twitter. They engage in discussing their favorite political party and highlight all the aspects of their beloved political figure.

#### Keywords:

[Youth Engagement](#),  
[Political Polarization](#),  
[Facebook](#), [Twitter](#),  
[Pakistan](#), [Political](#)  
[Discourse](#), [Case](#)  
[Study](#), [Online](#)  
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## Introduction

Politics, democracy, and media are closely linked and rather highly interdependent upon each other. Democracy survives and thrives in a politically diverse and enabling environment in the presence of vibrant, independent, and unbiased mass media. However, the fact is that this relationship is mostly based on self-interest heavily depending on each

other for their smooth functioning (Hrebenar & Scott, 2015). In the remote past, politicians and political parties used to rely on traditional mass media to reach out to the people to communicate political information and messages to galvanize their support.

However, in the wake of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>-century industrial revolution, there has been an



unprecedented advancement in the technological domain over the last many decades. In olden times, the invention of the wheel and in today's world, the invention of the chip, are known as the two defining milestone achievements of human minds. In continuation of this technological development, the last two decades of the 21st century have ushered in an unprecedented revolution in the field of communication technologies. Today, the world of communication is running on more sophisticated systems disseminating information within no time around the world and has truly materialized what great communication scholar Marshal McLuhan had thought of the world transforming into a global village many decades ago, removing the time and space constraints (McLuhan, [1964](#)). The world has been truly transformed into a virtual global village at present as a result of fast-paced information disseminating technologies.

### **Background:**

#### **Emergence of Social Media as a Powerful Tool of Communication**

This is an age of social media. This new media (Social media) has engaged people across the world socially as well as politically and people now use this new media actively to fulfill their needs for information and entertainment. Digital media and its social networking sites have become very popular platforms for political communication where political parties, political leaders, activists, and people interact and engage on political issues.

#### **Youth as Active Social Media Users**

Youth is an active user of social media. During the last decade or so, online political communication by political parties in Pakistan has enormously engaged the young generation in political affairs and they are now not only politically well-aware but also actively participate in the day-to-day political discussions and indulge in heated debates and discussions. Almost all political parties and politicians now have social media accounts where they disseminate political information frequently. They have specialized social media teams who promote their political agendas on these social media platforms. There is no denying the fact that social media has shaken the world with its powerful effects. It was former US President Barack Obama who had actively used and engaged the American youth

during his election campaign which eventually turned out to be very successful for him. Like other parts of the world, for political parties and politicians in Pakistan, the young generation is their substantial target as they not only constitute the major portion of our population but they are also the most active users of social media platforms.

### **Social Media & Political Polarization**

With this rapid digitalized communication revolution, political polarization has become an alarming issue around the globe in the past few years. This rising political polarization is mainly attributed to the spread of disinformation and fake news on social media platforms endangering the future of democracy (Tucker et al. [2018](#)). Politicians are using all possible means to gain more and more attention from the people especially the youth by disseminating their narratives and manifestos no matter whether they are based on facts or not. It is not only in the United States that political polarization has taken root (Arceneaux et al., [2012](#), Abramowitz & Saunders, [2008](#); Pew Research Center, 2017) but also across the world (Gidron et al., [2019](#)).

### **Political Polarization defined**

Political polarization refers to the extreme division among the members of a society about their political affiliations, loyalties, and ideologies and nurtures deep hatred and feelings of intolerance against the dissenting views of the opposition political party and its followers.

### **Youth of Pakistan, Social Media & Political Engagement**

Pakistan has a large proportion of youth which is nearly 63 % of the total population of the country. Social media usage is very common and popular among the younger population. Their political engagement on social media platforms has also risen to a great proportion. This widespread usage of social media among the youth on the one hand has increased their political engagement while on the other hand, it is argued that it has created division among them with regard to their respective political beliefs.

Keeping in view the political engagement of youth in this digital era, there is a dire need to conduct research with a special focus on youth and



their political behaviors. The current study will not only explore the role of social media in the political engagement of youth (university students) but will also try to find out if there is any political polarization among university students.

### Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this research study can be categorized as under:

1. To examine the extent of social media usage among university students in Pakistan
2. To find out whether a relationship exists between the political engagement of university students on social media and their political polarization.

### Significance of the Study

Political extremism is on the rise globally. The virtues of tolerance, debate, acceptance the dissenting views, and peaceful co-existence are perhaps on the fading end. Democracy is all about dialogue, debate, and harmonious co-existence within a political system where people are more tolerant and accommodative of individuals having opposed political views or ideologies. In Pakistan too, the divisive politics, and extreme political vie points have given rise to political polarization that has surely affected our social relations and bonds at societal as well as individual levels. There is extremity in people's political behaviors in favor or opposition of a political party or leader creating division within families, siblings, friends, and other social relations which is not a good omen for national unity and democracy. The usage of social media in general and among youth has exacerbated this division based on their blind political affiliations and loyalties.

This study will be significant for the political parties, political leaders and policymakers, and social media users to understand the polarizing effects of social media on youth while consuming political content and it may guide them to enact some regulations about their dissemination of political content on social media platforms. This study may also help youth to understand the role of social media in the formation of their political behaviors and they may become more cautious about their consumption of political content on social media.

### Statement of Problem

This is an era of hyper information and one cannot think of living without using the internet and social media platforms. Information, whether it is true or false, is traveling at lightning speed irrespective of its time and space constraints. Social media has now become a kind of “**political combat area**” where virtual wars are taking place among the political parties, their supporters, and their followers. The use of social media, political engagement of youth, and political polarization has become a subject of considerable importance around the world including in Pakistan. Social media networking sites such as **Facebook** and **Twitter** are the most famous and favorite platforms for political parties and their leaders to disseminate their political information and agendas to the public. The youth is the most active user of these social media platforms. It is argued that political polarization is deepening and creating a division at societal and individual levels. Political extremity, hatred, and intolerance are intensifying. The space for democratic values such as healthy political debates, and respect for opposing views is fast deteriorating. The active use of social media is said to be exacerbating political polarization, especially among the young population. This study will examine the role of social media in the perspective of political engagement to the political polarization of youth (university students) in Pakistan and whether this engagement is affecting their political attitudes and behaviors. It will explore whether and to what extent their political engagement on social media platforms is driving them to political polarization.

### Literature Review

The literature examined on political polarization reveals that the politics of division on various levels had been the hallmark of political parties, leaders, and people around the world. The studies on political polarization and the role of social media were mainly conducted in the United States and other developed countries. The literature reviewed explored that there are direct and indirect effects of political engagement and political loyalty in which social media has a vital role in political polarization. Further, it studied that more use of political content on social media leads to political polarization and political loyalty (Ali et al., [2021](#)).

Studies by many scholars narrated that there is polarization on social media networks (Bakshy et al., 2015; Hong, Kim, 2016; Lee et al., 2020; Shin, Thorson, 2017; Yardi, Boyd, 2010). The strong affiliation leads to rifts among people which is not a healthy prospect for democracy and people form their groups based on their similar opinions and hold animosity against those having opposing views. The digital revolution in the modern-day world has provided multiple platforms for communication among individuals and groups but this has some negative repercussions as well. According to C.R. (Sunstein, 2017), political polarization has grown to a greater extent with the spread of this new information and communication technological revolution.

Social media is shaping the way people perceive and interact with their political adversaries based on their associations and loyalty to their respective political identities or political parties. The younger generation is the most active users of social media and their political engagement has increased to a great extent on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter Social media use is speedily increasing in the world (Poushter, 2016).

The studies found that political parties and candidates around the world nowadays use social media to catch up to their supporters and followers (Dabula, 2017).

Social media is a pervasive platform that connects people across the world. According to Phillimore & McCabe (2015), social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram are popular platforms for obtaining and sharing political information.

According to Gibson and Cantijoch (2013), political participation is categorized as active participation which includes taking part in protests, voting, and campaign activities and passive participation refers to discussion, news attention, and other modes of expression. With the advent of online social media networks, the dynamics of political participation have provided new forms of political activities that include sharing, liking, tweeting, and re-tweeting content. The online or digital participation of people in political activities involves actions such as liking, sharing, participating in surveys, or posting photos (Muntean, 2015; Phillimore & McCabe, 2015).

Political polarization is dividing people within and across the borders and tolerance of opposing views has become rare. Lyengar (2012) stated that people hold extreme views against each other based on their political associations with their respective parties. Scholars hold the view that selective exposure to information on social media has accelerated this problem. These scholars point out that more exposure to the message of one's liking strengthens their personal beliefs (Prior, 2013; Stroud, 2010).

In the past literature, there was a general assumption that the major factor for political polarization was selective exposure among media users (Stroud, 2010; Kim, 2015; Arceneaux et al., 2012). This active participation on social media, on the one hand, has increased political awareness but on the other hand has given rise to many challenges such as an increased level of intolerance, heated debates, disagreements, and political polarization (Davis, 2009, Mutz, 2006). Scholars are of the view that political discussions on social media are not only limited to the sharing of information and ideas but also lead to an extreme level of opinion formulations (Brooks & Geer, 2007; Sobieraj & Berry, 2011).

Over the years social media has become an important platform for political information besides its usage for entertainment and education purposes. This new media plays a pivotal role in connecting the people and bringing them to virtual platforms where they take part in debates, and share information and ideas with ease and speed, playing a positive role in strengthening democracy (Mitra, 2001; Muhlberger, 2009).

According to Van Aelst et al. (2017) and Della Vigna and Kaplan (2007), the media has become more divided and partisan, and people have polarized ideologically. Sunstein (2009) argued that political polarization can increase because of the disagreements and intolerance in politics among the people taking part in political discussions.

## Gap in Research

The current study has focused on the role of social media in the perspective of political engagement to the political polarization of university students by taking a sample of students from different public sector university students in Islamabad Capital Territory. It has been explored whether there is any

relationship between the usage of social media, political engagement, and political polarization. Most of the previous studies on political polarization were conducted mainly in the developed states while this case is different in the underdeveloped world where social media has become a political power and political tool of politics. Since the use of social media has gained momentum during the last few years in Pakistan, there is a need for more studies in this area with a special focus on young people who are a major portion of our population. The study will explore whether Pakistani youth are divided or polarized in their political attitudes and on which basis this division is created. So, this study will be focusing on the young generation which constitutes a major proportion of Pakistan's population.

Previous studies have found that there is a relationship between social media usage and political polarization on varying factors. It has also been found a gap in variables such as literature shows such studies focused only on Twitter as a social media platform but here, this study explored both popular social media platforms (Facebook & Twitter) that are playing a significant role in political engagement among the university students in the Islamabad Capital Territory.

There are some other different gaps in terms of population, and sampling as well. This study has been also conducted in the Islamabad Capital Territory, while others were conducted in other provinces of the country. It has been found that there is a gap in sample sizes as well in earlier studies that have been considered in this research study. Some other studies have been conducted in private

sector universities in other cities of Pakistan. This study focused on students in public sector universities in the capital city where students come from all over the country and have diverse socio-political backgrounds and there is a gap in this area in comparison to the previous studies conducted.

### Hypotheses of the Study / Research Questions of the Study

1. It is more likely that a strong relationship exists between the use of social media and the political engagement of university students.
2. It is more likely that the political engagement of university students on social media drives them to political polarization.

### Research Questions

1. Which social media platform is preferred by university students for political engagement?
2. Whether and to what extent does the political engagement of students on social media lead them to political polarization?

### Methodology

This quantitative study has been conducted in public sector universities of Islamabad Capital Territory. In this study, the Survey research method has been adopted to collect data from 384 students to explore the role of social media in the lives of university students from the perspective of their political engagement and political polarization. The sample technique of the current study is probability sampling including Stratified and Simple Random sampling techniques for sample selection.

## Results and Findings

**Table 1**

*What is your gender?*

	Frequency	Percent
Male	218	56.8
Female	166	43.2
Total	384	100.0

The majority of survey participants identified as male, constituting 56.8% of the responses. Female

respondents make up the remaining 43.2% of the total responses (Table 01).



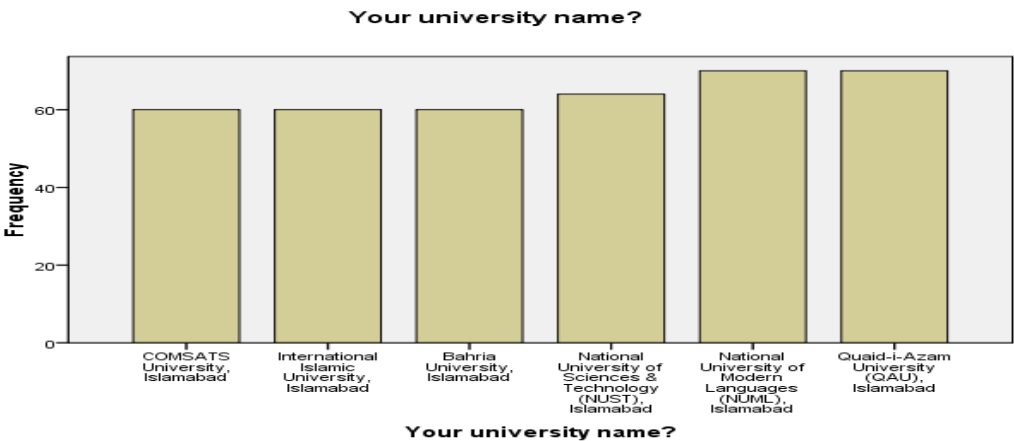
Table 2

What is your age?

	Frequency	Percent
18- 22 years	307	79.9
23 - 27 years	51	13.3
More than 32 years	26	6.8
Total	384	100.0

The majority of survey participants fall in the age range of 18-22 years, constituting 79.9% of the responses. The age range of 23-27 years accounts for 13.3% of the total responses. Respondents aged more than 32 years make up the remaining 6.8% of the total responses (Table 02).

Figure 1



The participants reported affiliations with various universities in Islamabad. The most frequently mentioned universities include the National University of Modern Languages (NUML) and Quaid-i-Azam University (QAU), both with 18.2% of responses. Other universities, including COMSATS University, International Islamic University, Bahria University, and NUST, also have notable representations (Fig. 01)

Table 3

Preferences for using Social Media

	How frequently do you prefer social media for political information?	How frequently do you prefer the traditional media for political information?	How frequently do you encounter political content on social media platforms?
Mean	3.8411	1.2232	3.2604
Std. Deviation	2.82283	0.21223	2.32061

Frequency of Social Media Usage for Political Information

The average frequency of preferring social media for political information is 3.8411. This value provides a central point around which the preferences are distributed. The standard deviation is 2.82283,

indicating the extent of variability or dispersion in the preferences for social media. A higher standard deviation suggests a more diverse range of preferences.

### Frequency of Traditional Media Usage for Political Information

The average frequency of preferring traditional media for political information is 1.2232. This represents the central tendency of responses regarding the use of traditional media. The standard deviation is 0.21223, indicating the degree of variability in preferences for traditional media. A higher value suggests more diverse responses.

### Frequency of Encountering Political Content on Social Media

The average frequency of encountering political content on social media platforms is 3.2604. This is the central point around which responses are distributed. The standard deviation is 2.32061, suggesting the degree of variability or dispersion in how frequently participants encounter political content on social media (Table 03).

**Table 4**

*How frequently do you prefer social media for political information?*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Very greatly	165	43.0	43.0	43.0
Greatly	115	29.9	29.9	72.9
Up to some extent	104	27.1	27.1	100.0
Total	384	100.0	100.0	

The majority of respondents (43.0%) indicated that they "very greatly" prefer social media for obtaining political information. An additional 29.9%

responded that they "greatly" prefer social media. The remaining 27.1% mentioned that they prefer social media "up to some extent" (Table 04).

**Table 5**

*How frequently do you encounter political content on social media platforms?*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Very frequently	142	37.0	37.0	37.0
Frequently	116	30.2	30.2	67.2
Up to some extent	49	12.8	12.8	79.9
Rarely	38	9.9	9.9	89.8
Never	39	10.2	10.2	100.0
Total	384	100.0	100.0	

The largest group (37.0%) reported encountering political content on social media platforms "very frequently." Additionally, 30.2% mentioned encountering political content "frequently."

Responses vary with 12.8% encountering political content "up to some extent," 9.9% "rarely," and 10.2% "never" (Table 05).

**Table 6**

*On which Social Media platforms do you actively engage with political content?*

	Facebook	Twitter	WhatsApp	Instagram	TikTok	YouTube
Mean	3.2245	3.2604	3.4356	3.5467	3.6677	3.9876
Std. Deviation	1.45637	1.45678	1.56785	1.56784	1.67895	1.09745

Facebook: The mean rating for Facebook is 3.2245, with a standard deviation of 1.45637. This indicates that, on average, participants rated Facebook around 3.22 out of some scale (e.g., out of 5 or 10), and there was some variability in individual ratings, with a standard deviation of approximately 1.46.

Twitter: The mean rating for Twitter is 3.2604, with a standard deviation of 1.45678. Similarly, participants rated Twitter around 3.26 on average, with a similar level of variability in ratings as Facebook.

WhatsApp: The mean rating for WhatsApp is 3.4356, with a standard deviation of 1.56785. This suggests that participants rated WhatsApp slightly higher on average compared to Facebook and Twitter, with a slightly higher variability in ratings.

Instagram: The mean rating for Instagram is 3.5467, with a standard deviation of 1.56784. Participants rated Instagram slightly higher on average compared to WhatsApp, with a similar level of variability in ratings.

TikTok: The mean rating for TikTok is 3.6677, with a standard deviation of 1.67895. TikTok received a higher average rating compared to Instagram, with a slightly higher variability in ratings as well.

YouTube: The mean rating for YouTube is 3.9876, with a standard deviation of 1.09745. YouTube received the highest average rating among the listed social media platforms, indicating that participants rated it the most favorably on average, with relatively lower variability in ratings compared to the other platforms. This table summarizes the mean ratings and standard deviations for six social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. On average, YouTube received the highest rating (mean of 3.9876), while Facebook had the lowest rating (mean of 3.2245). Standard deviations indicate variability in ratings, with YouTube having the lowest variability and TikTok the highest (Table 06).

**Table 7**

*How much time do you spend on Social Media platforms daily?*

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Facebook	3.67483	1.45366
Twitter	3.45673	1.34256
WhatsApp	2.83530	1.09564
Instagram	2.46733	1.48394
TikTok	2.46378	1.47894
YouTube	2.46378	1.56747

This table displays the mean ratings and standard deviations for six social media platforms. Facebook received the highest average rating (mean of 3.67483) with moderate variability (standard deviation of 1.45366). Twitter followed closely with a slightly lower average rating (mean of 3.45673) and lower variability (standard deviation of 1.34256). WhatsApp had a lower average rating (mean of 2.83530) with relatively low variability (standard deviation of 1.09564). Instagram, TikTok, and

YouTube had similar average ratings (around 2.46), but Instagram had the highest variability (standard deviation of 1.48394), followed by TikTok (standard deviation of 1.47894) and YouTube (standard deviation of 1.56747). It appears that, on average, survey participants report spending approximately 3 to 4 hours daily on each of the listed social media platforms, and the reported time spent tends to vary consistently across platforms (Table 07).

**Table 8***Engagement on Social Media*

	How often do you engage with social media posts of the political party you like the most?	How often do you engage on social media posts of political parties other than the party you like the most?	How often do you share the social media posts of political parties other than the party you like the most?	How often do you share the social media posts of political parties other than the party you like the most?
Mean	3.8073	3.3456	3.3467	3.9856
Std. Deviation	1.45789	1.98765	1.09567	1.12367

The mean engagement frequency with posts of the preferred political party is 3.8073, with a standard deviation of 1.45789. This indicates a moderate level of engagement on average, with some variability among respondents.

The mean engagement frequency with posts of other political parties is 3.3456, with a standard deviation of 1.98765. This suggests a slightly lower level of engagement compared to posts from the preferred party, with higher variability among respondents.

The mean sharing frequency of posts from the preferred political party is 3.3467, with a standard deviation of 1.09567. This indicates a similar level of sharing activity as engagement with posts from the

preferred party, with relatively low variability among respondents.

The mean sharing frequency of posts from other political parties is 3.9856, with a standard deviation of 1.12367. This suggests a higher level of sharing activity compared to engagement with posts from other parties, with moderate variability among respondents.

The table indicates that, on average, participants report a maximum level of frequency when engaging with or sharing social media posts related to their favorite political party and other parties. The standard deviation suggests a consistent level of variability in reported behaviors across these different aspects (Table 08).

**Table 9***The believability of Social Media Content*

	To what extent do you believe in the social media content of the political party you like the most?	To what extent do you believe in the social media content of the political party other than what you like the most?
Mean	3.8073	1.5063
Std. Deviation	1.45678	3.98345

The mean believability rating for content from the preferred political party is 3.8073, with a standard deviation of 1.45678. This suggests that, on average, respondents tend to believe in the social media content from the political party they support, with some variability in the level of belief among respondents.

The mean believability rating for content from political parties other than the preferred party is 1.5063, with a standard deviation of 3.98345. This

indicates a much lower level of belief in social media content from other political parties compared to the preferred party, with significantly higher variability in the level of belief among respondents.

Overall, the table highlights a stark contrast in the perceived believability of social media content between the preferred political party and others, with greater variability in beliefs for content from parties other than the preferred one (Table 09).



**Table 10***Political Polarization*

	Mean	Std. Deviation
I like to comment on the political statements of others on social media	2.4567	1.58493
At times, I use offensive language while discussing the political statements of others	1.5784	0.46738
Because of freedom of expression on social media, hateful discussion increases among political opponents	3.9834	1.27205
Most of the time I oppose my family members having different political views	2.5647	1.00374
I like to discuss political matters with my friends on social media	3.5784	1.36782
Disinformation on social media causes division among supporters of different political parties	3.8120	1.25674
I hold positive opinions about other political parties on social media	2.5689	1.44566
I do not give importance to the opinions of other people on political matters on social media	2.3679	1.55567
I often post negative comments on the social media pages of political opponents	2.4536	1.92537
I often receive hateful political comments on social media	2.9993	1.56473
I always stay away from hateful political discussion on social media	2.3389	1.92833
I tolerate other people's different political views on social media	2.4637	1.48392
I feel comfortable with my friends who hold different political views than me	2.9302	1.43749

Engagement with political content varies, with moderate levels of commenting and discussion with friends. Offensive language usage is relatively low. There's a perception of increased hateful discussion due to freedom of expression, and moderate opposition to family members with different political views. Disinformation is seen as a cause of division among supporters of different parties, mixed attitudes towards other political parties, with moderate positivity. Some tend to undervalue others' opinions on social media. Negative comments on opponents' pages are somewhat

frequent. Receiving hateful political comments is moderately common. Many aim to avoid hateful political discussions. Tolerance of differing political views is moderate. Comfort with friends holding different political views is moderate. These findings reflect the complexity and diversity of political discourse on social media, with varying levels of engagement, tolerance, and exposure to divisive content. Participants, on average, may have different attitudes or behaviors across various political discussion scenarios on social media (Table 10).

**Table 11***Pearson Correlation*

	I often post negative comments on the social media pages of political opponents.	How frequently do you prefer social media for political information?
Pearson Correlation		.092
Sig. (2-tailed)		.072

**Correlation Coefficient (r)**

The Pearson correlation coefficient (r) for "I often post negative comments on the social media pages of political opponents" and "How frequently do you prefer social media for political information?" is 0.092. The correlation coefficient of 0.092 indicates

a very weak positive correlation. This means that there is a slight tendency for individuals who often post negative comments on the social media pages of political opponents to also have a slightly higher preference for using social media for political information. The p-value (Sig.) is 0.072 for both

variables. The p-value represents the probability of obtaining the observed correlation coefficient if there were no true correlation in the population. In this case, the p-value is greater than the common significance threshold of 0.05, suggesting that the observed correlation is not statistically significant at the 0.05 level. The correlation between these two variables is very weak, and the p-value suggests that this weak correlation is not statistically significant at the conventional significance level of 0.05. While there is a slight positive relationship, caution should be exercised in drawing strong conclusions, and additional analyses or considerations may be needed to further understand the relationship between these variables in your specific context (Table 11).

## Discussion

Mitra (2001) and Muhlberger (2009) also declared social media a strong source of political information as has been mentioned in (Table 03). According to Van Aelst et al (2017) and DellaVigna & Kaplan (2007), the media has become more divided and partisan, and people have polarized ideologically. C.R. Sunstein (Sunstein, 2009) argued that political polarization can increase because of the disagreements and intolerance on politics among the people taking part in political discussions; it has been also explored and mentioned in Tables 04, 05, and 09. This erosion of trust can weaken democratic norms and institutions, exacerbating polarization and hindering efforts to address societal challenges through collective action. Studies by many scholars narrated that there is polarization on social media networks (Bakshy et al., 2015; Hong, Kim, 2016; Lee et al., 2020; Shin, Thorson, 2017; Yardi, Boyd), it is also explored in Table 10.

Political engagement on Facebook and Twitter has become a double-edged sword in contemporary society, with its impacts ranging from enhancing democratic participation to exacerbating political polarization. Here's a detailed discussion on how political engagement on social media leads to polarization: Social media platforms often use algorithms to personalize content based on users' preferences and interactions. While this aims to enhance user experience, it can inadvertently create echo chambers and filter bubbles. Users are exposed mainly to viewpoints and information that align with their existing beliefs, shielding them from diverse perspectives. This reinforcement of existing

beliefs can deepen polarization by limiting exposure to alternative viewpoints and fostering an "us vs. them" mentality. Individuals tend to seek out information that confirms their existing beliefs and biases, a phenomenon known as selective exposure. On both platforms, users can easily find and consume content that reinforces their political ideologies. This leads to polarization as individuals become increasingly entrenched in their own viewpoints, less willing to consider alternative perspectives, and more likely to dismiss opposing viewpoints as illegitimate or misguided. Facebook and Twitter platforms have been criticized for facilitating the spread of misinformation and disinformation, particularly during political events and campaigns. False or misleading information can rapidly circulate on social media, creating confusion and reinforcing existing biases. When individuals are exposed to misleading content that aligns with their political beliefs, they may be more likely to accept it uncritically, further polarizing public discourse and undermining trust in institutions and media. Facebook and Twitter often incentivize engagement through likes, shares, and comments, leading to the proliferation of polarizing rhetoric and tribalism. Political actors, including politicians, pundits, and activists, may use inflammatory language and divisive messaging to rally their base and garner attention. This not only contributes to heightened polarization but also fosters hostility and animosity between opposing political camps. Social media algorithms prioritize content that elicits strong emotional reactions, such as outrage or indignation. Consequently, controversial or divisive content tends to spread rapidly on Facebook and Twitter platforms, amplifying polarization and exacerbating societal divisions. The viral nature of such content can overshadow more nuanced or moderate perspectives, further polarizing public discourse and undermining constructive dialogue. On Facebook and Twitter, extreme viewpoints that would traditionally be marginalized or considered fringe can gain prominence and legitimacy through online communities and echo chambers. The normalization of extreme views can shift the Overton window—the range of acceptable discourse—towards more extreme positions, marginalizing moderate voices and exacerbating polarization. Prolonged exposure to polarized content on social media can erode trust in democratic institutions, political processes, and the

media. When individuals are constantly exposed to narratives that portray opponents as deceitful or malevolent, it undermines confidence in the legitimacy of the political system and fosters cynicism.

### **Conclusion**

Facebook and Twitter have the potential to facilitate political engagement and mobilization, their impact on political polarization cannot be overlooked. The

echo chambers, selective exposure, misinformation, polarizing rhetoric, viral outrage, normalization of extreme views, and erosion of trust collectively contribute to widening ideological divides and undermining democratic cohesion. Addressing political polarization on Facebook and Twitter requires concerted efforts from policymakers, tech companies, media organizations, and civil society to promote digital literacy, foster diverse discourse, and mitigate the negative effects of online echo chambers.

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