

Effects of Social Media on Political Behavior

Ejaz Bashir*, Shaher**

Abstract

One of the immediate needs of present is to promote Communication and Media research in a changing world. For sustainability, social inclusion is one of the core element, so it is a dire need of time to improve the understanding that how social media is used? People make their perceptions through Social media. People get information and entertainment through Social media. Social media has become very popular medium throughout the world. People share ideas, information, and pictures to update others. This study will explore the nexus of Social media and political campaigns. This study will find effects of Social media on youth's perception in transforming their voting behavior. Research will explain effects of using social networking sites like Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, on perception of youth regarding voting behavior. Nowadays social media has become very popular medium in making perception of public. For this purpose, researcher conducts a survey study in Sahiwal city, Pakistan. The respondents were from Sahiwal city, and the survey study was conducted on 103 respondents. For most of the people, Social media is the only source of getting news regarding politics. For political aspect Social media has a positive impact on voting pattern and political campaign. The trend of using Social media is increasing in Pakistan, and so its importance in re-imagining politics and political behavior is gaining admiration.

.Key Words: *Social Networking Sites, Voting Behavior, and political Campaigns*

Introduction

After the digital revolution of 21st century, the development of Social Media has seen a rise in the past few years. The shift of balance of power has changed the way the audience consumes Media. Large Social Networking sites are becoming International Media Corporation, which are not restricted by culture, borders, or nationality. This is the most interesting development of digital revolution. Facebook, Twitter, and You tube are example of such social networking sites (Rashid, 2012). The second stage of internet development is characterized by promises, like the end of hierarchies, the power of many, democracy, openness, free services, and convenient user experience (Scholz, 2007). The Web 2.0 gave the advantage of web based interactivity, information sharing and collaboration. These applications allowed the user of the internet to produce user generated content, and to publish it without any difficulty. The Internet users have now become the consumer and the producer at a same time (Bruns, 2008). In mid-1990s, after the adoption of Personal Computers worldwide, instant messaging, chat rooms, and different groups were the attraction for the internet users (Lengal, 2004). The social media provides the users an opportunity to interact with the like-minded people through blogs, video, photo, and music aggregators, social networking websites, social bookmarking websites and different platforms (Stumpel, 2010). The tools of Social Media include; Face Book, Myspace, You Tube, Flickr, and Wikipedia etc. These are the most famous tools used currently, and new tools are introducing every day (Suomen Toivo).

* Ejaz Bashir Senior Reporter, Associated Press of Pakistan Corporation. (APPC)

** M.Phil. Research fellow

Social Networking sites have become an important tool for Politics. This medium is an important source for news, finding like-minded people, information, and also to approach voters in case of elections (Pewinternet). In United States Election 2008, Presidential Candidate Barrack Obama focused mainly on social media, and after that successful campaign, public has a new way to participate in the political process

Literature Review

According to the Research Study of Noel Bermudez, the use of Social Media during the Arab Spring 2010 is an important example of power and influence of Social Media. During this Era, the Social Networking Sites acted as a primary media in spreading the information. The benefits of using Social Media for political campaigns can be found in the 2008 United States Presidential Campaign of Barrack Obama. Social Media was used in almost every aspect of this campaign (Bermudez, 2012).

According to the study of Kristian Smith, Social Media is an important aspect of New Media, and often News breaks on Social Media websites. During the 2008 American Presidential Election, Barack Obama uses the Social Media for its Political Campaign and he won that Election. After the success of this campaign, many Politicians started using Social Media for their Political Purposes (Smith, 2011). In many campaigns, Social Media users have shown the Political Expression by making online donations, encouraging for voting, comments on political issues, and by status updates. The study concluded that the social media had and will continue to play a significant role in the politics. After the successful use of social media by Barrack Obama in 2008, many politicians have started showing their presence on Social Media. Also the problems in the use of Social Media are due to the Novelty of the Technology (Smith, 2011).

The report by Philip N Howard analyses the role of Social Media during the Arab Spring, focuses mainly on Tunisia and Egypt. The data was collected using information on Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. Based on the results, the study concluded that Social Media played a central role during Arab Spring, and also the New Media help to spread the ideas across the borders (Howard, 2011).

In the Article "Twitter Free Iran", Alex Burns, and Ben Eltham focus on the limitation of the Social Media Technologies with regards to social change. The Study discuss the protest during Iran's Election in 2009, the use of Social Networking Site 'Twitter' by the protesters, and the consequences they have to face due to raising their voice on Social Media. The Article states that the Social Media may have provided the Information, but it did not enable ordinary people to grab power, as some of the protestors, due to the use of Twitter sacrificed their lives (Burns, 2009).

A Report written by Jeffrey Ghannam, discusses the use of Social Media and Social Networking Sites in Arab countries. It also provides a useful statistics of Social Media use in Arab Countries. The report states that Social Media and Blogging will have a long term impact on the politics and society, as they cannot alone bring an immediate change in the field of politics. The introduction of Social Media in the lives of Arabs has changed the nature of the freedom of expression for all classes, as it has changed the nature of news and community engagement (Ghannam, 2011).

The Research Article by Thomas Poell and Erik Borra examines the use of Social Networking websites, during the G20 Summit in 2010 by the protestors. The article states that Twitter, to some extent, did play a role in this protest. The protest was organized for the rights of minority groups, by the Gay community. The use of Social Networking sites, according to the writer, was an interesting attempt, but it was not much of a success as the focus was the violence by the Police, rather than the cause. The study concluded that the activists are increasingly focusing on the New Media as a preferred platform for their protest/ communication (Poell, 2012).

The Research Study by Aneela Rashid focuses on the Egyptian Uprising of 2011, and the role played by the Social Media Sites as represented by the CNN and Al-Jazeera News websites. The Social Media is changing the pattern of politics. The Egyptian Uprising supports the importance of Social Media to create awareness amongst people. The Author states that in youth, blogs did play a role in Egypt. The Traditional Media may remain as a primary source of information, but people are spending more time on Social Media. The study concluded that the Social Media alone could not be credited for this Uprising in Egypt, there were other factors involved in it also, and the goals of the protestors are not still achieved (Rashid, 2012).

A Blog written by Bilal Lakhani, explains the use of Social Networking website Facebook by the Pakistan's elite, to actively remain in touch with the ongoing politics and the political campaign in 2013 General Election of Pakistan. The writer states that before the General Election of 2013, Pakistan, the politicians and political parties are trying to attract the elite voters on their Facebook fan pages (Lakhani, 2013).

An article written by Nadia MushtaqAbbasi, states the importance of Social Media and its use in the politics, specifically in Pakistan. To strengthen the vote bank, the writer states, the political parties use the new media forums. The main target of the political parties is to attract the young voters. Pakistan Tehreek I Insaf (PTI) launched themselves on Social Media first. But now Participation on Social Media has become more of a norm, in Pakistan (Abbasi, 2013).

Along with the political parties, political personalities individually are also showing their presence on Social Networking websites to stay in touch with the public. The writer claims that this new medium is introducing a new political structure, and is challenging the traditional political structure (Solangi).

Sameen Hassan in her blog, argues that use of Social Networking Websites in 2013 General Election of Pakistan, was more for the negative propagandas against the rivals, and less for the personal advertisement. This trend of negative propaganda could be seen more on the few days before the election and at the day of election. The writer suggests that the PTI's Social Media cell was most dynamic. The blog concluded that the Social Media would act as a game changer in the next general elections (Hassan).

Theoretical Foundations

Walter Lippmann (1922, *Public Opinion*) has mentioned that the picture in our head about the larger world of public affairs are provided by the news media and for most citizens, that world is out of reach. The priorities of the public are influenced strongly by the priorities of the media (McCombs, 1972). It is also argued that the media alone, do not determine the consensus, it only helps to achieve consensus. There are certain

limitations for the news media to influence the public agenda. For example, if any issue does not resonate with the public, regardless of its prominence on the media agenda, it will not appear on the public agenda (McCombs M. , 1997).

New research suggests that media, along with telling us what to think about, is also edging us how to think about it. Subsequently, it is also influencing us what to think. Noelle Neumann analyzed three operating characteristics of media i.e. ubiquity, consonance and cumulation, can be considered in the agenda-setting concept (Shaw, 1977).

The news media influence the public attention on specific issues. The agenda-setting role of news media is an ethical responsibility (McCombs M. , 1997). Through the selection and display of news stories; the news media influence a picture of it. Sense of identity, agenda of issues, and the perspectives about the issues are the elements of this picture (McCombs M. , 1997). Mass media, by making some issues more prominent than others, influence the standards by which personalities and issues are judged (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987).

According to this, studies examine agenda-setting as the independent variable and priming as dependent variable (Scheufele D. A., 2000). The news media have an influence on nation's agenda, by focusing the public attention on a few key issues. The Newspapers influence by the salience of the topics in the daily news, and Television by its opening story and time devoted to the story. The repetition of the news by the media on a daily basis determines the importance of the issues amongst the public (McCombs, 1972)

Research Questions:

RQ1: Time spent on social media has association with voting behavior.

RQ2: Participation in political activities on social media has association with political campaigns.

Method and Measures

The present study is conducted by using Survey Research Method and is a Quantitative study. The universe or population of the present study was comprised of District Sahiwal and

Sample population consisted of City Sahiwal. The survey was distributed through Twitter and Facebook to resident of City Sahiwal. Before an actual survey, trying out the Questionnaire is known as Pre-testing. Pre-testing is necessary to know the workability of the questionnaire at a small scale before actually collecting a data. For that purpose, took a sample of 10 respondents. After the pre-testing, minor changes were made in the questions on the basis of the response. The below table and graph shows that 70.9% of the respondents in the survey study conducted were male, and 29.1% of the respondents were female. The table 2 and graphs shows that 58.3% of the respondents were students, 24.3% were private employees, 2.9% Govt. employees, 10.7% have their own business, and 3.9% had other occupations.

Data Analysis

Table-1: Respondent Gender

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	73	70.9	70.9	70.9
Female	30	29.1	29.1	100.0
Total	103	100.0	100.0	

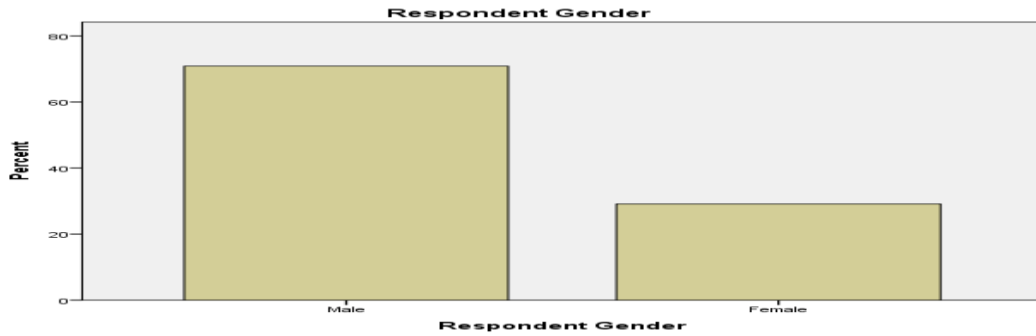
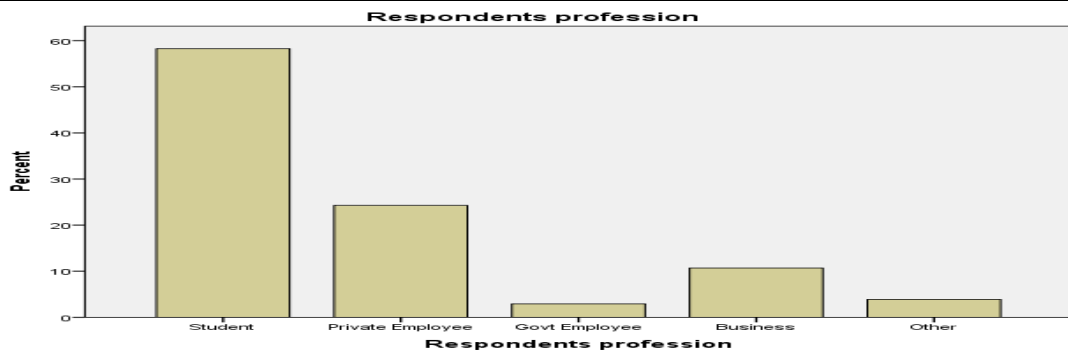


Table2: Respondent Profession

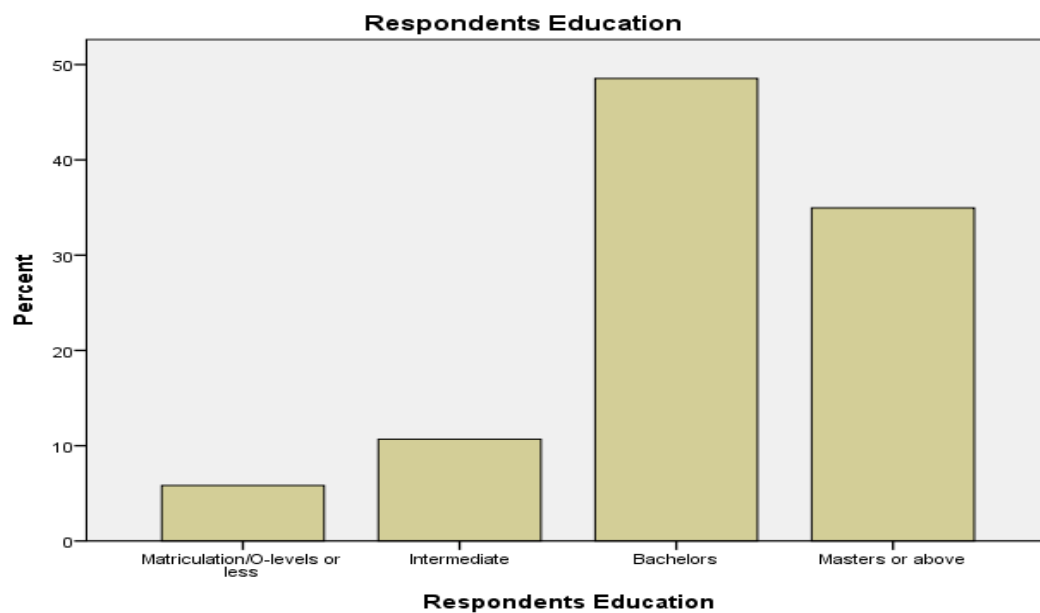
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Student	60	58.3	58.3	58.3
Private Employee	25	24.3	24.3	82.5
Govt. Employee	3	2.9	2.9	85.4
Business	11	10.7	10.7	96.1
Other	4	3.9	3.9	100.0
Total	103	100.0	100.0	



The above table and graphs shows that 58.3% of the respondents were students, 24.3% were private employees, 2.9% Govt. employees, 10.7% have their own business, and 3.9% had other occupations.

Table 3: Respondents Education

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Matriculation/O-levels or less	6	5.8	5.8	5.8
Intermediate	11	10.7	10.7	16.5
Bachelors	50	48.5	48.5	65.0
Masters or above	36	35.0	35.0	100.0
Total	103	100.0	100.0	

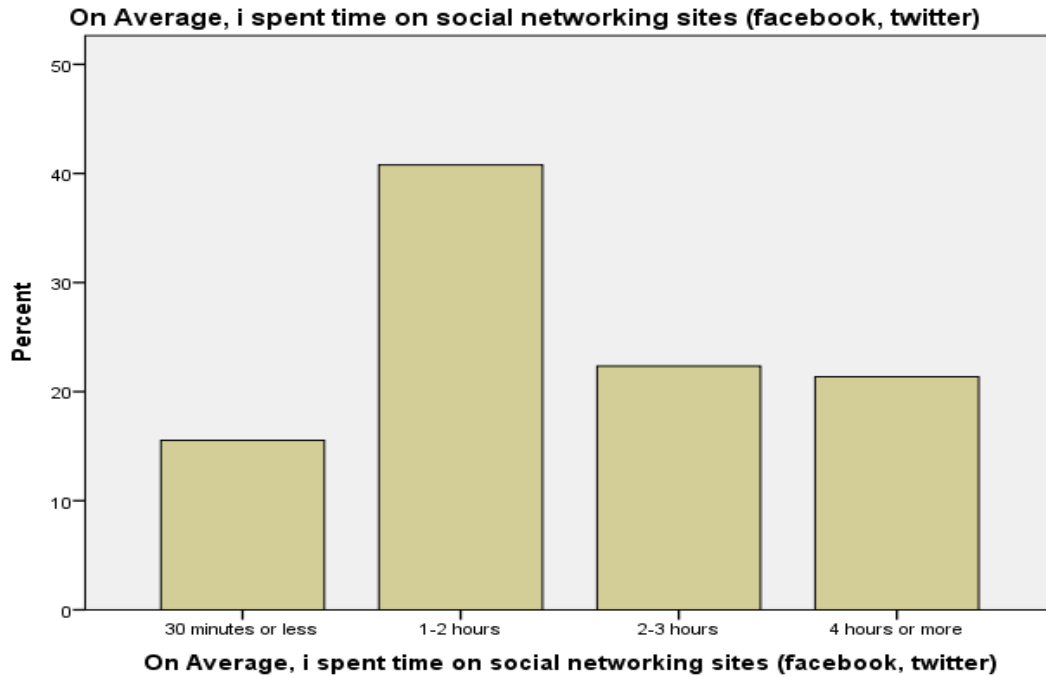


The above table and graph shows that 5.8% of the respondents have matriculation/O-levels or less education, 10.7% have intermediate level education, 48.5% are doing or have completed their bachelors, and 35% have masters or above degree.

Average Spent Time

Table4: On Average, i spent time on social networking sites (facebook, twitter)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
30 minutes or less	16	15.5	15.5	15.5
1-2 hours	42	40.8	40.8	56.3
2-3 hours	23	22.3	22.3	78.6
4 hours or more	22	21.4	21.4	100.0
Total	103	100.0	100.0	



the above table/ graph shows that 40.8% of the respondents spent their 1-2hours on social networking websites such as Facebook and Twitter, 22.3% of the respondents spent 2-3hours on social networking websites, 21.4% respondents spent 4 hours or more, and only 15.5% of the respondents spent 30 minutes or less time on social networking sites.

Table 5: Association of Time Spent on Social Media with Voting Behavior

		Post on social media over election campaign have affected my voting behavior					Total
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
On Average, i spent time on social networking sites (facebook, twitter)	30 minutes or less	2	4	5	3	2	16
	1-2 hours	1	5	9	19	8	42
	2-3 hours	3	4	5	8	3	23
	4 hours or more	2	5	4	6	5	22
Total		8	18	23	36	18	103

Calculated value of Chi square is 9.011

Table 6: Association of Participation in Political Activities on Social Media with Political Campaign

		I use social media to get news and current political scenario					Total
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
I participate in the political activities on social media	Strongly Disagree	1	0	0	5	0	6
	Disagree	0	2	2	10	2	16
	Neutral	0	4	4	4	3	15
	Agree	0	4	10	22	8	44
	Strongly Agree	0	1	4	12	5	22
Total		1	11	20	53	18	103

Calculated value of Chi square is 28.661.

Results

RQ1: Time spent on social media has no association with voting behavior.

Table 5 shows that “P” Value is great α , so we reject **RQ1**, which means time spent on social media has no association with voting behavior.

RQ2: Participation in political activities on social media has association with political campaigns.

Table 6 depicts that “P” 0.026 Value is less than α , so we accept **RQ2** which means participation in political activities on social media has association with political campaigns.

6. Discussion

To conclude the study it could be said that social media is playing a dominant role in shaping the public opinion and for propaganda setting. The trend of using social media is increasing in Pakistan. The political personals are well aware of that, and they are also using social media to gain the public support and implement their agenda. On the other side, people are also taking interest in political activities. For most of the people, social media is the only source of getting news and current political scenario. People are using social networking sites to get updated with news and current political scenarios, and it has an affect on their voting behavior, as they are convinced to cast a vote as per the study’s results. So, it could be said that the role and importance of social media in politics and political campaigns will keep on increasing in the future.

7. Recommendation

Based on the study results, in future study could be conducted to find out that why people are relying on social media and social networking sites more than traditional media. Also, if most of the people verify the information presented on pages and posts

by political personalities, than what is the resource they use for verification. The similar research study could be conducted to find out how much social media and social networking sites are affective and how they are playing a role in disaster situation? The study can also be conducted to find out how the Government organizations are utilizing social media for propagation.

Reference

- Rashid, A. R. (2012). *The Role of Social Media Sites in the Egyptian Uprising of 2011*. Erasmus University.
- Scholz, T. (2007). The Web 2.0 ideology. Collectivate. net.
- Burns, A. &. (2009). Twitter free Iran: An evaluation of Twitter's role in public diplomacy and information operations in Iran's 2009 election crisis.
- Lengal, L. T. (2004). Computer Mediated Communication.
- Stumpel, M. (2010, August 16). The Politics of Social Media. Facebook: Control and Resistance. University of Amsterdam.
- Suomen Toivo . (n.d.). *Social Media - The New Power of Political Influence*. Centre for European Studies.
- Bermudez, N. A. (2012). Effect of social media on individual voting. Doctoral dissertation, Gonzaga University.
- Smith, K. N. (2011). Social media and political campaigns .
- Howard, P. N. (2011). Opening closed regimes: what was the role of social media during the Arab Spring?.
- Bruns, A. (2008). *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and beyond: From production to produsage* (Vol. 45). Peter Lang.
- Ghannam, J. (2011). *Social Media in the Arab World: Leading up to the Uprisings of 2011*. Center for International Media Assistance.
- Poell, T. &. (2012). Twitter, YouTube, and Flickr as platforms of alternative journalism: The social media account of the 2010 Toronto G20 protests. *Journalism*, 13(6), 695-713.
- Lakhani, M. B. (2013, May 6). *For Pakistan's Elite, Facebook Turns Into a Political Battleground Ahead of Election*. Retrieved July 11, 2014, from Asiasociety: <http://asiasociety.org/blog/asia/pakistans-elite-facebook-turns-political-battleground-ahead-election>
- Abbasi, N. M. (2013, February 10). *Social media and politics*. Retrieved July 11, 2014, from Pakistantoday: <http://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2013/02/10/comment/columns/social-media-and-politics-2/>
- McCombs, M. (1997). Building consensus: The news media's agenda-setting roles. *Political Communication*, 14(4), 433-443.
- McCombs, M. E. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *Public opinion quarterly*, 36(2), 176-187.