

**Journal of Sociology & Cultural Research Review (JSCRR)**

Available Online: <https://jscrr.edu.com.pk>

Print ISSN: [3007-3103](#) Online ISSN: [3007-3111](#)

Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)

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**EFFECT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON PAKISTANI POLITICAL MOBILIZATION: AN ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

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**Abstract**

*This article examines how social media affects political mobilization in Pakistan, emphasizing how digital platforms have affected political activism, debate, and involvement in the nation. The study contends that social media's influence on Pakistan's political environment has been predominantly negative, notwithstanding its potential as a vehicle for civic engagement and democratic involvement. Through a critical examination, the article demonstrates how social media platforms have helped political actors manipulate public opinion, distribute false information, and deepen political polarization. The essay also tackles the impact of digital platforms on election campaigns, voter behavior, and the emergence of "echo chambers" that stifle important political debate. The article explains how social media has compromised the conventional methods of political mobilization and civic action by looking at case studies and actual data. This has eventually hampered the creation of an electorate that is more knowledgeable and engaged. The study ends with suggestions for resolving the issues raised by social media in Pakistani politics, such as the necessity of media literacy campaigns and legislative changes.*

**Keywords:** *Voting Behavior, Political Polarization, Information Dissemination, Misinformation, Echo Chambers*

**Introduction**

The world is currently living in a digital age when social media is continuously influencing politics and many facets of daily life. Political parties and leaders can now directly address the public without going via traditional media's gatekeeping mechanism thanks in large part to social media. Due to its bias, Pakistan's mainstream media has questioned the veracity of the information it has been disseminating, which has allowed leaders to reach the audience directly through social media. The

government or private companies that typically aim to maximize profits own Pakistan's mainstream media. Either way, it is difficult for anti-government or political ideas to gain support in the mainstream media (Sher Muhammad Khan, 2022). The world now resembles a little town due to the rise of the information revolution and the widespread use of electronic media. Information, news, and events can now travel the entire globe without hindrance or slowdown. These items appear in every living room right away, even before the government can take action and regulate them. The media's growing influence has had an impact on the social, political, and economic spheres of contemporary society. The images that the media presents serve as the foundation for people's ideas, opinions, and worldviews. Everybody, including simple people, elites, decision-makers, and statemen, has begun to incorporate it into their daily lives (Abdul Saboor, 2022).

The ability of contemporary media to eclipse traditional media throughout this campaign transformed the political landscape and made everyone aware of its significance. With this modification, political organizations could now further their political goals and engage with the people directly, free from outside influence. Social media has made it easier for the general population to participate in politics directly in addition to politicians. Other political leaders quickly adopted the use of social media as a communication strategy for their political organizations due to the two-way interactive nature of the new medium (Syeda Raheela Bano, 2021). Social media gives people the ability to disseminate and receive information, which aids in their decision-making process, encourages others to join campaigns or take part in protests, increases political discourse, establishes affinity groups, and launches grassroots efforts. Compared to traditional media, the internet provides more avenues for disseminating information to voters and opening up new avenues for self-promotion. The goal of digital communication is to facilitate direct communication between the people and the leadership of political parties. Since social media is online, it can function as a "permanent campaign" during times of post-election government, providing political campaigns with more than just a campaign (Arbay, 2021).

### **Analysis and Discussion:**

#### **PTI as a Third Major Political Party in Pakistan:**

Social media as a tool of political mobilization and political activism has enabled Pakistan Tehrika Insaf (PTI) to emerge as a new political force and

a third major political party to form government in the center. PTI did it due to constant and calculated social media campaigns manipulating the minds of the people (Sadia Sabeen, 2023 ). PTI realised social media platforms had the ability to reach the general public directly and get beyond traditional media gatekeepers as they became more and more prominent. He embraced social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and others as effective tools for spreading his political message, rallying followers, and refuting false narratives. Imran Khan's party's triumph in the 2018 general elections—which was a momentous occasion for the PTI as it formed the government for the first time—was largely due to his adept use of social media. PTI also used virtual events and live streaming during the COVID-19 pandemic to connect with a larger mass and keep them engaged even during worse times. Party used different tactics to gain and maintain popularity among people. PTI's journey in the digital space offers valuable insights into the strategies for success in this dynamic era (Dr. Zahid Bilal, 2024).

### **Affecting the Voting Behavior:**

Social media has significantly affected the voting behavior of people in Pakistan. It has increased the intention to vote since its rise. Individuals are more likely to vote if they use social media sites like Facebook more frequently. The outcome guarantees that the revolutionary social media sites, as a means of spreading ideas and influencing others, also have an impact on the political realm (Jamshed Butt, 2017). On February 8, 2024, Pakistan held its 12th general election. Of the registered voters, 128 million cast ballots, and 60.6 million votes were received. This was an increase of 5.8 million voters over the 2018 elections, when 54.8 million ballots were cast. In the 2024 election, the voter turnout percentage dropped from 52.1% in the previous year to 47.6% in spite of an increase in the total number of voters. The number of registered voters climbed from 106 million in 2018 to 128.6 million in 2024, a record 22.6 million new voters were added between the two elections, which was the main reason for this decline. All political parties concentrated on social media during the 2024 elections. Millions of rupees were spent by PML-N and PPP on social media and filming an advertisement. PTI uses social media because its top political leaders are in jail. They use Twitter, Tiktok, and podcasting to promote the party, but using AI tools is a new addition. An AI video of Imran Khan was produced by PTI and shared on WhatsApp channels in addition to all social media platforms (Maria Saleem, 2024).

### **Political Participation:**

All the actions people take to have an impact on the choice of leaders and the policies they support are collectively referred to as political participation. These can be many different things, such as voting, joining a political party, participating in protests, and online activism. Political decision-making is positively predicted by using social media for awareness. Young adults who follow credible accounts on social media develop into astute information consumers and acquire a thorough awareness of political issues. Young people's capacity to make political decisions can also be positively impacted by using social media platforms for socialization. Young adults can interact with people from different backgrounds, including different political views, through social media platforms (SYED ALI RAZA SHAH, 2023). There is a positive correlation between Facebook usage duration and political involvement. Put differently, the pupils who use Facebook most frequently are more involved in order to utilize it for political ends. Likewise, the Pupils who often use Facebook for political reasons include increasingly engaged in political activities both offline and online. Therefore, it can be assumed that pupils who dedicate less Facebook's political users are less politically active over time, both both offline and online, which further supports the idea that Participation in politics online is likely to shape and a person's offline involvement in politics. Therefore, the longer and the more time students spend on Facebook engaging in politics, the more He intends to pursue traditional political activities with vigor (Zaheer, 2016). Young people have more opportunity to participate in social and political issues when they use social media. Social media has altered young people's political behavior in modern society. Additionally, it backs up the current study's claim that social media had a part in Pakistan's democratic transition. The engagement of young people in many activities, like social media following of politicians, has impacted and strengthened the bonds among the followers. All parties involved benefit from this communication tool, which connects them with their respective political parties. Young people's use of social media for political updates was also influenced by their involvement in political activities during the elections (Rachmah Ida, 2020).

### **Information Dissemination:**

Trends in social media usage have shown a substantial increase, rising from 5% in 2005 to 72% in 2021. Numerous individuals, including students, utilize social media platforms for various aspects of their lives, including

education, communication with peers and instructors, sharing information, leisure, obtaining and retrieving information, and networking, among other things. Because social media usage has grown more accessible and available, people are fast to adopt it once they realize the advantages of doing so. Importantly, social media has emerged as one of the most important resources for academic information dissemination and student learning. It can be used for a variety of academic tasks, including group discussions, taking notes during lectures, projecting slides during lectures, recording lectures, reading and learning, and writing and taking notes (De-Graft Johnson Amenuveve Dei, 2022). Pakistan's social media platforms function as communication tools in five ways: they break stories or draw attention to stories that are overlooked by mainstream media; they mobilize people by providing information about protests and other social campaigns; they coordinate and publicize humanitarian efforts; they support social causes; and they encourage dialogue between elected officials and their constituents (Kugelman, 2012).

### **Political Polarization:**

A phenomenon called polarization causes a population's interpretations and political preferences to take on a distinctive pattern. When many group, such as political factions, the majority and minority, religious or ethnic groupings, or societies hold divergent views on a particular subject, polarization results. Conflict usually becomes more polarised before it gets more intense. Social media has complicated consequences on Pakistani young political polarisation. While social media can encourage political knowledge and engagement among young people, it can also exacerbate political polarisation and radicalization (Asia Maqsood, 2023). Since the middle of the 20th century, biased polarisation in Pakistan has dramatically increased, both among elites and the general public. This has presented Pakistani democracy with significant and largely unanticipated obstacles. Political parties are using social media platforms to spread undue antagonism towards their opponents, which encourages harsh methods, taints manners, and discourages compromise. The standards of political institutions are being seriously strained by strong, intense partisanship. These modifications seem to have increased the political system's vulnerability to partisan misinformation, which is regularly disseminated by polarised parties to partisan audiences. Threats to accelerating these processes include widespread use of social media and media distrust. Even though recent studies have produced substantial evidence that intergroup discussions produce mutual understanding in other contexts, more research

is needed to determine which strategies, messages, or issue positions are most likely to have negative effects. Additionally, efforts to reduce political polarisation on social media may benefit from learning whether political information delivered in offline settings might be a more effective vehicle to improve political understanding (Ali Khan, 2023). In Pakistan, social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp have become into heated debate arenas for political slang. It has made it possible for false information and fake news to spread, which fuels polarisation and creates societal divides across a nation. Social media has created "echo chambers," where people discuss stories that support their beliefs and worldviews (Dr. Raja Amir Hanif, 2024).

### **Misinformation and Disinformation:**

The detrimental psychological, social, and political effects that fake news has on people as well as the environment of varied cultures have led to a rise in social media interest in Pakistani culture. Many social media sites are home to fake news, which has the potential to negatively impact people's mental health. Such "fake news" can induce worry, anxiety, and dread, which is detrimental to one's mental and physical well-being. People who surreptitiously explore social media and come across misleading information experience tension and anxiety, according to a Pakistani study (Dr. Nasir Khan, 2024). Pakistan's political and social growth has undoubtedly faced serious risks in recent years due to disinformation. Not only does the dissemination of misleading information occur in cyberspace, but it is most conspicuously observed on the internet. It is occasionally accomplished through systematic campaigns and influence operations. Numerous forms and types of misinformation have been observed in Pakistan, and research indicates that they have put public health, political stability, human rights, journalism, and peace at risk in the recent past, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic years and the political upheaval and transition in 2022. Disinformation and misinformation are now an indisputable aspect of Pakistan's information environment. Disinformation is false information that is purposefully manufactured and disseminated to hurt and mislead others, while misinformation is accidentally conveyed erroneous messages that may be harmless. Disinformation is so ubiquitous that it has recently had an impact on practically every aspect of public life in Pakistan, including politics, religion, health, the economy, and culture (Rehmat, 2022). The researchers looked at how common fake news was in discussions on Pakistani politics and society on social media. According to the content analysis, there was a sizable amount of fake news on Facebook



and Twitter about politics, foreign relations, the military, the economy, and religion. Fake news stories about international relations received more likes and shares than stories about politics or politicians, despite the fact that more fake news on these subjects was uploaded. It's interesting to note that despite being exposed as false and untrue, fake news kept gaining attention. This illustrates how populism and cult following have an impact on Pakistani social media users (Haseeb Ur Rehman, 2020).

### **Research Findings:**

1. PTI used social media to interact directly with the public, avoiding traditional media channels and spreading his message of change, anti-corruption, and transparency. PTI's online presence, which included viral campaigns, live-streamed speeches, and interactive sessions, enabled the party to mobilise supporters, garner international attention, and build a strong grassroots movement. In addition to attracting new voters, this digital strategy helped PTI communicate in real-time during elections, giving it an advantage in influencing public opinion and solidifying its place in Pakistan's political landscape.
2. Because social media gives politicians and political parties a direct line of communication with voters, it has had a big impact on how people vote in Pakistan's elections. Social media has emerged as a key instrument for political debate, information sharing, and campaigning due to the growth of sites like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Social media is being used by voters, particularly younger voters, to obtain news, watch political content, and communicate with candidates in real time. This has changed how political narratives are constructed, with hashtags, memes, and viral content all having a significant impact on public opinion. Additionally, voters can avoid the gatekeepers of traditional media by using social media, which facilitates access to a variety of viewpoints and increases political consciousness.
3. In Pakistan, social media has significantly changed how people interact with politics and affected political engagement. It has democratised the distribution of information by enabling activists, political parties, and even regular people to directly contact sizable audiences without going through the gatekeepers of traditional media. Youth in particular now have more power because to social media, which allows them to participate in political discourse and

express their views on national issues. Parties now use social media to reach out to voters and engage them during elections, making it a potent weapon for political campaigns. Even though it has made it easier for people to participate, it has also caused polarisation, the distribution of false information, and the emergence of hate speech online, which has complicated the nation's political debate. In general, social media has raised political participation, but it has also brought attention to the necessity of regulation and digital literacy to guarantee that it supports Pakistani democracy.

4. Social media, which frequently eschews government-run channels, provides real-time updates on social movements, political events, and emergency situations. It has encouraged a more varied media landscape by enabling residents, journalists, and activists to express their viewpoints. But worries about disinformation and its effects on public opinion and social harmony have grown as a result of the quick dissemination of both true and false information as well as the difficulty of digital literacy. Social media continues to play a significant role in influencing Pakistan's information flow in spite of these obstacles.
5. Social media has played a critical part in driving political polarization in Pakistan by intensifying ideological partitions and making Echo chambers. In Pakistan, where political devotion runs profound, social media has empowered the quick spread of divided accounts, deception, and dramatist substance, worsening divisions between restricting political bunches. Political pioneers and parties utilize social media to straightforwardly communicate with supporters, bypassing conventional media, but this has moreover contributed to the spread of extraordinary talk. The need of control and fact-checking components assist powers the polarization, as clients are uncovered basically to substance that adjusts with their sees, driving to a fortification of predispositions and a decreased eagerness to lock in in valuable political discourse. Subsequently, social media in Pakistan has ended up a key driver of developing political separates and doubt among citizens.
6. Social media plays a critical part within the spread of deception and disinformation in Pakistan, regularly intensifying untrue or deluding data to a wide group of onlookers. In Pakistan, political stories, devout substance, and social issues are regularly controlled or



mutilated to shape open conclusion, impact races, or prompt savagery. Need of media education, coupled with restricted control and responsibility, permits people and bunches to abuse these stages to proliferate deceiving substance. This has made a unstable data environment, where rumors and tricks flourish, undermining believe in valid news sources and extending societal divisions.

## Conclusion

The study emphasizes how social media has a negative impact on political mobilization in Pakistan and how digital platforms are increasingly being used to disseminate false information, incite polarization, and erode confidence in established political institutions. The quality of public discourse has suffered as a result of the more polarizing political climate brought about by the ease with which extreme information and misleading narratives may be spread. In Pakistan, social media has frequently been used to sway public opinion, warp political realities, and establish echo chambers that strengthen preexisting biases rather than encouraging positive political engagement. Furthermore, it is impossible to overstate how social media contributes to the spread of hate speech and the incitement of political violence. These forums have increased regional, religious, and ethnic tensions by giving unrestrained speech a forum. Such polarizing content has far-reaching effects, including a reduction in the ability of various political groups to effectively communicate with one another and a rise in polarization. Social media's ability to serve as a tool for constructive political engagement has been undermined by this digital environment, turning it into a political weapon. Despite its potential for political mobilization, social media's current usage in Pakistan has significantly harmed the country's political climate. Regulations that encourage appropriate digital behavior and guarantee that social media is a forum for thoughtful, productive political discussion are desperately needed to lessen these detrimental consequences. In order to lessen the impact of damaging narratives and promote a more inclusive political environment, efforts must also be undertaken to improve public critical thinking and digital literacy.

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