**The Impact of Social Media Usage on Voting Behavior in University Students of Pakistan**

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# Abstract

This study aims to understand the relationship between social media usage and voting behavior in university students of Pakistan. As political campaigns and citizens increasingly make use of new social media platforms to communicate political information, it is important to understand the impact of social media usage on voting behavior in youth. The study findings will have implications of how social media is used and regulated to influence youth voting behavior in Pakistan. This study uses the diffusion of innovations theory, which proposes that social media is used by political actors and citizens to spread knowledge, and raise awareness and support (Sahin, 2006). A cross-sectional and quantitative research design has been adopted, with a sample from 200 university students. A standardized survey using questions from Frimpong and colleagues (2022) has been used to collect data. Data is analyzed using SPSS, and both cross tabulation and linear regression has been used to report findings. The findings confirm that youth voting behavior is influenced by social media usage (R=0.460). In addition, males are influenced more compared to females. Based on the findings of this study it is advised that: (i) social media regulation and monitoring is needed to ensure youth are communicated unbiased information, and (ii) social media can be used by researchers and civilians for awareness about political realities and rights of citizens.

# Introduction

This study aims to understand the relationship between social media usage and voting behavior in university students. During February 2024, Pakistan held general elections, in which many youth participated. Youth across the world are influenced by different types of social media platforms which provide them with information related to politics and options for voting (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2013). Not only political officers, stakeholders, academicians, and journalists, but even the youth are engaged in using social media to share campaign information, critique political parties, exchange their political views, and share preferences for political candidates.

*Aim of study and research questions*

The aim of this study is to identify the relationship between voting behavior and social media usage for political news. The research questions for this study include: RQ1: What is the relationship between university students and social media usage for voting behavior; and RQ2: What is the relationship between socio-demographic characteristics (wealth and gender backgrounds) and social media usage in voting behavior. As social media usage increases, there is less reliance on traditional means through which voting behavior was influenced, such as newspaper, family preference, and street campaigns.

*Significance of study*

Since politicians and citizens increasingly make use of new social media platforms to communicate political information, it is important to find out the impact of social media usage on voting behavior in youth. The findings of this study will have implications of how social media is used and regulated to influence youth voting behavior in Pakistan.

# Literature Review

In a study in South Africa examining the impact of use of social media on students' political participation, it was found that majority students used various social media platforms, which influenced their political participation (Siyavuya & Emeka, 2024). The study also identified that males used social media for political participation and females used social media for entertainment, but not political participation. Most of the university students actively follow political news on social media. Social media provides awareness regarding political issues in university students. While data also suggests that students between the ages of 24-28 use social media more than students of age less than 24 to get aware about political issues. Political efficiency is influenced by online political actvities. The majority of students are in touch with members of national and provincial assemblies, and they continuously visit the social media pages of politicians. Students who are permanently using social media are well aware of what the government is doing. Students specially from rural areas use social networking services to protest for their rights (Ahmad, Alvi, & Ittefaq, 2019).

Politicians use social media for their election campaigns. Most of them have Twitter and Hyves accounts. Social media added a significant number of votes. Study found that using social media for politicians is crucial. Using Twitter has a modest impact on preference votes. Most of the time, the masses follow the politicians who they like the most. Interaction on Twitter helps a great deal because people are already convinced whom to vote for, even political leaders hardly use it. Still having more followers and using social media more convinces people more to vote for them. If social media becomes omnipresent everywhere, it will not have much impact on masses regarding voting behavior, but it depends on the use of social media (Spierings and Jacobs, 2014).

Social media has been influencing people for the last few years regarding political issues. Twitter and Facebook played most important role in shaping public opinion about serious political issues. People also use different social media platform issues to express their issues and grievances regarding welfare of their community which could never happen in traditional media. Public agenda is taking central stages on social media. To set agenda, new social media need to be included in strategy as it has influence over public agenda. To understand current issues, politicians should keep abreast with development in social media as they are the main concerns of the people (Salman, Mustaffa, Mohd Salleh and Shahizan Ali, 2016).

Research in the last years has shown that the image of the political candidate is a significant factor in prediction of election results and voting behavior. Voters usually want to know more and more about personality of politicians to evaluate their trust in them as political leaders. In such a situation, social media has a main contribution in setting image of the political candidates among the masses. Strategies on social media usage are the significant factors in providing facts to make perspective about politicians. Research revealed three key points; firstly, Social media used as primary marketing tool during election campaigns. Secondly, Professionalism is being challenged by amateurism due to consistently developing social media trends. Thirdly, social media has power of setting agenda in making a good image of politicians (Enli, 2017).

**Theoretical Framework**

This study uses the diffusion of innovations theory, which proposes that social media is used by political actors and citizens to spread knowledge, and raise awareness and support (Sahin, 2006). The theory is the most appropriate for investigating the adoption of technology in higher education and amongst university students and explains that as interaction with social media increases, awareness and opinions about voting behavior can be influenced strongly.

# Methods

*Research design*

This study is cross sectional and adopts a quantitative research design.

*Ethics*

This study has gained clearance from the department ethics committee and the FCCU IRB before data collection (Appendix C). Before data collection informed consent was taken for all respondents (Appendix A). No names have been taken from respondents and the data is anonymous and confidential.

*Sample and Data Collection*

A total of 200 undergraduate university students was sampled for the survey. Questionnaires were sent to society presidents and society members, with request to sample males and females equally. Google survey has been used for data collection and the survey was administered

through society WhatsApp groups. Data was collected during the 2024 summer holidays after IRB approval, in June and July.

*Survey*

The survey consists of eleven socio-demographic questions and a section to measure social media usage for voting behavior (Appendix B). For the latter 5 questions have been taken from a scale used by Frimpong and colleagues (2022). In this scale the responses are measured on a 5 point Likert scale [Strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5)]. The higher the score, the more the influence of social media on voting behavior.

*Data Analysis Plan*

The three hypotheses of this study include: Hyp1: Youth are influenced by social media in voting behavior; Hyp2: Students from higher wealth backgrounds are more influenced by social media in voting behavior; and Hyp3: Males are more influenced by social media in voting behavior, compared to females. SPSS has been used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics, linear regression and cross tabulation have been used to present the results. P values of less than 0.05 were considered significant for this study. The variable of social media usage was compounded for data analysis and compared with socio-demographic characteristics of respondents.

# Results

### Socio-demographic result

Table 01 presents the sociodemographic results of the participants. A total number of 200 students participated in response to the survey from four different universities (FCCU, GCUL, PU and UoL). Students between the ages 21 to 23 years were the most with a percentage of 60.5 % while students from the age of 18-20 and 14 and above were 53 % and 13 % respectively.

Most of the students were male (65%).  Most of the students belong to social sciences and education department with 39 percent in number. The results showed that 51% of the total respondents were in their last year of university. Results also showed that 57% of the total students belonged to urban areas. Among total respondents, 81% were engaged in full time study. Most of the students had less than 100,000 rupees monthly household income (43%). Majority of the parents had degree of graduation (46.5% in maternal literacy rate and 50.5% in paternal literacy rate.

| Table 01 Sociodemographic results of participants (200 participants) | |
|---|---|
|  | $f(\%)$ |
| Age (years) 18-20 21-23 24 and above | 53 (26.5%) 121 (60.5%) 26 (13%) |
| Gender Male Female Prefer not to say | 130 (65%) 60 (34.5%) 01 (0.5%) |
| Faculty Social Sciences and Education Humanities Life Sciences Business, Computer Science, Mathematics Other | 78 (39%) 21 (10.5%) 21(10.5%) 49 (24.5%) 31 (15.5%) |
| Year of Study 1st 2nd 3rd 4th | 11 (5.5%) 40 (20%) 47 (23.5%) 102 (51%) |
| Regional Belonging Rural area Urban area | 85 (43%) 114 (57%) |
| Occupation Student Student and employed | 162 (81%) 38 (19%) |

| | |
|---|---|
| Monthly Household Income (rupees) | |
| 1-99,999 | 86 (43%) |
| 100,000-199,999 | 58 (29%) |
| 200,000-299,999 | 22 (11%) |
| 300,000-399,999 | 07 (3.5%) |
| 400,000 and above | 27 (13.5%) |
| Maternal Literacy | |
| Illiterate | 20 (10%) |
| Primary/Secondary | 43 (21.5%) |
| Higher Secondary | 44 (22%) |
| Graduation | 93 (46.5%) |
| Paternal Literacy | |
| Illiterate | 09 (4.5%) |
| Primary/Secondary | 33 (16.5%) |
| Higher Secondary | 57 (28.5%) |
| Graduation | 101 (50.5%) |
| I voted in the Feb 2024 elections. | |
| Yes | 128 (64%) |
| No | 72 (36%) |
| Which social media app do you use the most? | |
| Instagram | 90 (45%) |
| Facebook | 58 (29%) |
| Whats app | 21 (10.5%) |
| YouTube | 07 (3.5%) |
| Twitter | 11 (5.5%) |
| Other | 13 (6.5%) |

***Voting Behavior***

Table 02 represents the voting behavior of the students. Most of the students voted in general
elections in February 2024 contributing 64% of the total respondents of the survey. Instagram
and Facebook have the highest usage rate with percentage of 45% and 29% respectively which
means these two impacts have the most impact in influencing university students. Students who
agreed that social media impacted their voting behavior in February elections 2024 are 49%
according to my survey while 23.5% disagreed that they are impacted by social media. But
34.5% of people disagreed that social media influenced them to switch their voting preferences.
The majority of the students are affected in their voting behavior by issues on social media. Most

of the students follow political news on social media and their percentage is 37. According to the

survey, 46% of the total respondents follow politicians/ academics/journalists on their social

media accounts.

| Table 02 Voting behavior of participants | |
|---|---|
| | *f* (%) |
| Social media (Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter.) influenced my voting pattern (choice of the candidate) in the Feb 2024 elections. | |
| Strongly Agree | 35 (17.5%) |
| Agree | 63 (31.5%) |
| Neutral | 55 (27.5%) |
| Disagree | 30 (15%) |
| Strongly Disagree | 17 (8.5%) |
| Social media motivated me to switch my voter preference. | |
| Strongly Agree | 22 (11%) |
| Agree | 61 (30.5%) |
| Neutral | 48 (24%) |
| Disagree | 39 (19.5%) |
| Strongly Disagree | 30 (15%) |
| Issues on social media affected my voting preference. | |
| Strongly Agree | 25 (12.5%) |
| Agree | 67 (33.5%) |
| Neutral | 46 (23%) |
| Disagree | 37 (18.5%) |
| Strongly Disagree | 25 (12.5%) |
| I connect with (write posts, comments, follow, retweet, share) posts about political parties. | |
| Strongly Agree | 17 (8.5%) |
| Agree | 57 (28.5%) |
| Neutral | 55 (27.5%) |
| Disagree | 41 (20.5%) |
| Strongly Disagree | 30 (15%) |
| I follow with (write posts, comments, follow, retweet, share) politicians /academics/journalists who make social media posts. | |
| Strongly Agree | 17 (8.5%) |
| Agree | 75 (37.5%) |
| Neutral | 50 (25%) |
| Disagree | 39 (19.5%) |
| Strongly Disagree | 19 (9.5%) |

*Youth influenced by social media in voting behavior*

Table 03 represents the model summary of linear regression. To check whether the first hypothesis that voting behavior of youth is influenced by social media usage is correct or not, question number one from the voting behavior variable is put into the dependent variable box of the linear regression while 4th and 5th questions are put into the independent variable box of the linear regression. The value of R in the model summary of linear regression is 0.460 which indicates a positive but moderate relation between independent and dependent variables. In the result section, there is 21.2 % variation in the voting behavior dues to social media usage which also indicates a moderate positive variation between dependent and independent variable. Statistically the model is overall significant indicating the p value as 0.000 (p=0.000 < 0.05) which confirms that social media engagement has a significant impact on the voting behavior of the students. But this impact is due to following politicians, academics and journalists while political posts do not have much influence on changing voting behavior.

**Social Media and Voting Behavior**

| **Table 03**<br>Model Summary of the Linear Regression | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Model** | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. error of the estimate |
| 1 | 0.460 | 0.212 | 0.204 | 1.053 |

| **Table 04**<br>Coefficient of the linear regresson |
|---|

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | t |
| 1 | (Constant) | 1.208 | 0.218 | |
| | I connect with posts about political parties | 0.111 | 0.089 | 0.133 |
| | I follow politicians/academics/journalists on social media | 0.390 | 0.094 | 0.373 |

***Relationship between wealth and gender with social media in voting behavior***

Table 05 shows cross tabulated results of gender with voting behavior which indicate that both the males and females are influenced by social media in their voting behavior but males are slightly more influenced by social media in their voting behavior as percentage of male influenced by social media is 50 while percentage of female influenced by social media is 46.4 also representing a slightly less impact on females as compared to males because males are slightly more connected to political news on social media (37.7%) than females (36.2%). Males also follow politicians and journalists a bit more than Females as their percentages are 46.9 and 44.9 respectively. So, data of the cross tabulated results clearly shows that males are influenced more in their voting behavior as compared to females, but this influence is slightly more on them.

**Table 05**
Cross tabulated results of gender with voting behavior variables

| Gender | Male (Agree) f (%) | Female (Agree) f (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Social media (Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter.) influenced my voting pattern | 65 (50.0%) | 32 (46.4%) |
| Social media motivated me to switch my voter preference | 55 (42.3%) | 27 (39.1%) |
| Issues on social media affected my voting preference | 61 (46.9%) | 31(44.9%) |
| I connect with (write posts, comments, follow, retweet, share) posts about political parties | 49 (37.7%) | 25 (36.2%) |
| I follow with (write posts, comments, follow, retweet, share) politicians /academics/journalists who make social media posts | 61 (46.9%) | 31 (44.9%) |

Table 06 indicates cross tabulated result of wealth with voting behavior variables, result can be observed that there is no proper pattern of responses which may indicate that voting behavior of wealthy students is influenced more due to social media usage. The pattern of cross tabulated results of wealth and voting behavior variables is quite random which does not support my hypothesis that students from higher wealth backgrounds are more influenced by social media in voting behavior.

**Table 06**
Cross tabulated results of wealth with voting behavior variables

| Wealth (rupees) | 1-99,999 (agree) f (%) | 100,000-199,999 (agree) f (%) | 200,000-299,999 (agree) f (%) | 300,000-399,999 (agree) f (%) | 400,000 and above (agree) f (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Social media (Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter.) influenced my voting pattern | 43 (50%) | 30 (53.6%) | 08 (34.8%) | 03 (42.9%) | 14 (50%) |
| Social media motivated me to switch my voter preference | 35 (40.7%) | 20 (35.7%) | 08 (34.8%) | 05 (71.4%) | 15 (53.4%) |
| Issues on social media affected my voting preference | 38 (44.2%) | 25 (44.6%) | 11 (47.8%) | 04 (57.1%) | 14 (50%) |
| I connect with (write posts, comments, follow, retweet, share) posts about political parties | 32 (37.2%) | 23 (41.1%) | 06 (26.1%) | 03 (42.9%) | 10 (35.7%) |
| I follow with (write posts, comments, follow, retweet, share) politicians /academics/journalists who make social media posts | 42 (48.9%) | 26 (46.4%) | 08 (34.8%) | 04 (57.1%) | 12 (42.9%) |

## Discussion

Result of the study confirms two of three hypotheses which are that social media influences voting behavior generally of youth, and that social media influences political opinion of males more than political opinion of female. No significant findings were found to confirm the third hypothesis, which was that social media influences student from higher wealth background. Regression results indicate a positive variation between the dependent variable- social media influencing voting pattern, and the independent variable- following politicians, journalists and

political posts- of the study; confirming that social media usage affects the voting behavior of university students in Pakistan.

This finding also aligns with the prior research that using social media apps influences the political views of the students (Salman, et all, 2016). Previous studies also highlight that Twitter and Facebook influence students the most (Spierings and Jacobs, 2014), but these findings indicate that now Instagram and Facebook are influencing people the most because these two Apps are mostly used by respondents- specifically 45% and 29% respectively. Findings also indicate that the percentage of male students whose political thoughts are influenced by social media is more than the percentage of female students but this percentage is a bit more. In table 05, cross tabulated results are indicating that male students follow political news and personalities more than female students and they are influenced more than female students and these findings also align with the previous research that males use social media for political participation more than females (Siyavuya & Emeka, 2024). One hypotheses of this study is that students with higher wealth background are more politically influenced by social media as compared to the students with lower wealth background which can be seen in table 06 that cross tabulated results do not show any proper changing pattern between wealth and voting behavior variable.

## Implications

### *Programs in Universities for Political Literacy*

Based on findings of the study, universities should take initiative to start courses, seminars and study circles regarding media literacy which may produce critical thinking among the students

on how to analyze news information given by different social media platforms. Students should also be guided to find the authenticity of news and social media platforms. This will help students to avoid being victims of wrong agenda settings of different social media platforms and political parties. Better critical thinking will help the students in better decision making skills during political participation and voting. While knowing that students are influenced by social media in their voting behavior, they will be more responsible while following news on social media and will have more concern regarding authenticity of the news. Students will be aware that the news they are taking is biased or unbiased.

### *Social Media Usage to Raise Voices of Rights*

Social media is the most effective tool to propagate awareness to a large and unlimited audience. Students may use social media platforms to highlight political issues on social media. They can raise the voices of their rights to the political leaders. Political leaders will also be aware of the fundamental issues of the people through social media platforms. Using social media for raising the voices for fundamental rights of the people may have huge influence on the political leaders and there will be a pressure over political leaders to tackle such cases to set a good image among masses.

### *Strategies for Political Parties in Political Awareness*

This study will also help political parties and personalities to make proper strategies to regulate their political information regarding their goals and manifestos through social media. Along with focusing on other factors, policies regarding social media campaigns should also be the topics of concern by different political parties to use different social media platforms to create hype. Campaign through social media can be a main for the political parties for the propagation and

awareness of their goals among citizens of different parts of Pakistan. Such policies can help for the acceptance of political parties among the masses.

## Future Research

This study will also expand research on different demographic factors impacting the voting behavior of the students. Findings of this study also indicate that social media influences the voting behavior, but this influence is moderate influence, there are some other factors as well to influence the voting behavior of the students. Future research can be done to find the other factors such as cultural and political factors which influence the voting behavior of the students. Further studies can also be done on the impact of print media and electronic media on the voting behavior of the students. Furthermore, there are other factors as well which need to be studies, as they may also influence the voting behavior of the students, such as socio demographic factors.

## Limitations

Research is conducted from just 200 university students, increase in the population may have more significant results. Secondly, research covers just digital media while it does not cover the impact of print and electronic media on university students.

# Conclusion

In conclusion, findings of the research indicate a positive relation between social media usage and voting behavior, while this impact is moderately more on male students as compared to female students. This study has a significant implication on social media usage that how can students follow social media posts and news with authenticity and can analyze the news being

unbiased. University can design courses for the students on how they can use social media

properly in building their political opinion and how they can find authenticity in news without

biases. Research is dependent on the students where they may also have biases over social media

influence on making their political opinion. Future studies on the broader population and on

other impacting factors can provide a better and detailed understanding on the complexities use

pf social media and voting behavior of students.

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Informed Consent

Date: _____

Dear Respondents, you have been invited to participate in a survey entitled. "What is

The impact of social media usage on voting behavior of university students in Pakistan?"

The purpose of the study is to examine the relationship between social media usage and voting

behavior of university students. The attached questionnaire will take approximately 10-15

minutes to answer. There is no compensation for responding nor is there any kind of known risk.

The information provided will not be released to a third party and no names will be asked,

ensuring all confidentiality and anonymity. Your participation in this study is completely

voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from answering the survey at any point.

By signing this form, you are agreeing that you have read the above information and indicating your consent to participate or take part in this research study.

Thank you! Your participation is highly appreciated.

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Informed consent (Signature): _____

**Appendix B: Questionnaire**

*Section A: Socio-demographic questions*

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Age | 18 to 20 | 21 to 23 | 24 and above | | |
| 2. | Gender | Male | Female | Other (please Specify:_____) | | |
| 3. | Faculty | Social Sciences & Education | Humanities | Life Sciences | Business, Computer Sciences, Mathematics | |
| 4. | Year of Study | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| 5. | Regional Belonging | Rural Area | Urban Area | | | |
| 6. | Occupation | Just Student | Student & Employed | | | |
| 7. | Monthly HH Income | | | | | |
| 8. | Maternal Literacy | Illiterate | Primary/ Secondary | Graduate | | |
| 9. | Paternal Literacy | Illiterate | Primary/ Secondary | Graduate | | |
| 10 | I voted in the Feb 2024 elections | Yes | No | | | |

| 11 | Which top 5 social media platforms do you use (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, LinekedIn, Instagram, etc….) | |
|---|---|---|

**Section B: The social media usage scale for voting behavior has been taken from Frimpong and colleagues (2022)**

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Social media (Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter.) influenced my voting pattern (choice of the candidate) in the Feb 2024 elections | | | | | |
| 2. Social media motivated me to switch my voter preference | | | | | |
| 3. Issues on social media affected my voting preference | | | | | |
| 4. I connect with (write posts, comments, follow, retweet, share) posts about political parties | | | | | |
| 5. I follow with (write posts, comments, follow, retweet, share) politicians /academics/journalists who make social media posts | | | | | |

**Appendix C: IRB Approval Certificate**

## FORMAN CHRISTIAN COLLEGE
### (A CHARTERED UNIVERSITY)

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
## APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

IRB Ref: IRB-636/06-2024

Date: 04-06- 2024

Project Title: The Impact of social media usage on voting behavior in university students of Pakistan

Principal Investigator: Syed Jaun Hussain

Supervisor: Dr. Sara Rizvi Jafree

The Institutional Review Board has examined your project in the IRB meeting held on 04-06-2024 and has approved the proposed study. If during the conduct of your research, any changes occur related to participant risk, study design, confidentiality or consent, or any other change then IRB must be notified immediately.

Please be sure to include the IRB reference number in all correspondence.

Dr. Sharoon Hanook
Convener-IRB
Chairperson Department of Statistics
Forman Christian College
(A Chartered University)
Lahore

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