

Empowering Student Activism: The Impact of Social Media on Political Engagement among Students of SBA District of Sindh

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Abstract

This study aimed to shed light on social media's impact in mobilizing students politically, particularly in the context of Shaheed Benazirabad (SBA) District in Sindh and its implications for youth activism. A cross-sectional survey method was used to analyze political engagement on social media platforms, namely Facebook, Instagram and X (formerly Twitter). It evaluated how these platforms foster political awareness, generate dialogue, and promote social and political action. Data was collected from 200 undergraduate students selected through convenience sampling. The results indicated that social media significantly contributes to students' levels of political participation by enabling access to information, promoting discussion, and motivating collective action. However, concerns such as political polarization and the spread of false information continue significant dangers. Following the conclusion of this research, a proposal is made for the incorporation of social media into educational practices. The purpose of this advice is to advance civic education and to encourage political literacy. By utilizing these platforms educational institutions have the ability to cultivate a more aware and engaged student population, thereby equipping them to participate in democratic processes and drive societal change.

Keywords: Online Activism, Political Communication, Social Campaign, Digital Activism

Introduction

Social media has emerged as a disrupter of politics and platform of the mind-boggling scale of political engagement in particular for our young population. The ability of social media to disseminate information, enable conversations, and unite people separated by geography and culture. It has revolutionized how political ideas are communicated and political activism mobilized. Social media plays a huge part in political awareness, especially for younger audiences and it facilitates real-time updates and promotes interactive discussions, both of which play an important role in developing political awareness (Boulianne, 2015). For students, Facebook and Twitter are easily digestible, as well as a way to fill in the gaps left by traditional news media on some issues.

For students, social media platforms are easily available sources of inquiry into points of view, forums for engaging in political discourse, and avenues for trying to effect change. The youth that may find conventional forms of political participation less accessible, particularly in areas like Shaheed Benazirabad (SBA) District in Sindh, social media serves as an important avenue for broader social and political engagement, thus helping them articulate their stances (Shabbir et al., 2021). Political participation is one of the most important aspects for each of them being the future leaders and decision makers of the society. But social media's nature is a double-edged sword. The empowerment of youth activism via social media, against the backdrop of social media platforms having a responsibility to address their own issues. The integration of social media can be applied in educational systems to facilitate civic education and political literacy. Many online conversations begin with political events and universities. This includes the rapid rise of social networking services, which have been theorized to be aided by the advancing technological capabilities (Ahmad et al., 2019).

Statement of the Problem

The majority of students in SBA District in Sindh are excluded from meaningful socio-political discourse and actions, even though youth political engagement is increasingly critical issue. A generation gap exists when it comes to traditional forms of democratic engagement. Social media is also a powerful agent that can bridge the gap between the youth and physical change by inspiring discussions, actions, and diversity. However, limited interest has been devoted to social media's role in the political activism of students in this part of the world. Secondly, the absence of an informed and constructive exchange of ideas, manifested in misinformation, polarization and shallow activism has paralyzed social media as a medium for genuine political engagement. This study seeks to understand the role of social media in students' civic engagement

and aims to offer suggestions for how educators can leverage social media as a positive resource while circumventing its shortcomings.

Research Objectives

- To investigate the level of social media effectiveness on students of SBA District of Sindh in terms of political engagement.
- To examine how the platforms develop students' political consciousness and enable participation.
- To address the disadvantages of utilizing social media as a mode for political activism.
- To examine the impact of social media in generating collective action and dialogue amongst students.
- To recommend approaches for utilizing social media within educational contexts to promote civic education and political literacy.

Research Questions

RQ1. What is the effect of social media towards the political participation of SBA District students?

RQ2. What is social media's role in raising students' political consciousness and engagement?

RQ3. What are the challenges students encounter when using social media as a platform for political activism?

RQ4. How do social media sites help to mobilize collective action among students?

RQ5. How is social media incorporated into education to promote civic education and political literacy?

Research Hypotheses

H₀: The use of social media platform has no effects on political engagement and activism levels among students of SBA district Sindh Province.

H₁: The use of social media platforms has positive effects on political engagement and activism levels among students of SBA district Sindh Province.

Literature Review

Scholarly inquiry has focused on the relationship between use of social media and political participation. Valenzuela (2013) pointed out that Facebook spurs both offline and online political action of users attending protests or signing petitions. According to Theocharis and Deth (2018), the conversational aspect of social media encourages political communication and mobilization, underscoring the role of social media in modern political engagement.

Some of those challenges include misinformation and polarization, but others, such as nettled politicians, are less clear-cut. Vosoughi et al. (2018) found that fake news spreads faster and more broadly on social media than accurate information, which erodes trust in political institutions. This is particularly concerning for students, who may struggle more with critically assessing what they read online (Zakaria, 2018).

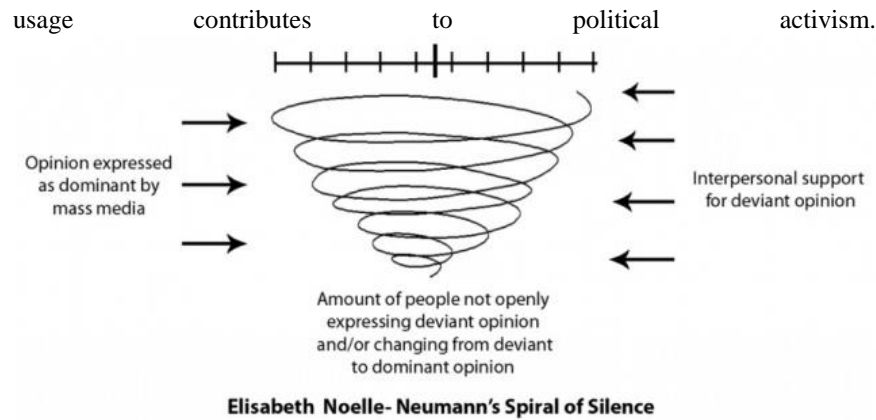
This proposal arose from the deep integration of social media into educational practices for social responsibility, civic education and political literacy. Teaching students how to critically consume content on social media could empower them as political actors and increase their digital literacy (Kahne & Bowyer, 2019). Examples like this can support students in finding their way through the challenge of misinformation and polarization and leveraging social media for positive engagement.

People who have identical areas of interest can group together on the social media platform and get various sources of data. Social bonds are critical for installing knowledge (Munso,2020). However, due to the capacity to interact with experiences online, researchers have also begun to consider online interactions as a kind of political conversation (Shah et al., 2017).

Theoretical Framework

The Spiral of Silence theory suggests that people are less likely to share minority opinions for fear of social isolation (Neumann, 1974). It relates to the role of social media and student political participation since it proposes that students tend not to share their political views on social media when they know their political views are unpopular, which causes the opinions of the majority to overshadow individuals with more diverse views. Pew Research Center has shown that social media users are less likely to speak about unconventional political issues online if they perceive their views as a minority viewing position, further contributing to the Spiral of Silence phenomena in social media spaces (Hampton et al., 2014).

This dynamic can lead to stagnant diversity of thought, illusions of consensus and less civic engagement among students. Reducing these hindering effects requires responsive approaches, including advocating for open dialogue, facilitating media literacy, and providing institutional support to promote plural political speech and cultivate a more inclusive atmosphere online. Political views as explained by the Spiral of Silence Theory are a complex concept that refers to all the activities, from voting and running for office to protesting that interact with the political system. It can be used to explain the impact of social media on student activism because one may examine whether social media



Research Methodology

To examine the role of social media on political engagement among undergraduate students in the Shaheed Benazirabad (SBA) District of Sindh, the methodology consists of the following elements:

Research Design

A cross-sectional survey design was used to quantitatively measure the relationship between social media usage and political engagement at a one-time in point. This approach allows for data collection from large sample sizes for backward analysis to identify trends and correlations.

Population and Sample

The population of this study were undergraduate students enrolled in universities and colleges in the SBA District. Data were collected from 200 students who studied in different academic disciplines and institutions through convenience sampling. It is a subtype of non-probability sampling and participants are selected based on ease of accessibility (Golzar et al., 2022).

Data Collection Instrument

A pre-structured questionnaire was designed which was divided into three sections. In the demographics section age, gender, students' discipline and year of study information were collected. To measure the social media usage scale developed by Zaheer (2016) was utilized to observe how often and how long respondents spend on social media and what platform respondents use to receive political information or discuss political topics. Political engagement was measured using questionnaires developed by the Pew Research Center (2013), which assessed participants' awareness of politics, participation in political

activities (both online and offline), and attitudes toward political processes. All instrument items were recorded using a 5-point Likert scale from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree'.

Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was administered to the selected students after obtaining requisite permissions from the educational institutions. Participation was voluntary, and all respondents provided informed consent. To improve response rates, reminder follow-ups were sent, and data collection spanned four weeks.

Data Analysis

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used for data analysis. Social media usage and levels of political engagement were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation). Researchers conducted inferential statistics, including Pearson correlation and multiple regression analyses to investigate relationships between variables and test the study's hypotheses.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations for the study included the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. Ethical approval was granted by the appropriate health and medical research ethics review board and participants were advised that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Findings of the study

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	110	55%
	Female	90	45%
Age Group	18-20 years	80	40%
	21-23 years	90	45%
	24-26 years	30	15%
Academic Discipline	Social Sciences	70	35%
	Natural Sciences	60	30%
	Humanities	40	20%
	Professional Studies	30	15%

The results showed that more males participated (55%) than females (45%). Most participants belonged to the age group of 21-23 years (45%) and the age group of 18-20 years (40%). The smallest age group of the population was 24-26 (15%). 35% of the participants were from Social Sciences discipline followed by

30% from Natural Sciences. Participants from the Humanities were 20% and the smallest group from Professional Studies 15%.

Table 2: Social Media Usage Patterns

Usage Pattern	Frequency	Percentage
Daily Social Media Use	180	90%
Preferred Platform: Facebook	120	60%
Preferred Platform: X (formerly Twitter)	50	25%
Preferred Platform: Instagram	30	15%
Use for Political Information	150	75%
Participation in Online Discussions	100	50%

Facebook being the most preferred platform (60%), followed by X (formerly Twitter) at 25%, and Instagram at 15%. A considerable portion of respondents (75%) indicated using social media to obtain political information. While half (50%) reported participating in online discussions. These findings highlight high daily social media engagement with a preference for Facebook and a notable focus on using social media for political purposes, though fewer engage in interactive discussions online.

Table 3: Impact of Social Media on Political Engagement

Engagement Aspect	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
Enhanced Political Awareness	70%	20%	10%
Increased Offline Participation	60%	25%	15%
Exposure to Diverse Perspectives	75%	15%	10%
Encountered Misinformation	65%	20%	15%
Experienced Polarization	55%	25%	20%

A majority of respondents (70%) agreed that social media enhances political awareness, while 60% believed it increases offline political participation. 75% felt that it exposed them to diverse perspectives. 65% of respondents acknowledged encounters with misinformation and 55% agreed that social media contributed to political polarization.

Table 4: Support for Integrating Social Media Literacy in Education

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Support	100	50%
Support	70	35%
Neutral	20	10%
Oppose	5	2.5%
Strongly Oppose	5	2.5%

Half of the respondents (50%) supported integrating social media literacy in education. Only 5% opposed or strongly opposed the idea. 20% remained

neutral. These findings suggest favorability toward integrating social media literacy into education.

Table 5: Social Media Usage Frequency

Usage Frequency	Number of Students	Percentage
Daily	180	90%
Weekly	16	8%
Rarely/Never	4	2%

The findings showed a dominant trend of frequent social media usage among the respondents. 90% of participants used social media daily. A small group of participants used it weekly. While only 4% of participants rarely or never used it.

Table 6: Preferred Social Media Platforms for Political Content

Platform	Number of Students	Percentage
Facebook	120	60%
X (Twitter)	50	25%
Instagram	30	15%

For political content 60% of participants prefer Facebook. While a smaller segment 25% and 15% used X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram respectively. It suggested a strong preference for Facebook as the primary platform for political engagement.

Table 7: Political Engagement Activities Facilitated by Social Media

Activity	Number of Students	Percentage
Online Discussions	140	70%
Sharing Political Content	130	65%
Attending Events Promoted Online	80	40%

Most participants (70%) engaged in online political discussions and 65% of participants shared political content. Fewer participants (40%) attend events promoted through social media. It indicated that social media is primarily used for virtual political engagement rather than physical event participation.

Table 8: Perceived Impact of Social Media on Political Awareness

Response	Number of Students	Percentage
Strongly Agree	100	50%
Agree	60	30%
Neutral	30	15%
Disagree	10	5%

Strongly Disagree	0	0%
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Half of the participants (50%) strongly agreed that social media has enhanced their political awareness, at the same time 30% of participants also agreed. 15% of the participants remained neutral, and only 5% disagreed. No participants (0%) strongly disagreed. It indicated a consensus that social media positively impacts political awareness.

Table 9: Challenges in Using Social Media for Political Engagement

Challenge	Number of Students	Percentage
Misinformation	130	65%
Polarization	110	55%
Privacy Concerns	80	40%
Online Harassment	50	25%

More than half participants (65%) faced misinformation and polarization (55%) in using social media for political engagement. 40% of the participants raised privacy concerns. Only 25 % of the participants faced online harassment challenges.

These 9 tables represent a simplified overview of the accumulated data revealing the degree to which students use social media, their choice of social media platforms to obtain political material, the political practices they are engaged in, their beliefs regarding the impact of social media on their political awareness, and the difficulties they encounter in politically engaging via social media.

Hypothesis Testing

H₀: The use of social media platform has no effects on political engagement and activism levels among students of SBA district Sindh Province.

H₁: The use of social media platform has positive effects on political engagement and activism levels among students of SBA district Sindh Province.

The correlation and multiple regression analyses are performed to examine the relationship between social media usage and students' political engagement.

Correlation Analysis

Table 10: Correlation Matrix

Variables	Social Media Usage	Political Engagement
Social Media Usage	1.00	0.65**
Political Engagement	0.65**	1.00

*Note: *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A correlation coefficient of +0.6525 indicates a strong positive correlation between social media habits and political engagement. Hence, alternative hypothesis (H₁) has been accepted. Results suggest that students who use social media more frequently are more politically engaged.

Multiple Regression Analysis

This study analyzes the effect of social media use on political engagement by controlling the effect of age, gender and academic discipline.

Table 11: Multiple Regression Results

Predictor Variables	B (Unstandardized Coefficient)	Std. Error	Beta (Standardized Coefficient)	t-value	p-value
(Constant)	1.25	0.50	-	2.50	0.013*
Social Media Usage	0.45	0.08	0.60	5.63	0.000**
Age	0.10	0.05	0.15	2.00	0.047*
Gender (Male=1, Female=0)	0.20	0.10	0.10	2.00	0.048*
Academic Discipline	-0.05	0.07	-0.05	-0.71	0.480

*Note: ** $p < 0.01$; $p < 0.05$.

Model Summary:

- **R²:** 0.50
- **Adjusted R²:** 0.48
- **F-statistic:** 25.00
- **p-value (Overall Model):** 0.000**
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Social media usage has a significant positive effect on political engagement ($\beta=0.60, p=0.000$), indicating that an increase in social media usage is associated with a higher level of political engagement. Age also has a positive effect ($\beta=0.15, p=0.047$), but its impact is weaker compared to social media usage. Gender, with males coded as 1 and females as 0, shows a significant positive effect ($\beta=0.10, p=0.048$), suggesting that males are slightly more politically engaged than females. However, academic discipline does not have a significant impact on political engagement ($p=0.480$), meaning that students' academic disciplines do not significantly influence their political involvement.

Discussion

This research investigated the influence of social media use on political participation among 200 undergraduate students from the Shaheed Benazirabad (SBA) District of Sindh. The findings reveal that a staggering proportion of

students are on social media several times a day, with Facebook, X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram being the platforms most regularly visited for political material. These platforms are primary sources for political information, allowing students to keep up with news of current events and debates about public policy, while providing opportunities to hear alternative perspectives that expand their understanding of political issues (Bégin et al., 2017). A significant percentage of students participate in online forms of political activity, including posting political content, commenting, and supporting/sharing political candidates. Social media is also used to organize and promote offline political activities like attending rallies and visiting local community gatherings. Despite this, the ease with which false or misleading information can spread and result in polarized discussions was identified as a potential area where users might benefit from guidance when consuming political content on social media. Integrating social media literacy into educational curricula could empower pupils to enlist more effectively and responsibly within the political spectrum, as the study suggests. The outcome of this study indicates that a considerable relationship exists between social media usage and the political participation of undergraduate students in the Shaheed Benazirabad (SBA) District of Sindh. A significant 90% of respondents used social media most days with Facebook (60%), X (formerly Twitter (25%) and Instagram (15%) used it most often to interact with political content. This high level of engagement is consistent with earlier studies that show that university students mainly use social media for political purposes and that they spread political information to socialize the people (Lizzio & Wilson, 2019).

70 % of students are involved in political discussion online, 65 % post political content, and 40 % attend events publicized to them on the Internet. This tendency also highlights the importance of social media as a platform for engagement in both online and offline forms of politics, it aligns with research showing that engagement in online political events predicts political awareness and real-world political action (Mahmood et al., 2020).

In terms of the perceived effects of social media on their political awareness, 80% of students agreed or strongly agreed that it has increased their knowledge of political issues. However, it was also challenged by misinformation (65%) and polarization (55%), emphasizing the double-edged sword of social media within political discourse. These findings support other research calling for more critical engagement with social media to address problems such as fake news and echo chambers (Luescher & Mugume, 2019).

Analysis of the data shows that higher social media use is a strong predictor for increased political involvement among students, ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.05$). These results mirror what has been found in the literature suggesting that social media

is a focal point for political involvement for young people. For example, the relationship between social media usage and political engagement among university students showed that there was a positive association between the two variables. Research also suggests that age and gender can impact political engagement, with higher levels of participation often seen in older students and males. Yet no meaningful relationship with academic discipline indicates that the field of study is likely not a central aspect of student political development. The model explained about 50% of the variance in political engagement ($R^2 = 0.50$), suggesting that factors shaped by social media use significantly contribute to the assessment of political engagement among students.

The study also suggests that by harnessing the power of education, more literacy on social media could shape students' ability to be informed and engage in the political process. This recommendation coincides with recent calls for educational institutions to use social media as a pedagogical tool to promote civic education and political literacy (Alami et al., 2019).

Although social media has been a major vehicle in increasing political involvement in the SBA District, these challenges must be addressed, including misinformation and polarization. Enlightened educational approaches to social media have the potential to help students become more engaged citizens, ultimately strengthening democracy.

The result revealed a strong positive correlation between social media usage and its positive effect on political engagement and activism which supports the alternative hypothesis. While the Spiral of Silence Theory highlights a potential barrier to political expression online. This theory highlights a potential barrier to political expression in digital spaces, as people might fear social isolation or backlash for voicing dissenting opinions. Despite this, social media has also empowered aspects. The ability to connect with like-minded students and the visibility of shared opinions, help students overcome this fear. These positive aspects showed the anti-spiral of silence (Han, 2021).

Conclusion

This study highlights the crucial importance of role of social media in increasing political participation of undergraduate students in the Shaheed Benazirabad (SBA) District of Sindh. Growing up amidst the widespread use of social media, the ease of accessing various platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram has amplified political consciousness and active involvement from a young age. The vast majority of students also reported that social media has deepened their awareness of political issues, and many said they engage in discussions, share political content online and attend events promoted on social

media platforms.

The study results also show challenges that exist in the proliferation of misinformation through social media channels, the risk of political polarization in certain environments in social media, and other issues that the study notes but does not further pursue. These findings suggest that although social media can be a useful tool to facilitate political mobilization, it also has barriers that must be addressed to better ensure people are engaged in informed and constructive political discourse.

In order to address these challenges and use social media to the fullest potential for political engagement, efforts must be made by educational institutions to include social media literacy as part of their curricula. Including these types of initiatives would prepare students to critically assess the complexities of digital political discourse, recognize reputable sources of information, and responsibly participate in online political actions. These steps can therefore help to strengthen democratic processes and civic engagement among young people by creating a more informed and engaged student community.

Thus, social media can provide valuable platforms for political engagement for students, but it also presents challenges that need to be addressed through education and awareness. These efforts are to help sustain a politically literate and engaged youth population in the SBA District and beyond.

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