

# Social Media Effects on General Elections Turn-Out in Pakistan

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## ABSTRACT

The current study investigates the impact of social networking sites on voter participation in Pakistan's national elections. This research was done in Bahawalpur, which is known as a princely state and is considered the centre of Southern Punjab. A total of n=195 respondents were chosen using the Stratified Random Sample technique, with males and females ranging in age from 18 to 60. For data collection, a survey method was utilized, and a questionnaire was created with 15 closed-ended questions. The current research was carried out using the Uses and Gratification Theory and the Diffusion of Innovation Theory. According to the findings, social media has a significant positive impact on Pakistan's current political condition. Furthermore, the findings revealed that social media has increased people's awareness of the importance of voting for the country and the advancement of democracy. Furthermore, social media attracts more people to participate in the political process during elections. The study goes on to say that social media plays a significant impact in raising voter turnout in general elections.

**Keywords:** Social Media, General Elections, Voting Turn-out.

## Introduction

The media has a vital and crucial function in society. In democratic cultures, the media is regarded as a spokesperson. By disseminating knowledge and new ideas, the media is transforming society. It raised public awareness and provided fresh ideas. The media assists observers by informing them about their state's political system (Grossman, 1996). In other words, the advancement of democracy is linked to public education and information provided by the media. The media is a potent communication instrument that effectively informs both the political elite and the general public. It ensures that information is available to dispersed citizens, who subsequently form their own opinions and share the information provided by the media (Wheeler, 1997).

Politics exists in all over the societies. Basic purpose of politics is cooperation, negotiation and struggle in the activities, production and distribution of resources. Politics describes the distribution of power and the forces that shape and reflect it. The political process is about social workers' and institutions transformative potential, not about governments and governments alone (Held, 1995).

Pakistan is a democratic state in which every individual has the right to vote for their government. A vote is a reflection of a person's political views. The following is an agreed-upon concept of human rights in relation to voting:

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*“All the citizens over the age of eighteen have the right of vote. It confirms that rights of the people are preserved.” (HRCP, 2008)*

Voting is a method of expressing one's choice for a candidate or a political party over others (Blais, *et al.*, 2004). As a result, it is crucial to determine whether the media plays a significant impact in improving voter turnout in Pakistani elections.

In today's society, leaders are chosen through a democratic process. More participation makes democracy more legitimate and reliable, and it ensures that the administration will continue to exist. A government that does not involve the public cannot be described as democratic. A prominent political philosopher, John Stuart Mill (1910), once said:

*“The only government in which masses participate can satisfy all the necessities of social state, participation is very useful in any public function; that public participation is most important for the improvement of society.” (John Stuart Mill, 1910)*

Technology today is at its pinnacle; it allows for speedier interaction; events take happen in one part of the world, and news from the other part of the world breaks in seconds. The challenges of distance and time have been solved thanks to technology, particularly the mobile phone and the Internet. Traditional media such as television and radio have also become more functional as a result of technological advancements. One of the most potent media tools is social media. It is crucial in shaping public opinion, informing and educating people on the importance of democracy, and ensuring people's engagement in the democratic system. A well-informed and educated population is a major goal of the media, and social media plays a big role in achieving this goal through current affairs programmes, educational programmes, amusement, dramas, and other forms of entertainment.

The use of the media in political communication refers to the use of the media to inveigle people in the hopes of involving them or making them aware of current events (by political leaders, institutions such as parliament, governments, the state, pressure groups, terrorists, and others). All of these efforts are aimed at increasing people's political participation. The media's impact on politics is undeniable. According to McQuail (2005), the organization of democratic politics, both domestically and internationally, is dependent on the media, and there are few social issues that are not addressed through the media.

### ***Objectives of the Study***

1. To understand the role of social media in general election voter turnout.
2. To see if social media is used to disseminate political information to the general population.

### ***Research Questions***

1. What role do social media have in voter turnout in general elections?
2. What role do social media play in raising democratic awareness?

### ***Rational of the Study***

The main goal of this study is to see if social networking is more beneficial than other factors in increasing voter turnout, such as political leaders, political parties, and Biradarri. According to the researchers, the majority of channels in Pakistan are news stations that carry largely political news and current affairs shows. So the researcher wonders whether media motivates people to join in the political system and form political opinions, or whether political leaders, parties, and Biradarri have greater influence.

### ***Scope of the Study***

This study identifies new ways for researchers to do advanced research in this subject. This research will also look into the relevance and usefulness of the media in boosting voter turnout. This research examines the media's future role in ensuring people's engagement in the democratic system.

## Literature Review

A research conducted by Bushra H Rehman (2014) entitled “Conditional Influence of Media: Media Credibility and Opinion Formation” at Punjab University Lahore. This study investigates the relationship between media consumption, believability, and the formation of political attitudes among literate Pakistani youth. The relationship is investigated on the basis of the idea that reliance is important in all aspects of social life. It will influence the public's perception of the target group. Following the same rationale, the study predicted that trusting the media would help the media's usefulness in shaping public opinion. The study concludes that while the amount of time spent viewing news channels has little bearing on the relationship between the media and the people, the perceived dependability of the media is critical in the shaping of public opinion.

Anwar and Jan (2010) conducts the study on “Role of Media in Political Socialization: The Case of Pakistan”. The main goal of this research was to look into new trends in political promotion in the media and their influence on political opinion formation. To have a better understanding of political socialization through the media. To investigate the impact of the media on voting behaviour. This research establishes a framework for political socialisation in Pakistan. Political socialisation through media is explored, explained, and investigated in this study. The media is a tool for socialisation. This study explains the process of political socialisation and communication. At the local, national, and global levels, the field of political communication connects media and political approaches. In democracy person who have not participate in election but he can give his opinion by vote. The study particularly emphasis on the election campaign, voting attitude and role of media in formation of political awareness.

Grabner (1976) says that mass media not only inform us about daily concerns, but also explain clearly and forecast all the incoming possibilities. So media not only inform us but also play an important role I creation of political opinion in democratic system. Yaser *et al.*, (2010) conducts a study on, “Correlation between Media's Political Content and Voting Behavior: A case Study of 2008 elections in Pakistan” During the 2008 election in Pakistan, this study looked into the relationship between audience members' use of political content in the media and their voting intentions. People primarily watch political messages on television and also read newspapers for this reason, according to the report. However, television, rather than radio or newspapers, was the primary source of political information for most respondents. The majority of respondents oppose relying on civic groups for political knowledge and voting decisions. In comparison to radio and television, the statistics show that during the election campaign of 2008, television appears to be the most popular media for acquiring political information and making voting decisions.

Kietzmann (2012) Citizens and communities exchange, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content through social media, which uses mobile and web-based technologies to build highly dynamic platforms. According to Ellison and Boyd (2007), social network sites are web-based services that allow users to create profiles, view user relationships, and search and navigate within that list. A social networking site or service is an online service or platform that focuses on supporting the formation of social networks among people who share common interests, hobbies, and backgrounds through real-world relationships. It's a website that lets users share information with a small group of people. It's a fantastic way to stay in touch and share images from your travels (Fewkes and McCabe, 2012).

## Theoretical Framework

The “*Diffusion of Innovation*” hypothesis and the “*Uses and Gratification Theory*” are both media and government theories. The purpose of this research is to learn more about the impact of social media on voter turnout in national election. Why and how individuals deliberately seek out particular media to gratify specific wants, according to Uses and Gratification theory, and Diffusion of Innovation theory tries to elucidate how, why, and at what pace new ideas and technologies proliferate, according to Diffusion of Innovation theory. As a result, the researcher has chosen “*Uses and Gratification*” and

“*Diffusion of Innovation*” theories as theoretical support for the current study in order to examine whether these ideas are valid or not.

### Hypotheses

**H1:** Social media is more likely to have a beneficial impact on voter turnout.

**H2:** In terms of improving turnout, social media is more likely to be more effective than other elements.

### Research Methodology

The methodology of research is an important aspect of the research activity. Conducting research is more important than ever, because without it, research cannot be completed. The researcher should make a strategy for their judgments and results, according to methodological approach. The researcher can easily receive their tasks by using this method. For this study, the survey research methodology was used. Stratified Random Sample approach was used to choose a sample of n=195 respondents from Bahawalpur, encompassing males and females aged 18 to 60. For data collection, a survey method was utilised, and a questionnaire was created with 15 closed-ended questions.

### Data Analysis

The study's goal was to collect numerical data using a questionnaire method and a scale created by the researcher. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to compile the data for the results.

### Results

Table 1: *Demographics of respondents and frequency and percentage of responses*

Demographics	Attributes	<i>f</i>	%
Gender	Male	105	54.0
	Female	90	46.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Qualification	Matric or under	14	7.4
	Intermediate	6	3.4
	Graduation	61	31.1
	Master	110	55.6
	M.Phil	4	2.4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 1 shows the demographics of respondents and frequency and percentage of responses of the respondents. It shows that male are more in frequency and most of the respondents were master class students who respond to the researchers.

Strongly Agree= SA, Agree=A, Uncertain=U, Disagree=DA, Strongly Disagree=SDA

Table 2: *Research questions, responses, frequency and percentage*

Research Questions	Responses	<i>f</i>	%
Social media as pro-democratic	SA	77	39.1
	A	75	38.1
	U	16	8.4
	DA	22	11.4
	SDA	65	3.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Social media as source of political awareness	SA	110	55.0
	A	67	35.0
	U	76	3.7
	DA	11	5.9

	SDA	2	1.3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>100.0</b>
	SA	67	33.0
	A	82	40.5
Social media use and motivation among people to cast the vote	U	10	5.3
	DA	26	13.2
	SDA	10	5.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>100.0</b>
	SA	64	32.4
	A	64	32.4
Social media influence to increase voting turn-out	U	22	11.4
	DA	41	20.8
	SDA	54	2.4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>100.0</b>
	SA	89	44.8
	A	80	40.3
Social media use and educational promotion among people about vote	U	7	3.2
	DA	16	8.2
	SDA	4	2.3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>100.0</b>
	SA	36	18.1
	A	44	22.1
Social media watch dog role during elections	U	42	21.2
	DA	50	25.2
	SDA	23	11.4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>100.0</b>
	SA	71	35.7
	A	74	37.3
Social media as source of knowledge about the power of vote	U	76	3.2
	DA	30	15.2
	SDA	14	6.8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>100.0</b>
	Yes	108	54.0
Overall satisfaction with social media's role in voting system	No	81	40.5
	Don't Know	6	3.5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 2 demonstrates the questions asked to the respondents with responses, frequency and percentage. Overall theme of the questionnaire was to explore the role of social media in increasing turn-out in general elections of Pakistan.

### Discussion and Conclusion

The current study investigates the impact of social networks on national election turnout. The research was carried out in Bahawalpur to find out how people felt about the influence of online media in elections. The 195 respondents were chosen at random from a pool of available and convenient people. Data were gathered from 105 males and 90 females. Result shows that most of the respondents were master and graduates. Questionnaire was prepared in well-mannered that consists of 15 close ended questions. Respondents take interest in answering the questions that proved helpful in concluding results. As per its geographical location, Bahawalpur is considered the hub of Southern Punjab and is now part of Pakistan's Metropolitan Cities. Because the upper Punjab receives the majority of the funding, the southern Punjab is less developed. The movement of Southern Punjab has begun as a result of unequal

allocation of funding and lack of administrative representation. In any case, Bahawalpur is the most well metropolis in comparison to those other cities in Southern Punjab, and it is likely to become the provincial capital if the Southern Punjab movement succeeds. The primary goal of the study was to learn what people thought about the function of social media and how they contributed.

**RQ 1: What role do social media have in voter turnout in general elections?**

Social media is easily accessible in urban areas however, in rural areas, access to social media is relatively low as compare to urban areas. For concluding the result of research question, researcher asked the relevant question to his respondents that “Do you think social media influences in the increase turnout of general election?”. According to the results, 32.4 percent strongly agree and 32.4 percent agree that social media has an impact on voter turnout in general elections. They claimed that in today's world, individuals obtain up-to-date political news via social media and are able to comprehend reality. 11.4 percent of respondents indicated they had no understanding what this question meant, while 20.5 percent disagreed and 2.3 percent strongly disagreed, claiming that social media had no impact on voter turnout in the 2013 election. The respondents were also asked another question by the researcher. “Do you think social media can motivate the people to cast vote?”. The findings demonstrate that 31.8 percent strongly agreed and 41.2 percent agreed with this statement, while 5.2 percent said they had no information about it. On the other hand, 13.2 percent of respondents disagreed, with 5.3 percent strongly disagreeing, that social media cannot influence people to vote. "Social Media show the portrayal of prior government activity that awakens your thoughts to vote for the country?" a researcher said. According to the results, 25.2 percent strongly agreed and 34.7 percent agreed. 9.8 percent of respondents had no knowledge of the subject; on the other hand, 17.1 percent disagreed with the question, and 12.4 percent strongly disagreed.

**RQ 2: What role do social media play in raising democratic awareness?**

Literacy rate in Pakistan is not very high so people relay on different source for political awareness. After the birth of Pakistan, different elections conduct in Pakistan for the promotion of democracy but the general elections of 1970 considers more reliable and non-controversial. After a long time, Pakistani politics make a big change in its history. After consider atomic power in 1999, Pakistani politics gain more importance in the world. It is because of 1<sup>st</sup> Muslim Atomic power in the world but still have different question marks on its democratic system and foreign policy. The researcher asked his respondents a pertinent question in order to get an answer to the study topic. “Do you think that social media is a good source of creating political awareness in its viewers?”. According to the results, 55.8 percent strongly agreed and 33.8 percent agreed. 3.4 percent of those polled stated they had no idea what the inquiry was about. Social networking is not an useful tool for political understanding, according to 6.1 percent of respondents, and 0.7 percent strongly disagree. Other elements, such as political leaders, Baradari, and others, they claim, play an essential part in raising political consciousness. The researcher also posed another pertinent question. “Do social media aware you about the power of your vote?”. According to the results, 35.8 percent strongly agreed and 37.4 percent agreed that social media made them aware of the power of their vote. Furthermore, the media awakens the public to the need to reform the corrupt political system. According to the interviewees, social media is acting as a watchdog in the system of government, exposing the negative aspects of any political party in a timely and effective manner. 3.4 percent of those polled stated they had no idea what the subject was about, that they were uninterested in politics, and that they were despondent. 15.6 percent disagreed, with 7.6 percent strongly disagreeing, that social media has not made them aware of the power of voting.

They claimed that political leaders and Bradariism are more potent tools than the media, which help people understand the importance of their vote. They stated that social media is skewed, and that different political parties' social media sales support specific political parties or candidates. As a result, the theme among the less educated is that they should vote for the leader or party that is projected to win on social networking sites.

**H 1:** Social media is more likely to have a beneficial impact on voter turnout.

Social media is easily accessible in urban areas however, in rural areas, access to social media is relatively low as compare to urban areas. To examine the hypothesis, the most suitable question asked by the researcher “Do you think social media influences in the increase turn-out of general elections?”. According to the results, 32.4 percent strongly agree and 32.4 percent agree that social media has an impact on voter turnout in national elections. They claimed that in today's world, individuals obtain up-to-date political news via social media and are able to comprehend reality. 11.6 percent of respondents claimed they had no knowledge about the subject, while 21.0 percent disagreed and 2.4 percent strongly disagreed, claiming that social media has no impact on voter turnout in elections. The preceding hypothesis discussion is supported.

**H2:** In terms of improving turnout, social media is more likely to be more effective than other elements.

Researcher asked the relevant question to check the hypothesis “Do you think social media is more effective than any other medium to motivate the people to cast vote?”. The results indicate that 32.1 percent strongly agreed and 41.4 percent agreed with this statement, while 5.4 percent said they had no information about it. On the other hand, 13.4 percent of respondents disagreed, with 5.6 percent strongly disagreeing, that social media cannot influence people to vote.

The primary goal of social media was to raise public awareness about the previous administration's performance. To increase turnout, other slogans were utilised, such as "vote for education." Additional query demonstrates people's curiosity about social networking motive. “Social media show the portrayal of previous government work that awakes your mind to vote for the country?”. According to the results, 25.4 percent strongly agreed and 35.1 percent agreed. 10.1 percent of respondents had no knowledge of the subject; on the other hand, 17.1 percent disagreed with the question, and 12.4 percent strongly disagreed. After much deliberation, it has been determined that the hypothesis is supported.

## **Recommendations**

The results of our study showed that social media effects the turn-out of elections. During my research, we noticed that there is a flurry of false news on social media which does not reach the common man with correct information and therefor he cannot make the right political opinion. Our suggestions for future researchers are that they should study on the quality of social media information.

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## **Conflict of Interest**

Authors have no conflict of interest.

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