The Impact of Facebook Use on Political Self-efficacy and Online Political Participation among Young Voters

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Abstract
Young voters are usually the most frequent social media users which has an effect to shape their political attitudes and behaviors. This study was designed to test the role of Facebook use, political self-efficacy in online and offline political participation among young voters. A survey was developed and conducted to measure the study variables. A sample of (N = 304) young voters was selected through convenience sampling. Results revealed that Facebook use, political self-efficacy in online and offline political participation were positively correlated with each other. Facebook use and political self-efficacy were found predictors of online and offline political participation. Male voters were found more frequent users of Facebook and participate more in online and offline political activities. The research has practical implication in political behaviors shaping.

Keywords: Facebook Use, political self-efficacy, online political participation, offline political participation

1. Introduction

The digital and social media and technology has a significant impact on the social interactions, attachment and communication styles, and discussions on social and political issues (Ahmad, Alvi & Ittefaq, 2019; Golan, Arceneaux & Soule, 2019; Idrees & Malik, 2022). Social media provides its users a huge amount of information about political and social events occurring around them and engages them in online as well as offline political activities. Considering the richness of their content, social media platforms have become vital for political discussions and actual participation (Ahmad et al., 2019; McAllister, 2015). Social media use and online participation in political activities encourages voters, especially young voters, to participate in political events (Quintelier & Vissers, 2008). This plays an important role in the election campaigns of developed countries as well as developing countries, like, Pakistan. Although, it has also negatively impacted the elections, like, the 2016 presidential elections in the United States and a few European countries. Because of having billions of users, social media platforms cause a potentially large vulnerability for disinformation and manipulation of public opinion. This research study aimed to study the role of social media use on the political self-efficacy and online political participation of young Pakistani voters.

Social media consumption among young adults is common in both developed and developing world. Almost all political parties and their affiliated, or independent individual politicians have their active social media accounts to share their political agenda and information about political activities (Ahmad et al., 2019). Young people learn about political and social issues on social media platforms and make their personal opinions (Karamat & Farooq, 2016). The internet access is limited in Pakistan as compared to other Asian countries, but it is rapidly increasing. Considering the COVID-19 pandemic, health behaviors and perceptions of people have changed (Asif et al., 2020; Idrees et al., 2022), and the use of social media has increased. Along with the increase in social media use, public political participation has also increased (Adnan et al., 2021; Nwankwo, 2021).

Researchers have studied the impact of the internet and social media for political discussion on the political behaviors of individuals. For instance, a few research studies found that online political news exposure predicted higher voting rates and the exchange of political information via social media enhanced community engagement, trust, and satisfaction in youth (Ishaq et al., 2017; Mossberger et al., 2008; Shah et al., 2001). A few research studies have also discovered that online group discussions about politics via a specific social media platform can help individuals develop important political skills, trust, and democratic values (Jennings & Stoker, 2004; Brehm & Rahn, 1997; McFarlnd & Thomas, 2006). Similarly, Coleman (1988) and Fishkin (1991) investigated that to remain up to date with political news and to remain politically motivated, group membership on social media is very important. The current study highlighted group participation via Facebook and its impact on an individual's political self-efficacy and political participation.

Keeping in view the online group membership and political engagement of the individuals, Conory, Feezell, and Guerrero (2012) investigated online political engagement through Facebook group membership vs. offline political engagement to explore the importance of online group discussion to increase political engagement among youth. They assessed (N=455) university undergraduates based on their political knowledge and their participation in the elections of 2008. Their findings indicated that online political groups were found to be the best platform to enhance political participation and online political engagement.

Similarly, in another study, the use of social media and its impact on political participation have been investigated. By keeping in mind, the social cognitive theory, the findings suggest that political knowledge and extended social capital have a significant positive impact on political participation. The study also highlights the mediating effect

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of self-efficacy and outcome expectations on political knowledge, extended social capital, and political participation (Kim, Kim & Lee, 2020). In another study, Scheufele et al. (2004) also explored the importance of social media platforms like Facebook and other networks that play an important role in political participation and are considered as important forerunners of political engagement. Similarly, Wellman et al. (2001) found that by increasing awareness of social needs, better communication skills and political participation are enhanced with the expansion of social networks.

In another study, the effects of social media on the political participation of individuals have been investigated. The focus of the study was to check the impact of online political efficacy on real-life political participation among university students. The link between political knowledge and political activities was also the focus of the study. The findings revealed that most students were found to use social media for political awareness and knowledge, and higher political self-efficacy was found to significantly enhance political participation (Ahmad et al., 2019). Michaelsen (2011) found that social media users and voters have been getting political information via very active social media accounts run by the political parties in Pakistan.

Khan and Shahbaz (2015) also highlight that the social networking platforms have a significant impact on the political knowledge of the citizens especially for young people. In another study, Karamat and Farooq (2020) found that social networking sites have a very strong impact on people of Pakistan and students mostly use such social networking platforms for political information and for sharing their own opinions with other community members (Arshad & Hassan, 2014). Similarly, Quintelier and Vissers (2008) also found that the political activities shared on online social media like Facebook were very effective for motivating young people to participate in political proceedings.

However, the importance of social media, political efficacy and political participation have also been explored in a research study by Reichert (2016) by finding that mostly young people give preference to watching political news from social media instead of reading from newspapers. Political knowledge through social media provides more consistent political attitudes and helps to motivate individuals to make their own political decisions according to their choices (Galston, 2001).

Furthermore, numerous empirical evidence showed that political efficacy plays a significant positive role in political participation (Schulz et al., 2010; Condon & Holleque, 2013; Krampen, 2000). According to Krampen (2000) political self-efficacy also highlights an individual's evaluation of political knowledge, followed by individual's belief on their behavioral skills and their actions. Apart from this, political efficacy was also considered as a motivational and informational factor to enhance the political participation among youth (Finkel, 1985; Jung, Kim, & Zungia, 2011). The current study also highlighted the role of political self-efficacy in political participation along with taking Facebook as a social media platform for political discussion, for political knowledge, and for political participation.

1.1. Research Hypotheses

There will be a positive correlation between Facebook use, political self-efficacy, offline and online political participation.

- Facebook use will positively predict offline and online political participation.
- Political self-efficacy will positively predict offline and online political participation.

2. Method

2.1. Sample

Sample of this study consisted of (N = 304) undergraduate students at a suburban university. The average age of the participants was 19.88 years (SD = 2.01). There (n = 151) female students in the sample. A non-probability convenience sampling technique was used to select the participants.

2.2. Measures

There were two main independent variables, Facebook use and political self-efficacy, and two dependent variables, online political participation and offline political participation. To measure the Facebook use, two items were used with a 5-point likert scale ranging from 1 = not at all to 5 = very frequently. To measure the political self-efficacy of the students, a 9 items scale was used with a 5-point likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. This scale was initially developed and used by Sarieva (2018).

3. Results

The main aim of the study was to investigate the effect of Facebook use and political self-efficacy on online and offline political self-efficacy. After the data collection, data was analyzed through SPSS v.28.

Findings from the above table indicates that Facebook use showed strong and significantly positive correlation with political self-efficacy, offline political participation, and online political participation. It means that more use of Facebook increase the political self-efficacy and political participation (offline & online) among youth. Results also revealed that political self-efficacy have a significant positive correlation with both online and offline political participation. Which indicates that higher level of political self-efficacy increase the political participation among young voters.

Table 1: Zero-order Correlations among Study Variables

Variable	Political Self-efficacy	Offline Political Participation	Online Political Participation
Facebook Use	.17**	.46***	.34***
Political Self-efficacy	-	.21**	.17**
Offline Political Participation		-	.59***
Online Political Participation			-

Facebook use was found a statically significant predictor of the political self-efficacy among young voters as displayed in table above. Which indicates that more use of Facebook predicts higher level of political self-efficacy among youth (Table 2).

Table 2: Multiple Linear Regression for the Effect of Facebook Use and Political Self Efficacy on Online and Offline Political Self Efficacy

Variable	B	SE	β	F
Facebook Use	1.01	.11	.44***	45.87***
Political Self-efficacy	.07	.03	.14**	

Table 3: Independent Sample T-test for the Gender Difference across Study Variables

Variables	Men (n = 153)		Women (n = 151)		t	p	95% CI		Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			LL	UL	
Facebook Use	7.35	1.14	7.04	1.44	2.06	.041	.01	.06	.24
Political Self-efficacy	38.97	4.19	33.69	6.07	8.84	.000	4.11	6.46	1.01
Offline Political Participation	16.42	3.11	15.83	2.84	1.73	.086	-.08	1.26	.20
Online Political Participation	15.78	3.18	14.14	3.48	4.30	.000	.89	2.40	.49

Facebook use, online political participation, and political self-efficacy showed significant gender differences while the gender difference was not found statistically significant in offline political participation. Male participants had higher scores on all study variables (i.e., Facebook use, political self-efficacy, offline & online political participation).

4. Discussion

This study was conducted to appropriate a relation between usage of Facebook on the political self-efficacy and online political participation and offline political participation. The results of the study support both the hypotheses, i.e., Facebook use will positively predict offline and online political participation; and Political self-efficacy will positively predict offline and online political participation. In other words, the present study complements the previous work done on the subject. (Adnan et al., 2021; Nwankwo, 2021; Ishaq et al., 2017; Mossberger et al., 2008; Shah et al., 2001).

Given that Pakistan is a developing country, majority of the people use Facebook for socialization, information, knowledge, and political activity on a regular basis, therefore Facebook here, acts as a forum for political debate and the sharing of social and religious problems. It also provides platform for exchanging political information and ideas on various themes. Furthermore, Facebook usage among young graduates in Pakistan fosters a political culture that reflect democratic and political norms.

The results of this study show that show that male participants of the study had a higher political efficacy which was positively complemented by the usage of Facebook. However, the same was not true for the female as they had a relatively low number political efficacy.

Furthermore, in response to the other variables as well, the male participants were deemed more active in their both online and offline political participation, but the number of women were low as against women in both variables.

The results are also found to be consistent with the previous studies which have maintained that using Facebook had a positive impact on the students, especially in the development of their political and voting behaviors. The reliance of the youth in online information and its translation through their political views is deemed considerate of the previous studies.

Furthermore, it has also been observed that the political behavior of the students that they develop is mainly reflected through their offline actions. They tend to rely more on the content, they happen to go through during

their usage of social media platforms and in particular Facebook, in developing their opinion about any political views.

Similarly, Facebook, as a digital platform, allows active users to connect, discuss political opinions, and engage in a range of activities. Facebook is a prominent online medium for political engagement and information exchange. Political engagement and political persuasion tend to encourage the public and others to modify their views and actions toward political problems through virtual communications voluntarily. Facebook encourages youth online political participation; they also tend to subscribe to the political pages and vote for political party candidates.

Facebook, unarguably, is one of the largest, most popular, and least expensive venues for political communication and offline political participation. The relation of Facebook usage and offline political participation is found too relatively positive. This demonstrates that Facebook users are more inclined to participate in political activities and discussions. As a result, Facebook usage is critical in sharing political news and conversations, as well as influencing users to participate actively in offline political events.

Furthermore, it is critical in broadcasting political news, gatherings, and conversations, as well as appealing people and motivating them to join both in online and offline political activities. It is the largest and cost-effective source of information utilized for political operations. This is consistent with the findings of a recent study by Adnan et al., 2021 and Nwankwo, 2021, which demonstrated that respondents who are fundamentally connected in various online networks are more likely to participate in offline political activities. Active Facebook users are more politically aware than inactive people. Similarly, exposure to Facebook leads to offline political activity. In today's world, Facebook has evolved into an indispensable instrument for improving political awareness and education. It is a political instrument that is quite popular among Pakistani youth, and in particular, students. It provides a dynamic platform for them to communicate and exchange opinions on culture, values, beliefs, religion, and politics, pushing them to join in offline civic and political activities. Furthermore, the engagement of young men and women across all fields is critical to any country's progress and development. Youngsters are becoming more interested in offline political activities and are sharing their opinions with the public at large. They share information and news updates about certain political parties and leaders to their peers, families, and friends. Young people's active participation in social media enhances democratization.

Facebook has an impact on both online and offline political participation, influencing political actions and knowledge. Its application matches to people's persuasive behavior, young voters' participation, and personal expression among social circles.

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