Political Communication on Facebook and its effect on Political Attitude of University Students

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Abstract

Social media is working as a change agent in different areas of our routine life, Political awareness is one of them. With ever rising young population, social media offers this adventure in safety and privacy at our homes. Logging into Facebook looking at the newsfeed and sharing stuff has become our daily habit. Country like Pakistan where politics is the core area of discussion everybody takes interest in it. Pakistani youth has become the target public on social media by the political parties for their vested interests and propaganda. This quantitative research has been conducted to investigate the intensity of change in political attitude of youth using facebook.

Keywords: Social media, facebook content, political communication, propaganda

Introduction

Facebook was made available to the world in the year 2006. Since then, it has kept evolving into something far more universal than any of its competitors. It is, for sure, not the only channel available to the masses of digital age but yes, it is a social media giant.

For now, FB is almost a must-visit place for the users of social media and its success has been unsurpassed. Real life gestures and communications patterns have been replaced by messages, likes, comments and friendships. Facebook's success can be better understood by looking at some of their policies and by their staggering numerical success.

Policies and Timing of Facebook

It is now common knowledge that a major factor determining success of any business is the timing at which it is launched. Facebook came up at the time when there was high demand for social networking platforms, and used an interface which was much more user friendly than others. It was also well synchronized with increasing internet

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availability and age of smart phones. In addition, Facebook has been much more flexible and adaptable.

Pakistan Statistics and youth representation

Over 20 million Pakistanis were on Facebook by end of 2015. Of these, more than two thirds are below age of 25, which speaks volumes about its popularity in young crowd. Of the total Facebook users, 15 million are male and 4.7 million are female.

More and more teens and preteens are now exposed to social media from a young age, increasing their vulnerability and likelihood of using Facebook than their parents or elders. These young people have been conditioned to spend considerable time with their computers and mobile devices, compared to their forerunners.

This is another statistic used to calibrate relevancy and usage of any social media. In Pakistan it appears considerable number of users are logging into their Facebook accounts on daily basis. This trend is directly related to consumption of online news, trends and memes. Facebook was having 1.59 billion active users till the year 2015 (Statista 2015).

Voices of Facebook are regularly brought up by social commentators, bloggers, psychologists, parents etc. but it has its fair share of positive influences. Now Facebook content is repeated by sharing tagging etc, so most young people of similar background are likely to view similar posts their friends have 'liked' or 'shared' and so on. So views on all the popular subjects are propagated to a 'Facebook community' by simple sharing of Facebook posts etc. Another thing that we have observed is that we share a number of posts, other than our personal stuff, that we find funny, or ridiculous or inspiring or simply something that catches our eye and we think what our friends may think of it; but much of this stuff we take down from popular 'pages', whose authors we do not personally know. So Facebook, while being a social keep-in-touch tool, is also teeming with propaganda, more and more stuff is going 'viral' without having seen the face of mainstream media. However youngsters who will not think too much before being unknowingly recruited for certain idea and movement are most strongly affected by these posts.

Raising Socio Political Awareness

Not only Facebook helps us stay informed of our friends ' life milestones; like getting a job, having a new relationship, or seeing adorable photos of their newborn, it also keeps us in tune with the relevant social issues. Social media often embarks on social and

political commentary and open discussion about various social evils, that unfortunately mainstream media has no time for.

Engaging Youth Worldwide

Apathy of voters has become quite an issue world over. Especially young people are not interested in politics. This is a worrying trend and will affect future of countries and world in general. In Pakistan, situation is similar and we have been seeing poor voter participation. Overall turnout in elections has been low up till 2013; when voter turnout was almost 55%, highest since 80's. It is an ongoing debate how much of this trend was attributable to social media, but many agree that political activism on platforms such as Facebook has galvanized youth's interest about social injustice, politics and helped channel their collective misgivings. People of similar socioeconomic background have the opportunity to come together and organize into a formidable political force. Allegations of electoral fraud and frequent military coups affect health of Pakistani statistics, but we can say that advent of social media has helped engage youth in politics.

In US electionsof 2008, usage of Facebook and political participation through this channel was studied and it was revealed that people participating in political debates and expressing political affiliation through Facebook were likely to do it in the real life as well (The Express Tribune 2013).

Facebook for Gender Equality

In patriarchic societies like Pakistan, voice of women is often stifled in the society. The traditional woman does not need to express her opinion. Facebook is a gender neutral platform and doesn't treat you differently because of your gender. Certain degree of anonymity and use of indirect communication is allowing women in segregating societies to voice their thoughts. Discovering their voice on these platforms can help women take baby steps towards improving their social participation and in long run can even mould national policies.

In Pakistan, PTI is the first political party which has succeeded in bringing sizeable number of women to their gatherings. They are even boasting of a 'women voter base'.

Political Socialization on wall posts

Everybody has personal wall on Facebook. So Facebook is the replacement of personal diary to open diary. Anybody can look at the wall if it is public. It is the choice of user that he share things with the friends or everybody on the Facebook.

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Joining the Bandwagon

Not everyone is cut out to be a leader and trendsetter. It is especially natural for gullible young people to be affected by a fashionable behavior or trend. Often, propaganda is spread by making it appear popular among certain group of people, and these people, would then, predictably join in. This tactic is employed by mass media, companies and even government policy makers to achieve their respective ends. Social media is a handy tool in hands of these groups and they can employ it to spread their opinions, packaged in a user friendly and emotionally relevant scenario. The end user might think that he / she is engaging in a personal cause, when they are actually being subversively tricked in to it.

Psychological Warfare on Facebook

Political communication on Facebook is a new style of old propaganda and psychological warfare. Sometimes these messages on Facebook are coming from an openly defined source, sometimes from a hidden source. However there are a lot of fake pages and ID's on Facebook so that it becomes difficult to judge what is based on truth.

Objectives of the Study

Primary Objective: Exploring the relationship between exposure to political content on Facebook and attitudinal change in the graduate and undergraduate students of the province is the primary objective of the study.

Secondary Objectives: To investigate how the propagandist play-up with the educated youth, and to support the fact that Facebook has become very effective tool of political propaganda.

Literature Review
Usage of social media by politicians

To explore the relation between the usage of social media websites by politicians and their chances of getting popular or gaining electability, a content analysis of three different politicians was conducted on 88 students of college level and it was tried to measure the influence on their perceptions. ChaireMcCaskil, Thaddeus McCotter and Kevin McCarthy were the politicians chosen for this purpose. Five different attributes from their Facebook and Twitter accounts were studied; quality of content, speech informality, designing, posting frequency and number of their followers on these websites. A positive correlation was found in personable contents and voting intentions. Social networking websites like Facebook have enabled the people to access the political and public figures with ease. It is an essential part of political campaigns to address the audience of social networks (Hellweg 2011).

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Electoral Campaign in Transition in Romania

In local campaign for Mayor's office of Iasi, 2004 elections, the social media was emerging and was meant to be a new way to approach the target audiences. Campaigns were launched exploiting emotions and attachments (Lupascu 2012).

Propaganda; good words going wrong

Sadly, it cannot be said that we now have found the exceptional definition of the concept, and because there is no agreement between the students concerning the definition of this time period, the gained knowledge of propaganda has to go on. It is a tricky phenomenon that consists of together with it some disagreeable connotations and preconceptions that must be put away when learning propaganda. This suggestion can be utilized as well for just right functions, as for unhealthy ones; it depends on the character who appeals at its robust resources. Might be propaganda will never die out and, as Edward Bernays hoped in 1928, probably smart men will comprehend that propaganda is the contemporary instrument through which they can combat for productive ends and support to bring order out of chaos (ŞUTIU 2012).

Social Media and Modern Societies

The basic undertaking which cutting-edge societies face is the democratic development of culture that manifests itself through local, social and political stipulations. All societies adopt distinctive approaches of expressing cultural reminiscence that is related to a unique time and is manifested as values, attitudes, opinions or a detailed ideology and material artifacts. Cultural identity is a fluid and problematic discourse, a product of cultural memory mediated and broadcast by the new media technologies; it cannot be understood exclusively as an abstract method (Siljanovska 2014).

Modern War Paradigm and Communication

The Youtube, Facebook, Twitter are the basic sources of information while analyzing the conflicts in Syrian crises. In Ukrainian case, it was a Facebook and Twitter revolution. It was of same nature like in Egypt and Tunisia in Arabian Revolution. Social media is tractable during the war times too. Soldiers used to communicate with their families through Facebook during the war in Afghanistan. Posts of social media networks are having some beliefs or concerns. They are creating a virtual environment of war (Ibrahim 2015).

Penetration of Social Media in Politics

The social media can strengthen the civil society as well as the public sphere in the long term. It may happen easily where the public opinion is relying on media and dialogue. It will be more difficult to articulate the websites like Facebook, Twitter, Wikipedia,

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YouTube, QQ, Wikileaks, Tuenti, Naver etc. by the US government as these are the websites used mostly for the political speech and coordination. But such an articulation is also very necessary (Shirky 2011).

Social Media and Intelligence

Use of social media for the main front of propaganda might be the new dynamic of old conflicts, such as the conflicts between Israel and Palestine. But the conflicts on social media are intelligently mediated. It was reported that the Hamas created fake Facebook page for a kidnapped Israeli soldier. Social media has also been used as a source to gather intelligence based information. Trust is the key perspective while tackling the issues of information over social media (Treverton and Miles 2014).

Political Campaigns and Social Media

The presidential campaign of president Obama in 2008 was manipulated by political campaign on social media. The scholars started comparing this campaign with the political campaign of John F. Keneddy through the use of TV. The intensive use of social media by Obama seemed to be one of the biggest factors in his victory against John McCain. Obama targeted millions of young social media users mobilizing them through Facebook, Twitter, flickr and other social websites, creating a good team of political volunteers for him campaign. Moreover, the Republicans are also using the social media actively. On the other hand, the political blogging is creating problems for candidates. Social media will keep playing significant roles in future political campaigns (Smith 2011).

Political Change, Social Media and Human Rights

People share different sorts of information on social media. Facebook and Twitter the most popular channels that enable sharing text messages, videos, photos, audio files and apps. Mobile social media is another crucial development. Social media is widening the access to evidence of human rights abuses. It also amplifies the messages. It can also be used to disseminate the misinformation and propaganda. And it also supports pro democratic forces besides pushing the pro government actors. Social media is actually a neutral tool for spreading either good or bad speech. It is important to know that Facebook pages manipulated the Syrian protesters and hence provided a platform for social mobilization. Facebook also came under the fire the Syrian government started shutting down the pages (Joseph 2012).

Relationship between Cyberspace and Political Participation

Social media users do not follow national boundaries like the traditional media channels do. Blogs, Facebook, Twitters etc, are the social networks with huge potential for acting

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like an institution to confront the political maturity. Social networks try to enhance personalization of the policy. In social networks, politics are not analyzed in normal ways through rational procedures. Symbolic meanings are often derived. Social media has changed the patterns of political participation of the users in a strange manner (Harsij, et al. 2014).

Political Decision Making through Social Media
There are positive effects of internet on democracy. A moderate link is present between political self efficacy, situational political involvement and amount of attention to traditional internet communications for political communication. Young adults are shifting to online communication channels from the traditional media. Attention to the social network channels is accountable for variance in self efficacy in political patterns of the users. Still further researches are required to conclude the true effects of internet mediated political communication and information on self efficacy (Kushin and Yamamoto 2010).

Social Networking and Political Communication in Asia
Facebook emerged as the social media for selection of candidates in May 2010's presidential elections in Philippines. When the cell phone started getting old fashioned, the Facebook started creating impact with campaign organizations and social community. Facebook medium was perfectly utilized by Aquino and Villar during the political campaign. It was also used to sell the promotional objects and to raise funds for the parties. The elected president Aquino also announced that he will use Facebook and Twitter to keep communication liaison with the community. These websites give opportunity to the community members to report their problems and cases of government mishaps. The president kept in contact with the social media users through Facebook (Konard 2010).

Social Media, Political Participation and Attitudes of Youth
The study on 2011 elections in Nigeria indicates that there was a positive correlation between Facebook usage and Political activism. Social media has the ability to unite and engage the public in political debates and activities. There are about 60 million young voters in Nigeria whereas the number of internet users is about 43 millions. Social media can usefully mobilize these voters to take part in the political process (Dagona, Karick and Abubakar 2013).

Theoretical Framework
There are a lot of theories which can be related with the current study. Bandura (1977) proposed the concept of social learning that became a very influential theory of learning

and progress. Bandura's social learning theory has its best implication on social media like Facebook when a person follows and likes his favorite page he/she can imitate the model behavior whether it is about political trend or fashion trend. Social media has changed the old style of interactions. Stimulation, acquisition of knowledge, experience and motivation are all involved when a person uses social media.

The old knowledge gap hypothesis can also apply here, those who have access to social media and Facebook has a knowledge gap from those who are not using it. Chomsky & Herman (1988) raised the point that internal setup andconditions underlying for structure are very essential and media is operated by this developed structure. The explanation of term manufacturing consent used by Herman and Chomsky can be seen in Facebook political propaganda.Where all tactics and appeals of political communication are visible with best suited examples.

Petty &Cacioppo (1986) presented the Elaboration Likelihood Model suggesting two different routes for persuasion towards some idea or innovation:

- **Central Route**
  It involves the Audience Factors such as high levels of motivation and one's ability to think about and analyze the message. The message is further processed very deep, focusing on the quality of the message and associated arguments. It finally leads to the persuasion outcome causing the lasting change which resists facing and counterattacks.

- **Peripheral Route**
  The audience motivation factors are very low in this case and they do not have ability to think about the message. It involves superficial processing focusing on the surface features such as the attractiveness of the communicator or just the number of arguments presented without bothering about the quality of arguments. Finally it leads to the temporary change in the attitudes or even behavior that is susceptible to fade out and may face counterattacks.

Understanding of Central and peripheral routes of Petty and Cacciopo has become easy after observing, studying, researching and finding the attitude and behavior of youth. Most of them are using peripheral route for political inclination and interest.

Statement of the Problem
Facebook has become a vital tool for socializing in modern digital era. This study intends to investigate whether there is any relation between exposure to the political propaganda messages on FB and changes (if any) in the perception, political thought and socio

political behavior of graduate and undergraduate students of the Punjab and Sindh province. This study will also explore the extent of change in political inclinations caused by Facebook propaganda.

Research questions
1. Whether and to what extent the university students rely on Facebook for consumption of political information?
2. Whether and to what extent the attitudinal change is caused by exposure to political contents on Facebook?

Hypotheses
H_1: It is more likely that the extent of exposure and reliance on Facebook for political information will change previously held political attitudes of the consumers.
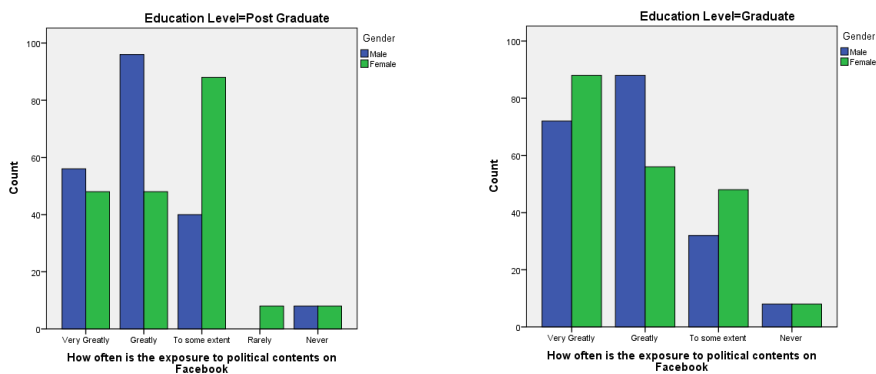
Research Methodology
Quantitative Survey design was applied to the study with questionnaire being the major tool using a Likert Scale.

Sampling Technique
A random sample frame of 400 students with equal number of demographic variables such as gender and educational level was drawn from universities from Punjab and Sindh provinces of Pakistan.
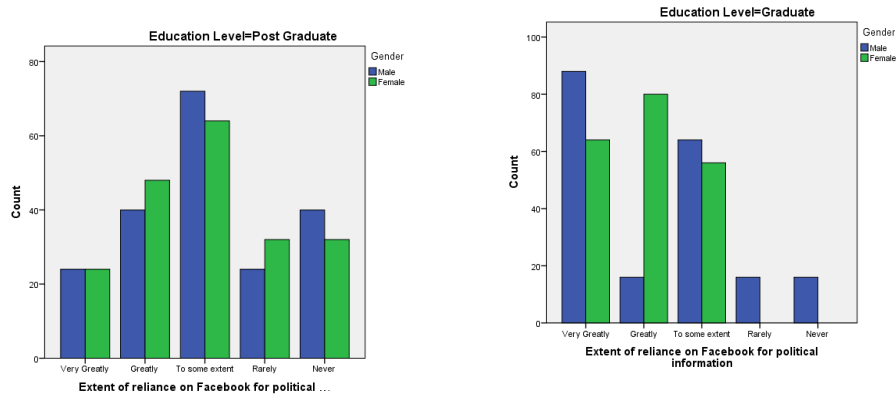
Data Analysis
Extent of Exposure to Political Contents on Facebook

It was indicated that there were 72 male and 88 female graduates, 56 male and 48 female post graduates who are very greatly exposed to political contents on Facebook while there were 88 male and 56 female graduates, 96 male 48 female graduates who were

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exposed to political contents on Facebook greatly. Similarly there were 32 male and 48 female graduates, 40 male and 88 female post graduates who saw political contents on Facebook to some extent while there were 0 male and 0 female graduates and 0 male and 8 female post graduates who were exposed rarely. Moreover there are 8 male and 8 female graduates, 8 male and 8 female post graduates who never came across to political contents on Facebook.

Reliance on Facebook for Political Information

The statistics confirmed that there were 88 male and 64 female graduates, 24 male and 24 female post graduates who rely on Facebook for political information very greatly while there were 16 male and 80 female graduates, 40 male and 48 female graduates rely greatly. Similarly there were 64 male and 56 female graduates, 72 male and 64 female post graduates who rely on Facebook for this purpose to some extent while there were 16 male and 0 female graduates and 24 male and 32 female post graduates who rarely do rely on Facebook. Moreover there were 16 male and 0 female graduates, 40 male and 32 female post graduates who never rely on Facebook for political information.

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Testing Hypothesis
Regression Analysis

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.763[a]	.582	.581	.659

a. Predictors: (Constant), Extent of exposure and reliance on FB for political information
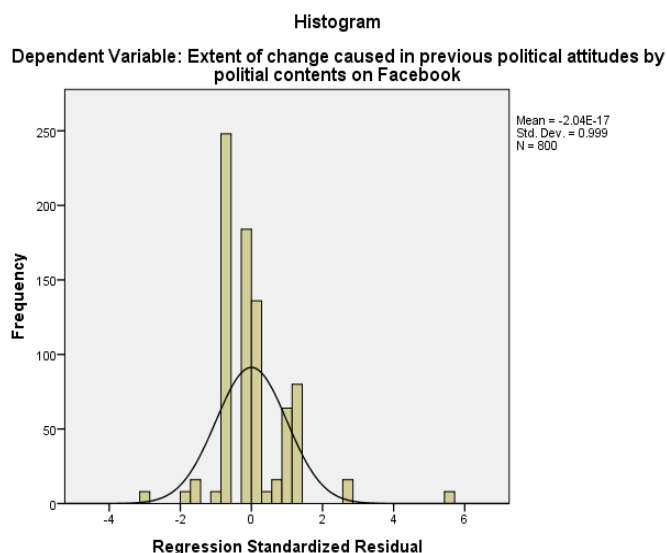b. Dependent Variable: Extent of change in previously held political attitudes

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	481.289	2	240.644	553.946	.000[b]
	Residual	346.231	797	.434		
	Total	827.520	799			

a. Dependent Variable: Extent of change in previously held political attitudes

Coefficients[a]

Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t
1	(Constant)	.639	.061		10.403
	Extent of FB consumption	.768	.025	.763	31.108
	Extent of reliance on Facebook for political information	.000	.020	.000	.011

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Histogram

Dependent Variable: Extent of change caused in previous political attitudes by politial contents on Facebook

Null hypothesis was tested through Linear Regression Analysis in SPSS version 17. The value of R was 0.763 and R square 0.581 that was clearly closer to +1 indicating there was a positive correlation between the variables. Significance level of95% was proven in the ANOVA test. Value of Beta was 0.763 (closer to +1 instead of -1) and that was significant as well indicating thatit was the independent variable that was creating causal effect on the dependent variable. As the significant confidence level was achieved to accept the alternate hypotheses and reject the null hypotheses, the results may be generalized to the whole population. A positive correlation between the extent of exposure to political contents on the Facebook and a change in political attitudes was found.

Conclusion

On the balance of the statistical analysis, the researcher can conclude that there is a strong positive correlation between reliance on Facebook for political information and change in attitudes among the Pakistani youth. Facebook is creating political awareness and has emerged as a handy medium for expression of political thoughts, activism and mobilization. Political campaigns through Facebook can not only bring attitudinal change in political mindsets and attitudes, they may also lead to the behavioral change. Extensive use of Facebook and reliance on it for information has opened new avenues for political actors to exploit the young minds.

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