

SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN PAKISTAN

SOBIA SHAHZAD

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SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN PAKISTAN

by

SOBIA SHAHZAD

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MEDIA SOSIAL DAN PENGLIBATAN POLITIK DI PAKISTAN

ABSTRAK

Penyertaan politik merupakan faktor penting untuk menjamin demokrasi berfungsi dengan baik. Kajian lepas, walaubagaimanapun, menunjukkan tren penyertaan rakyat dalam politik semakin menurun, terutamanya dalam kalangan remaja di kebanyakan tempat di dunia. Baru-baru ini terdapat bukti yang mengatakan bahawa populariti media sosial menyumbang kepada penyertaan politik apabila masyarakat kian terdedah dengan berita politik melalui media sosial. Maka dengan itu, kajian ini bertujuan untuk membina model integrasi penggunaan media sosial dan penyertaan politik bagi menguji peranannya dalam menggalakkan penyertaan politik di Pakistan. Dengan berpandukan Model Pengantaran Komunikasi berasaskan OSOR, kajian ini menerangkan bahawa proses yang bermula daripada penggunaan media sosial kepada penyertaan politik adalah kompleks dan tidak secara langsung. Selain itu, kajian ini turut memperkenalkan konsep kapital sosial kepada Model Pengantaraan Komunikasi (Communication Mediation Model) dan menguji kesan pengantaraan kapital sosial dan ekpresi politik terhadap penyertaan politik di Pakistan. Tambahan pula, model ini turut mengambil kira pengaruh sokongan politik berpihak (partisanship) yang diamalkan di Pakistan. Sokongan politik berpihak diterapkan ke dalam model sebagai pendorong kepada penggunaan media sosial bertujuan untuk mendapatkan berita. Model kajian ini diuji pada golongan remaja yang berumur antara 18 hingga 35 tahun (N= 800) yang disampel daripada populasi Pakistan yang luas dengan menggunakan persampelan berkelompok berperingkat. Kajian ini menggunakan borang soal selidik jawab sendiri (self-administered questionnaire) sementara penemuduga turut digunakan bagi membantu proses perlaksanaan tinjauan. Analisis PLS path modeling digunakan untuk

menguji model kajian. Hasil pengujian model pengukuran menunjukkan kesemua syarat adalah tercapai, seterusnya membuktikan model kajian ini adalah baik. Jumlah varians yang menerangkan pemboleh ubah tidak bersandar; penyertaan politik secara dalam talian ($R^2 = 0.52$) dan penyertaan politik secara bukan dalam talian ($R^2 = 0.54$), menunjukkan fungsi signifikan pemboleh ubah bersandar iaitu penggunaan sosial media, sokongan politik berpihak, sosial kapital dan ekspresi politik dalam meramalkan penyertaan politik di Pakistan. Kesahihan ramalan yang besar bagi pemboleh ubah bersandar ($Q^2 = 0.32$) seterusnya mengesahkan kebagusan model integrasi yang dicadangkan dalam kajian ini. Secara keseluruhan, ekspresi politik dapat dibuktikan sebagai prediktor terkuat dalam meramalkan penyertaan politik dan merupakan pengantara yang positif bagi perhubungan antara penggunaan media sosial bertujuan untuk mendapatkan berita dan penyertaan politik. Hasil dapatan kajian ini menunjukkan penggunaan media sosial secara umum membawa kepada penggunaan informasi melalui sosial media yang turut mempengaruhi ekspresi politik dan kapital sosial. Selain itu, penyertaan politik dalam talian didapati melimpah kepada penyertaan politik di luar talian. Hasil kajian membuktikan penglibatan politik dalam parti khusus turut menyumbang kepada penggunaan berita dalam media sosial dan sebagai pemangkin dalam penyertaan dalam sfera politik di luar talian. Hasil kajian turut menyokong peranan faktor sokongan politik berpihak di dalam model OSOR kajian ini. Bagaimanapun, hubungan antara kapital sosial dan penyertaan politik adalah negatif dan merupakan peramal yang tidak signifikan terhadap penyertaan politik secara luar talian. Hasil dapatan ini bertentangan dengan tanggapan popular yang menyatakan jaringan sosial adalah produktif dalam politik dan ternyata kapital sosial memberi kesan bercanggah kepada senario politik di Pakistan. Kajian ini mengariskan keperluan untuk

menimbang penggunaan teori kapital sosial mengikut konteks kerana faktor konteks
memainkan peranan penting bagi memahami penyertaan politik dalam situasi berbeza.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN PAKISTAN

ABSTRACT

Political participation is considered a key factor for well-functioning democracy. Past studies, however, suggest a declining trend of citizen participation in politics, especially among youth, in many parts of the world. Recent evidence found the popularity of social media has contributed to participatory politics as people are increasingly exposed to political news via social media. The current study develops an integrated model of social media use and political participation to test its role in promoting political participation in Pakistan. Drawing on OSOR model of Communication Mediation, the proposed model of this study elucidates that the process from social media use to political participation is not simple and direct but complex and mediated. This study introduces social capital to the Communication Mediation Model and hypothesizes the mediating effects of social capital and political expression on political participation in Pakistan. In addition, the typical political behavior in Pakistan which is often motivated by partisanship is also considered in developing the model. Partisanship is incorporated as a predisposition to social media use for news. The model was tested on youth aged between 18 and 35 ($N= 800$) sampled from the large population of Pakistan using a multi-stage cluster sampling. By means of survey method, data was collected using self-administered questionnaire while interviewers or enumerators were also made available to assist the process. PLS path modeling technique was used to test the model. All requirements for measurement model were met suggesting a good fit model for the current study. The variance explained for the dependent or outcome variables; online political participation ($R^2 = 0.52$) and offline

political participation ($R^2 = 0.54$) indicate significant roles of social media use, partisanship, social capital and political expression in predicting political participation in Pakistan. The large predictive relevance for both the dependent variables ($Q^2 = 0.32$) further confirm the goodness of fit of the integrated model suggested in this study. Overall, political expression proves to be the strongest predictor of political participation and positively mediates the relationship between social media news use and political participation. The results also reveal that general social media use leads to informational use of social media and social media news use greatly influences political expression and social capital. Likewise, online political participation spills to offline political participation. The result further depicts that the extent of political allegiances with a particular party encourages social media use for news and catalyzes the participation in offline political spheres. This result also supports the inclusion of partisanship as predisposition in OSOR model in this study. However, social capital negatively predicts online political participation and becomes insignificant predictor for offline political participation. The inversed outcome goes against the popular notion that social networks are politically productive and holds true for contradictory impact of social capital in a political scenario of Pakistan. The study highlights the need for rethinking the use of social capital theory according to contexts as contextual determinants play important role in understanding political participation in diverse settings.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Participation in politics is considered a prerequisite for a healthy and functioning democracy. Previous studies, however, suggest a declining trend of citizen participation in politics, especially among youth, in many parts of the world, making political detachment of citizens the most challenging political issue since the turn of this century (Kim, 2005). Determining critical factors that can bring alienated citizens back to the participatory politics has become a key issue in recent political communication research, and this effort to determine the cause of political disengagement has shown several individual and social factors to be connected with political participation.

According to Michigan school of thought, individual factors responsible for political participation mostly find their origin in psychology and include those psychological factors that usually separate a voter's voting behavior and the events outside his world (Campbell et al. 1954), for instance, age, gender, socio-economic status (Verba & Nie, 1972) or partisanship and political efficacy. Second school is Columbia school of thought (Berelson et al. 1954) which paid special stress on social characteristics of political behavior, and associate the decision about voting with factors like personal relations, association with specific groups etc. (Berelson et al. 1954). Columbia school of thought also suggests that personal attitudes are shaped by the individual's association with specific social, ethnic or religious groups. This sense of association with a particular group is what leads to flow of information in two distinct stages.

Nevertheless, psychological factors have frequently dominated the social factors, at least up until the last century, and because of this, the researchers have been concentrating their efforts on understanding the democratic role of social factors in prompting political participation in citizens. Researchers have often evaluated the socialization factors of political participation, to determine the way in which individuals are motivated by others in their surroundings to get politically involved.

Over the passage of time, internet has evolved to become leading socialization platform. Some academics are convinced of the democratic potential of the internet because of its interactive and decentralized features. Internet enhances the chance of interactive messaging at a much wider scale than the offline domain; hence, it plays a significant role in encouraging political participation (Shah, Cho, Eveland, & Kwak, 2005). These researchers are of the view that internet is a cost effective and convenient method that can serve to enhance community and political participation among citizens especially in youth, by providing information, spreading news, while encouraging interaction at the same time (Bennett, 2008).

More recently, the digitally optimistic strand of researchers started expecting the same democratic outcomes from social media, once positive empirical evidences in this context were obtained. For example, Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, and Valenzuela (2012) and Shah et al. (2005), suggested that using social media for informational purposes contributes to greater political participation. On the other hand, youth's more frequent social media use for news has stirred researchers' interest in social media as a potential area for political participation.

1.1.1 Social Media Effects on Political Participation

From political disengagement perspective, it has been argued that the probability of political participation increases with an increase in news media consumption. Scholars have upheld the notion that information, or news seeking attitude is crucial for enhancing public's involvement in politics (Habermas, 1989), which forms the core assumption of democracy as well. News seeking attitude of citizens strengthens the democracy by facilitating their opinion construction, attitude formation, and decision making in social and political spheres (Berelson, 1954).

However, social media has become a prominent source of news with two third users getting their latest news updates from the sites like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The most recent evidence of social media's massive use for news and political participation comes from the US presidential elections of 2016, when the presidential candidates continued the Obama tradition of immense campaigning through the social media. For the American citizens, after television, social media was the second medium of choice (four out of ten) for getting political news and updates. In the same way, 50% of the young American adults preferred social media to TV for the latest news and information (Mitchell, Gottfried, Barthel, & Shearer, 2016). News seeking behavior on social media is constantly on a rise; for example, post U.S. elections of 2016, the percentage of American population relying on social media for latest news increased by a whopping 62% (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016). The skyrocketing popularity of social media and the youth's heavy dependence on the Face book, Twitter, and LinkedIn for

seeking latest political information during and after elections further enhances the notion about the role of social media as a game changer in politics.

On the contrary, despite the popular expectations regarding social media's potential for optimizing political engagements among its users, the pessimists blame social media for promoting shallow relationships that distract people from public affairs and encourage political disengagement (Hodgkinson, 2008). These opponents see the social media use as predominantly entertainment oriented, and argue that the factors affecting political participation are mainly the ones other than technology and digital media.

In addition, these skeptics further argue, that a drastic change in institutional political participation such as: voting, campaigning, and volunteering by using online media, is a superficial idea which cannot be executed (Davis, 2010). Similarly, it is perceived that there are greater chances for lobbyists and special interest groups to use social media as a tool for non-institutional politics like online petitioning, protesting, and mobilizing, which is alarming for the smooth functioning of democracy. However, the argument that the ease of access to social media provides an equal opportunity to general social media users to petition the government and the other state institutions for their common interests is rejected by the pessimists, who believe that the wealthy still have an upper hand in creating political influences.

Taking into account the aforementioned flat contradiction between negative and positive impacts of social media on politics, this new quandary that questions the use of social media for news and political participation, is the top concern of the contemporary

researchers, and needs further attention. In probing the process from social media use to political participation and keeping in mind that the researchers are debating the involvement of different sociopolitical factors that can be crucial for increasing political participation. This is the right time to expand the social media research for establishing new perspectives, which advance the debate whether social media is promoting or discouraging political participation.

As mentioned above, recent researches show an incremental trend of suggesting important social contributory factors that might accelerate the political engagement of social media users. Nevertheless, some scholars are of the view that social media general or news use directly influences political participation without any intervening or contributory factors. It is also perceived that the social media news use in itself is a form of political participation that helps in shaping and understanding the political affairs.

Put another way, social media have inbuilt capability to increase the interest of individual users in politics, once they seek political news. Even entertainment use has the capacity to create political interest, as many social media users receive their news unintentionally while using media for purposes other than news seeking (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016). Therefore, frequency of social media political use directly promotes political participation among its users (Holt, Shehata, Strömbäck, & Ljungberg, 2013). In spite of increasing scholarly interest, by and large, very little has been explored in specifying direct or indirect effects of social media on political participation. However, some notable exceptions in research assessing the phenomenon of social media use and political participation have described that it is not that simple and direct; quite the

contrary, it is indirect and mediated by some potential factors. Given that, the claims about negative social media effects are mostly based on the assumption of how much social media is used rather than “how” it is used (Shah et al., 2005).

Meaning thereby, direct route is adapted when frequency and intensity of social media use are important measures of concern for assessing participatory behavior instead of patterns of social media use. Likewise, it is argued that the key dimensions of traditional political participation, including voting, campaigning, contacting politicians, and taking collective actions (Verba & Nie, 1972) are not too straightforward to be measured directly. Rather, it is mediated through some other measures (Gil de Zúñiga, Molyneux, & Zheng, 2014). Therefore, suggesting an indirect route to the complex process of social media use and resultant political participation has become a recent phenomenon (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014). Moreover, the broader picture of media use and participation depicts that the underlying process of the said link is predominantly indirect (Shah et al., 2005).

Referring to the importance of indirect effects, it can be presumed that instead of creating direct link, connecting social media news use and political participation indirectly via some potential mediating socio-political factors might better explore the wide-ranging effects of social media on political participation. Therefore, to get maximum political output from the social media, and to explore if there are important mediating factors that can engage more citizens in politics and catalyze the process of political participation, the knowledge of the existing models is necessary. Since, constructing more nuanced and complex theoretical models have long been of scholarly

interest to examine the media effects in politics; therefore, determining political effects of social media through modeling makes it more relevant to the political communication research. In addition, constructing a model of social media use and political participation by observing the existing models in the field of political communication provides a deeper understanding of the elaborative process of linking important mediating factors, which spur political participation (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014). Consequently, this will make the process of indirect effect more relevant in the current digital era.

Nevertheless, political expression on social media is a new version added to the long standing concept of offline political discussion. Political discussion is the essential element for reinforcing political attitude formation of citizens in healthy democracies. Scholars have long posited that political communication in any form, for example, dialogues, talks, discussions and disagreements create sound deliberations among citizens, and lets them replace previous conceptions by driving them to understand and accept alternative viewpoints (Habermas, 1989). Therefore, scholars are equally convinced of the importance of online political expression in all its forms including political discussions as major participatory activity, because such political discussions mature democratic attitude, enhance political knowledge and facilitate learning (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995) which ultimately galvanizes political engagement.

More specifically, political expression through social media is better understood as a passive political activity which can develop political interest in politically detached people, and provides gateway for more active and rigid political activities (Vaccari et al., 2015). According to Gil de Zúñiga, Veenstra, Vraga, and Shah (2010), the concept of

political expression differs from participation in the same way as political conversation varies from actual political action. The same way as talks paved the way for action, expression precedes participation by altering expresser's self- perception from being just an observer to an active participant (Bem, 1967).

It is noteworthy, that this argument is more relevant in this digital age because social media presents a range of novel ways to expressing oneself on political fronts. Now users can express their political thoughts by creating their own contents and sharing others' political contents. They can show their online presence such as liking, commenting, or sharing news content as passive expression or through participation in online discussions, reading and commenting on blogs and disentangling political controversies via social media as active expression both in turn promote offline political participation (Vaccari et al., 2015).

In any case, whether it is active or passive expression, the individuals who are more interested in politics show increased activism on new online avenues. They adopt more sophisticated forms of expression such as posting personal political experiences, becoming a fan of a political party, updating status about elections and campaigns, and pursuing others on political topics.

Furthermore, the wider the network, the greater is the opportunity for people to encounter a variety of opinions on political issues, and develop political consciousness (Mutz, 2002). In other words, the difference of opinions initiates political discussions, which is an essential element of political deliberation (Brundidge, 2008).

Simultaneously, diversity of opinions and political disagreements shared on social media through social networks can reach such a large audience which was not possible earlier in offline settings. Therefore, at present there are more probabilities for the people to openly express themselves, who otherwise get sidelined or they avoid indulging in political arguments (Bekafigo & McBride, 2013). Consequently, the scholars postulate that interaction among the members of social networks can serve as catalyst for political expression and consequent participation (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014). The argument is also consistent with social and political identification theory that the expressive behavior of one online friend might motivate others to show their active presence in a group, and trigger a series of expressions that result in ever-increasing opportunities of political action (Fowler & Kam, 2007; Gil de Zúñiga, Puig-i-Abril, & Rojas, 2009).

Altogether, the argument that political expression spurs political action is backed up by a plethora of studies, all of which have shown a consistent connection between political communication and action (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995). This reveals that the greater chances of political expression including online expression, mobilizes people to take political actions offline. Additionally, the social media have facilitated the process of political action by exploring new vistas, that allow the expressive behaviors to be expressed on an impressively large scale, only a fraction of which were possible before. As a result, now any particular political action of one community has a tendency to be followed by the social media users across other countries.

Because of the new methods of expressions offered by the social media for shaping political communication, and given the importance of political expression as highlighted

in the literature for fostering that discourse, scholars have recently shifted their attention from offline political discussion to online political expressions. Based on this trend, the current study suggests the political expression to be a mediating factor between social media use and political participation.

It is worth noting that many scholars who analyze the role of mediating factors in enhancing political participation through an indirect pathway mostly take their insight from communication mediation models. Basically, the communication mediation approach has been taken from the O-S-O-R framework of cognitive social psychology (Markus & Zajonc, 1985) and implemented on the political communication research. As an outgrowth of O-S-O-R framework, the communication mediation process is founded on the fact, that the impact of media is not universal and direct like S-R; the simple stimulus-response perspective, rather, it is quite conditional and complex (Lee, 2017). Thus, the O-S-O-R framework elaborates the complex interaction between audience's background dispositions that they bring with them to receive media messages, and their social, cultural, psychological interventions for creating a response (Shah et al., 2005). Further, research conducted on communication mediation has shown that according to experiments and observations, communication mediation is a strong and theoretically established method of communication effects (Lee, 2017).

The communication mediation models typically elaborate the mediating psychological or ideological, communication, social and cultural processes between media use (deliberation, attention and elaboration) and outcomes of community and political participation (Cho et al., 2009; Shah et al., 2007). The models of communication

mediation represent the whole process of communication mediation in such a manner, that the informational media use and engagement in political discussion does not only shape individuals' socio-cultural, cognitive, or structural impacts, but also modifies them to boost civic and political participation. These models characterize communication as a major process, that acts to separate the individuals confined to their personal lives from their duty as citizens of a society (Lee, 2017).

Generally, communication mediation models treat media use and interpersonal communication as critical mediators between background dispositions and participatory behaviors of citizens. Put another way, strength of the communication mediation model is based on connecting mass communication (individual's media use) with interpersonal communication in a causal pattern to predict increased participation (Cho et al., 2009; Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995). However, testing communication mediation model in online domain as citizen communication mediation model particularly specified that the online political expression mediates exactly like face to face political communication in terms of online news seeking and political participation (Shah et al., 2005). In particular, the face to face political conversation can be interpreted as political expression when tested in online domain. Practically, Shah and colleagues found online political expression more effective than offline political talks for promoting participatory behavior (Shah et al., 2005), mainly because of its capacity to reach beyond family and close friend circle, to a larger audience who have varied opinions, thus helping in understanding media message. More recently, a study by Gil de Zúñiga et al., (2014) has extended the mediation domain to social media and found a robust relationship

between social media news use and political participation via political expression. However, the study did not detect any important direct relationship. Logically, it can be concluded that the interpersonal political discussion has always been a critical mediator in communication mediation models.

One of the most prominent works in the literature based on communication mediation model is perhaps that of McLeod and colleagues, who found positive relationship between individuals' interactive discussion and civic engagement, with an emphasis on the role of news and political conversation as significant mediators between traditional media use and participation (McLeod et al., 1996). Similarly, Shah et al. (2005), found interpersonal communication as a significant mediator for participatory behaviors while including internet along with traditional media in his citizen communication mediation model, afterwards, research by Valenzuela (2011) concluded political discussions as a significant mediator for increased political participation in his effective citizen communication mediation model.

In brief, the aforementioned discussion concludes that indirect pathway from social media use to political participation under the rubric of citizen communication mediation model and linking social media news use to political participation via political expression might pave the way for increased political participation more effectively as compared to direct pathway from social media use to political participation. Noticeably, the communication mediation model is largely adapted by the studies that perceive the process of social media use for political participation as complex and indirect, rather than simple and direct (McLeod et al., 1996; Shah et al., 2005)

On the whole, the suggested indirect route from social media use to political participation in the current study facilitates the flow of these diverse forms of expression, given the textual nature and insertion of non-verbal cues. Moreover, information transmitted through online connections is more likely to encourage expressive and participatory behaviors, because the opinions aired by personal sources carry more weight than those from purely strangers (Bode, 2012).

In spite of growing literature on the use of social media, and its contribution towards social networking, political expression and political participation (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014) there is still limited empirical research on achieving a better understanding of communication mediation phenomenon to increase political participation. Therefore, there is a need to expand earlier social media research by finding new links between significant contributory factors in communication mediation phenomenon for greater political participation. These new links might expand the horizon of social media research and help in improving political participation among citizens even those from under-developed democracies.

1.1.2 Social Capital and Political Participation

In the lieu of declining political participation, most notable work is that of (Putnam, 1993; Putnam, 1995, 2000) in elaborating the critical social factors involved in decreasing participation of public in politics and civic activities. Putnam's explanation for increase in political participation is through social capital, which he considers a key factor for enhancing political engagement and smooth functioning of democracy.

According to this explanation, when there is less stock of social capital in any society, public participation in civic and political activities also decreases. Social capital has been defined as, “Features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society facilitating coordinated actions” (Putnam, 1993, p. 167), where social networks possess worth ”. Furthermore, Putnam’s linkage of social capital to political participation revives the old debate in political communication research on the importance of social networks for enhancing civic and political engagement. Social networks, which are interchangeable with voluntary organizations, informal and formal groups of people, strong tie associations of close friends and family, or weak tie associations including associations of clubs, churches etc. all are equally a source of social capital, which is a prerequisite for quality civic life and greater political participation (Putnam, 2000).

Coleman (1988), postulated that the resource accumulation resulting from the networked relations among people is called social capital. Similarly, Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) associate the concept of social capital with social networks, and the trustworthiness and reciprocation that results from them. In other words, social capital is an all-inclusive ultimate advantage that someone receives from their relationship with others, which in turn strengthens the social fabric. The associations in the social networks also empower people to achieve their individual and collective goals by facilitating cooperation among them. Social capital increases commitment of citizens with their community which tightens the social fabric and reduces the social disorder, among several other benefits. People, who are tightly bonded in an association, have a

higher level of trust; therefore, they are more likely to get involved in community affairs, socialize in informal groups, and volunteer for collective problems (Levi, 1996). The social bonding brings positive results equally at individual and institutional level by creating an atmosphere of cooperation, support and trust through aggregated social capital (Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer, & Bichard, 2010). Due to this very reason, the societies with high stock of social capital have well-functioning political structure, where elite is more responsive towards people's need, and as a result, there is an increased participation in civic and political activities (Putnam, 2000).

It is noteworthy, that the social media have premium technological capacities for building social networks even across boundaries, among users sharing common interests instead of geographical locations, something which is almost impossible in the offline world. Bridging online and offline contacts is one of the distinct social media features (Ellison et al., 2007), facilitating political engagement, among other unique online opportunities such as political discussion, online polls, following political leaders and generating political contents. The special features of social media allow its users to make an extensive online network of new friends as well as maintain friendship with real life friends (Ellison et al., 2007). Online social networks are also more straightforward than offline social groups because, once the users get linked with their friends; they immediately receive an exhaustive list of other connections present on the social media, giving them a chance to readily extend their online network, thus enhances their social capital.

Research shows that social capital in the form of networking resources is used for two purposes. First, it is used to achieve personal goals such as getting recognition and support from others (Zhang, Tang, & Leung, 2011), and to maintain or increase social connections (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012). Indeed, individuals draw on resources from other members of social networks for their personal well-being and life satisfaction. This in turn motivates them to become more civically and politically engaged, because, individuals satisfied with social status are more likely to volunteer for public affairs. Secondly, social capital as a networking resource helps people in achieving shared goals, for example, civic engagement and participation in politics (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012). Furthermore, the content available on social media are immensely diversified (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012), where users are receiving and sharing a variety of content simultaneously. Therefore, both aforementioned purposes of social capital can be achieved by online users at the same time, because of which, the objectives of social capital including personal and social well-being are positively linked with participation (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004).

Heinrichs, Lim, and Lim (2011), have highlighted the role of Twitter and Facebook as key mediums for creating new connections with like-minded people in order to form larger social groups. Other studies place Facebook at the top to highlight these networked relations created by viewing and linking each other's profiles (Gross & Acquisti, 2005). Since, social media has become the biggest source of making new connections, all the while maintaining and extending the existing ones; therefore, a number of optimistic scholars is convinced of profound impact of the internet services

on the status of citizens who are now more informed, more socially connected, and more involved in civic and political affairs (Bennett, 2008).

In other words, the key outcome of this discussion is that there are two prominent perspectives that define the influence of social media use on political participation: social media news use for enhanced political expression (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012), and online social networks that encourage collective political actions (Boulianne, 2015). The first perspective draws heavily from previous researches on traditional media, which holds that people who use media for news and information are more knowledgeable and more expressive, hence, participate actively in politics (McLeod et al., 1996). The second perspective takes its impression from social capital theory, in which the resources inherent in social relations are used for collective civic and political benefits (Ellison et al., 2007; Putnam, 2000).

In either case, both perspectives are effective for increasing political participation. Moreover, social media has inbuilt features that might catalyze the process of political participation under both the perspectives of news use for political expression and social networking. For instance, current figures that show major shift of news consumers from traditional news sources to social media platforms are in line with the first perspective.

In the similar vein, there is sufficient evidence that supports the second perspective of social networking for increased participation. For example, increased opportunities in wider social media networks to receive political information, motivation to sign a petition, volunteering and participating in a campaign, boycotting or knowing the reason

for preferring one candidate over the other in elections, all increase the likelihood of voting (Boulianne, 2015). Furthermore, engaging in social networks expedites information flow, and facilitates the recruitment of larger groups, which is perhaps the most effective way to mobilize people at a mass level for community and political activities (Wilson & Musick, 2007). Likewise, a vast scholarship considers that the trend of pursuing and sharing of news is a main source for connecting with several people and generating diverse social networks and greater political expression (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012). In particular, whenever entertainment, communication, and informational use of social media are studied by the scholars, a positive relation is discovered between the use of internet and social capital (Boulianne, 2015; Shah et al., 2005), which is a key indicator for promoting participatory behaviors among citizens, both at the public and political level.

The social media use for news develops attitudes and behaviors that promote political expression, and social capital within virtual groups which ultimately enhances their political participation. Owing to the similar political outcomes of the two aforementioned perspectives of news use of social media and social capital, the current study has linked these perspectives together for better results. This study concludes political expression and social capital as one of the most important contributory factors which mediate the process of social media use and political participation.

So far, most of the social media researchers have explored western democracies to elaborate the process of social media use and political participation and related contributory factors (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014; Vaccari et al., 2015). However, very

little is known about the process of political participation via mediating factors in less developed democracies, despite the rapid growth of social media applications in these democracies.

1.1.3 Social media Use and Political Participation in Pakistan: The Context

Present study takes up the case of less developed democracies, by examining the process of social media use and political participation in Pakistan. Pakistan will be a unique case to examine political implications of social media use because of its distinctive circumstances. For example, it has a history of a democracy, that was interrupted by Army unlike America and Europe, more than 50% of its population is under the age of 24 years (CIA World Fact Book, 2017, July 9) with two third of social media users being under the age of thirty, a ratio which is higher than that found in Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (Michaelsen, 2011). Additionally, it has a free traditional media as compared to Arab countries. Therefore, Pakistan is a ripe region for exploring news consumption on social media, and resulting democratic outcomes like citizens' enhanced social capital, political expression, and eventually political participation.

Unlike America, Europe, and even India, political scenario of Pakistan has not been smooth ever since its birth. Pakistan has seen four interventions of army which led to feudalism and fragile democracy. There are only three national assemblies that were able to complete their term in sixty-eight years' history of Pakistan. In addition, there is a lack of national consensus and a decline in electoral participation. Consequently, the

irregular elections have affected the political activity and democratic standards of Pakistan (Ahmad, 2004).

Altogether, Pakistan had ten general elections in its history, but from the very beginning it had a series of unfortunate events that disturbed its democratic strength. The first general election resulted in the separation of East Pakistan from West Pakistan, to create a new country, Bangladesh. The second general election resulted in power shift from civilian government to military rule. Security challenges and poor law and order conditions were the main problems during the period of 1985 to 2008, and hence, not a single elected government had been able to complete its term in this period. General elections of 2013 were the first time in the history of Pakistan that an elected government completed its five years and shifted its powers to another civilian government (Rizvi & Gilani, 2013). As a whole, this political instability throughout the history of Pakistan has left the citizens disgruntled; consequently, the citizens are politically disengaged and participate less actively in the electoral process.

In spite of the fact that traditional media enjoys freedom in Pakistan (Michaelson, 2011), and is highly popular among masses, yet, it could not play any important role to increase political participation. Unsurprisingly, alongside free traditional media, the popularity of social media has increased tremendously since 2011 onwards. The total number of social media users was 8 million before 2013, and it increased by more than 13 million within 6 months (Ali, 2016). Similarly, studies conducted in Pakistan showed that the public uses social media for social interaction, as well as for collective public and political goals. Nevertheless, the general elections of 2013 marked the beginning point when for

the first time social media was used for specific political activities, a practice that was not common in Pakistan before.

According to researchers, if the number of social media users among common masses increases, including voters or supporters, the number of social media users among politicians also rises subsequently (Smith, 2009) in order to keep in touch with their potential voters. Undoubtedly, this argument proved correct in Pakistan's election scenario, when the politicians recognized the importance of social media for the first time to use it to mobilize voters, especially the youth in the general election 2013 who had previously not shown any significant political activity on social media (Ali, 2016). Formerly, the political parties in Pakistan used very traditional ways to access their voters, such as door to door canvassing and public meetings. Before the general elections of 2013, the top political leaders including the then president of Pakistan, Asif Ali Zardari, Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani and opposition leader Nawaz Sharif did not show any online political activity including any kind of online interaction with their supporters at that time.

However, the use of social media by mainstream political parties to interact with the people increased tremendously before the electoral process of 2013. The ruling party PPP (Pakistan People's Party), Opposition party PMLN (Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz) and comparatively a new party PTI (Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf), and some other parties operated their own networks on Facebook, Twitter, and other social platforms for creating blogs, tweeting political opinions and updating political statuses to mobilize the public for participation in political process (Eijaz, 2013).

Political parties activated their specialized social media cells. For example, PTI was one prominent political party that utilized the power of social media by creating its very own official Facebook page, and also established its online presence in blogosphere through the blog “Insaaf”, and constantly updated its followers about the activities of its party leader during and after elections. PTI’s rally was followed by over 30,000 online individuals all over the world (Eijaz, 2013).

Later on, the election commission of Pakistan reported an overall voter turnout of 55.2% for the 2013 general elections, which was a much higher ratio since the 80s. The voter turnout had remained as low as 35-44% in the last six elections during the time period of 1998-2008. Hence, there was an approximated 11% increase in the voter turnout as compared to the last general elections in 2008 (Ahmed & Skoric, 2014). This was the second time in the history of Pakistan that more than half of the total voters casted their votes. In the same lieu, PTI challenged the 40 years’ monopoly of the two mainstream parties PPP and PMLN, and emerged as the second biggest party in terms of voting ratio. Moreover, PTI was successful in setting up its government in the province of Khyber Pakhtun Khawa (KPK), again one of the many firsts in the history of Pakistan.

Almost similar outcomes were concluded for another democracy –Nigeria. In Nigerian elections, intensive use of social media for political news during elections resulted in a greater voter turnout as well as political activism (Okoro, & Nwafor, 2013). Similar trend was observed for UK elections of 2010, where in accordance with the expectations of political scientists, voter turnout emerged to be much higher than the previous elections because of the widespread use of social media for political news. Within a span

of ten years from 2005 to 2010, the number of voters rose from 2 million to 29.6 million, with a voter turnout of 65.1% as compared to 61% of that of 2005 (Walton, 2010).

Given the similarity of changing political scenario at international level and the aforementioned new political outlook, it was quite suitable to use Pakistan as an example for investigating the role of social media in increasing voter turnout, boosting youth's interest in online and offline politics, and establishing the government by a new party. Overall, major purpose of the study is to examine the political implications of social media; particularly, the comprehensive process which works to connect social media use to political participation among the population of Pakistan that has been politically less dynamic during the course of history.

1.2 Problem Statement

A sharp rise in the popularity of social media, its inherent capabilities, and an increase in its use for seeking news and information, all have made social media an important role player in enhancing political participation in a democracy. However, the scholarly discussions on cyber optimism and cyber pessimism are not over yet. Nonetheless, the long line of research on the said issue shows the vastness of the literature which is still growing. Further, it has deepened the interest of scholars to investigate the ways and circumstances through which social media use effects political participation; albeit the given lack of conclusiveness of the data.

Focusing on the academic debate over the outcome of using social media and its overall social and political contribution towards a society, the existing study fills the gap in the

social media research, by taking up the stance of communication researchers who are convinced of positive impacts of social media for enhanced social and political engagement.

On the account of cyber optimism, there is a great deal of research distinguishing different motivational needs of social media users (Zhang et al., 2011). Similarly, the importance of social media in specifying civic and political behaviors has been expounded by a sizeable body of researchers (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; McLeod et al., 1996; Shah et al., 2005). However, less research has been extended to elaborate the comprehensive process that how social media use can bring political outcomes. The current study attempts to address the so far unsolved problem of the underlying process through which the individuals' social media activities might end up in political participation.

As mentioned earlier, one phenomenon to explore the process of news use of social media for greater political participation is, by characterizing it through communication mediation approach. Though, the scholars showed high interest in specifying different mediating factors to explain the process of political participation of media users within the scope of communication mediation models, yet, the existing literature has just scratched the surface, specifically, in the still emerging field of social media. Besides, the digital revolution demands new horizons to be explored that might change the attitude of political disengagement in any democracy. Therefore, finding some new links between decisive mediating factors of political participation in a socio-political context,