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Social Media

Role of Social Media in Civic-State Engagement and Political Apathy in New Public Sphere: A Survey of Faculty/Research-Scholars from Gomal and Qurtuba Universities DIK KP Pakistan

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Abstract: Social media [SM] has become a political platform in new public sphere for the politicians, governments and citizens. It is rapidly becoming a popular tool for political and social activism. It has become a smart instrument of protests and communication. Digital revolution is igniting political and social revolutions through social media using leading edge communication and data sharing gadgets. Social media has been found supporting civic-state engagement [CSE] and helpful in reducing political apathy [PA] particularly in the developing states like Pakistan. The events of last decade in the 'Middle East have verified the powers of SM in political activism and breaking the ice of PA. This study explores the same theory of relationships among the academicians of higher education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The results confirm the hypotheses by giving significant statistics regarding both positive and negative relations of SM with CSE and PA respectively.

Keywords: Social Media; Participation in politics; Civic Engagement; Political Apathy; New Public Sphere

1. Introduction

Networked digital technologies have integrated all the communication and distribution technologies together around social media (Kirkpatrick, 2010). The economic, social and political impacts of these technologies on societies indicate that the era of Knowledge Society has arrived. The birth of Internet has begun the scholarly debate regarding role of ICTs including social media on the international citizens (Khoury, 2011). Besides many gadgets, ICTs include Internet and mobile technologies, which actually support platforms of social media (Nawaz, 2012). Though critics suspect the potential of ICTs to phenomenally change power relations

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in society but they acknowledge the prospects for underprivileged groups to come forward, communicate and organize transnationally. Social media are playing an increasingly constitutive role in organizing social movements and in mobilizing on a global level in new public sphere (Zubair et al., 2012a; 2012b).

SM increases the transnational ability of social movements to link with rest of the organizations having large networks empowered to go beyond time and space constraints (Castells, 2008). SM is playing decisive online role in supporting coordination and mobilization social and political workers for off-line actions and movements. Text messaging and sharing of pictures and videos are making deeper impacts in spreading the instant information on political events and ideas (Gillan et al., 2008). For instance, SMS on mobile phones mobilized against Philippine President Joseph Estrada, which ended in his resignation in 2001 showing a mega change in political communication and mobilization (Nawaz, 2012). Lowering cost and better outputs of mobilization is the main power of smart phones and social sites, which has enabled online communicative practices (Sara, 2012).

When there is no transparency and accountability among the so called democratic governments in the developing and poor states (Pinkleton et al., 2002), the natural reactions of citizens is lower levels of participation in elections, lack of interest in political activities thereby creating a state of political apathy (Cushion, 2007; Loveless, 2013). SM has made it possible to motivate the general public to have increased level of political interactions without having traditional physical participation (Nawaz, 2013). Likewise, politicians, political parties and government are also using SM for their campaigns against the rivals as well as in their own favor (Froiland, 2015).

2. Research Design

In the current study, positivism has been used as the underlying research philosophy for collection and analysis of data and documentation of results. This philosophy suggests that an idea/theme is knowledge it can be verified through observational methods (*Ontology*). Likewise, knowledge should be recorded and communicated through scientifically identifiable concepts (*Epistemology*) using "*Scientific-Method*." Survey was used as approach to access the sample-subjects for both secondary (qualitative) data from literature and primary (quantitative) data using standard questionnaire (7-point scale). Applying the theoretical framework, extracted from the literature, as guide, quantitative data has been analyzed through SPSS-22 to test hypotheses and answer hypothesized questions.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Social Media

The evolution of media from print to radio to TV to online media is increasingly affecting the opinions and perceptions of masses (Carty & Onyett, 2006). However, SM such as WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter has raised this evolution far away from the traditional technologies and media houses in terms of changing the public opinion and actions in social movements and political activism (Braskev, 2011). Today's social media create instant sensations through a news statement, which reaches from 0 to 20 million audience in no time (Sara, 2012). The viral nature of social and user-driven engagements help even strangers to connect and agree on common desires, beliefs, and interests and thereby create instant losers and winners (Nawaz, 2012).

Digital age is verily referred to as "information age" with knowledge societies where ICTs have abridged the gaps of time and space in information sharing, communication, and socializing via networks (Braskov, 2011). This obviously changes the way people connect and how we exchange and share in the political cyberspace (Khan et al., 2012a). Social media can therefore be accepted as a powerful tool in facilitating the social cum political contact of citizens and state. Government can potentially use the platforms of social media to lobby opinion on policies and political actions of governing party (Bennett et al., 2012). Likewise, citizens can use social media to express their frustrations or acceptance of policies and actions of government (Mansell & Hwa, 2015).

SM assists the citizens in searching for novel routes of cooperative and collective action by providing the mundane opportunities to mobilize citizens for a common cause or to sensitize public on selected issues (Khoury, 2011). It was not possible for the traditional media channels but SM has created the opportunity to provide equal and parallel access to every citizen to share his/her view point directly on the information high way of cyberspace and make it visible to every citizen on the planet (Khan et al., 2012b). Sharing stories with citizens containing social, economic, political information is more possible for traditional owners of information rather every citizen has the hands on facility to share for sharing the perceptions of receivers (Walia, 2012). It is however notable that internet and SM being free and open, good and bad information can be posted to guide and misguide the public opinion. The traditional media owners still continue to filter messages and apply censorship through strict rules and regulations (Nawaz, 2013).

The network speed has increased all over the world thereby increasing immediacy. The Internet based real time communication offers options regarding when to read, review and then comment on the contents on media. Broadband and Web 2.0 come with a flood of opportunities to interact instantly and anytime (Gillan et al., 2008). Further, there is difference between 1-to-1, 1-to-many and many-to-many

communications (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). SM is based on connecting technologies, which bring together most of the traditional systems of data manipulation and information sharing (Khoury, 2011). SM has also blurred the differences of private and public types of communications (Bennett et al., 2012). SM makes it possible to communicate between few-to-few, which is a powerful tool for the citizens working as activists and managing social movements. For instance, chatting can help in 1 to 1 as well as a group of few participants to conduct online conversation very successfully at any time or moment (Sara, 2012). Likewise, email is commonly used communication application and same is VoIP, which is used for making conference calls between a group of participants (Nawaz, 2013).

The SM has potentially reduced the cost of communication and information sharing thereby making this facility commonplace for every citizen (Braskov, 2011; Saleem & Mourtada, 2011). SM is instrumental in generating faster membership and collective participation (Walia, 2012). However, low costs are not the indicator of automatic increase in political participation. It also requires continuing with face-to-face interactions to build trust and keep information safe (Bennet et al., 2012).

3.2. Civic-State Engagement

SM helps citizens to form networks, get connected, exchange views, and plan joint actions (Castells, 1996). Internet and SM networks have created a "digital civil society." SM is a cyberspace for civil society where it can be used conduct conversations in rallying citizens and doing some social or political action (Nawaz, 2012). In near past, successful social media campaigns have raised so far hidden topics to general public to mobilize their support (Sara, 2012). SM is the new stage for civic activism and there have been events wherein political changes have resulted due to "social media revolutions", for example, in the events of "Arab Spring" SM played instrumental role in driving as well as supporting those "Leaderless' activism (Mansell & Hwa, 2015).

For citizens a nominal level of understanding/skills is required to use SM for civic participation and engagement therefore their social media literacy need to be increased for greater usage (Carty & Onyett, 2006). Further, civil organizations have to improve their SM policies to manipulate the opportunities. Social media also provide opportunities for political leaders to strengthen their interaction with the citizens (Kaplan & Hawnlein, 2010). Government and state institutions can use online systems to distribute information and thereby prepare citizens as pro-govrenment. That is why political interactions have reached new heights of political activism using SM (Khoury, 2011). Political entities like parties and candidates can variably use SM to access public for earning their support and favor for political manifestos and plans before elections, during and after voting season (Khan et al., 2012b). Reportedly, there is still a lot to be used by political stakeholders from the

SM platforms in attracting citizens and influence their social and political perceptions (Nawaz, 2013).

Research tells that the use of SM by activists and their protest movements is conducted at the intersection of political motives, social context, and opportunities offered by the networked technologies (Gillan et al., 2008, p. 151). For example, technology is changing every day and creating new opportunities for the political leaders and citizens to update themselves with emerging gadgets and their applications for political purposes (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Likewise, Twitter was not initially developed to manage protests however, at the moment, this technology is playing very impressive role in this regard (Mansell & Hwa, 2015).

3.3. Political Apathy

Political apathy refers to a kind of "deficiency of love and devotion" for the state (Walia, 2012). It is expressed in the form of citizens' indifference for the political matters occurring in the country in the form of political parties, leaders, protests, elections, public opinion, civic rights and duties. Political apathy is thus the absence of interest, or concern regarding socio-political life (Nawaz, 2013). An apathetic citizen has no interest in the social and political affairs of his/her state. Democracy is believed to be the best form of government for civilized citizens living anywhere on the planet and considered indispensable for national development through respect for human rights, rule of law, accountability, transparency, and social/political participation. However, all this happens in the presence of civic-state engagement (Loveless, 2013). If there are weaknesses on the part of government, the resultant behavior of indifference by citizens is called political apathy (Froiland, 2014).

Classically, democracy is said to be a government of the people, for the people and by the people (Hassan, 2003, p. 31) where democratic politics is constructed as per specific principles, such as, civic-participation, respect for human rights, free-n-fair elections, and good governance (Hoffmann, 2010). If these principles are not observed or under played by the people in power and government, frustrations become common among the citizens thereby leading them to consider political matters beyond their control. These perceptions generate indifference between state and citizen and labeled as political apathy of the masses, meaning that it is the behavior of the political parties, political leaders, state and government, which makes and/or breaks political apathy as a disease for political sphere of a country (Nawaz, 2013; Froiland, 2015).
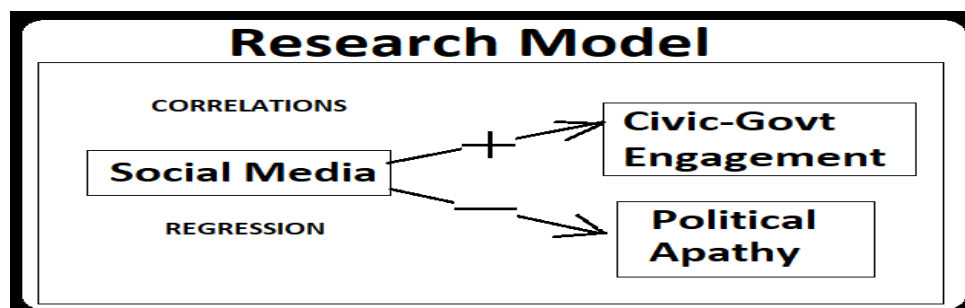
Figure 3.1. Schematic Diagram of the Theoretical Framework

4. Findings of the Study

Table 4.1. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Social Media	193	3.27	6.91	5.9416	.58719
Civic-State Engagement	193	3.10	5.10	4.3477	.48327
Political Apathy	193	2.00	6.60	2.9435	.74033

Hypothesis # 1 Predictor is significantly associated with both criterion variables

Association Analysis

Table 4.2. Correlations

		Social Media	Civic-State Engagement
Civic-State Engagement	Pearson Correlation	**.388****	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	193	193
Political Apathy	Pearson Correlation	**-.443****	.029
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.689
	N	193	193

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

Analysis

SM is positively (r = 0.388) and significantly (p-value = 0.000) associated with CSE. Likewise, SM is negatively (r = -0.443) and significantly (p-value = 0.000) associated with PA. However, the association between CSE and PA is very low as well as insignificant. Thus, Hypothesis # 1 is substantiated.

Prediction of Civic-State Engagement

Hypothesis # 2 SM significantly and **positively** predicts CSE

Table 4.3. Model Summary

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
.388a	.151	.146	.44652	33.909	.000b

Table 4.4. Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.449	.328		7.474	.000
	Social Media	.320	.055	.388	5.823	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Civic-State Engagement; b. Predictors: (Constant), Social Media

Analysis

SM has brought 15% ($R^2 = 0.151$) change (positive) in CSM at the significance of p-value = 0.000 and Beta-weight of 0.320. Given this the Hypothesis # 2 is substantiated.

Predicting Political Apathy

Hypothesis # 3 SM significantly & **negatively** explains PA.

Table 4.5. Model Summary

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
.443a	.196	.192	.66547	46.628	.000b

Table 4.6. Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	6.262	.488		12.823	.000
	Social Media	-.558	.082	-.443	-6.828	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Political Apathy; b. Predictors: (Constant), Social Media

Analysis

SM brings 20% (R^2=0.196) (negative) change in PA with significance of *p-value* = 0.000. The Beta-weight = -0.558. Therefore Hypothesis # 3 is accepted as true.

5. Discussions

SM is the first technology which have enabled users to stay in touch with more people than humans have ever been connected in the history of mankind. More importantly, SM has motivated those who are not willing to communicate with others. Millions of citizens are now connected on mobile phones using applications like facebook, WhatsApp, twitter, messenger, chatting and email for one to one and one to many communications. It is helping them increase interactions with fellow

citizens as well as government. PM-Portal is the latest application for connecting citizens with the government in place. SM is therefore huge role in bringing citizens closer to their leaders and governors thereby simultaneously reducing the levels of political apathy among the nation.

The global links of SM with CSE and PA have been verified by the results, however, the interrelationships are very nominal and there is a lot of space for the state, government and political stakeholders to do some efforts for capitalizing on the effective use of SM to conduct constructive online political affairs. For this purpose, steps have to be taken both on the part of citizens and political communities. Citizens must increase their social media literacy, while government has to provide technological facilities in the form of robust networks. Political parties and government have to keep technological infrastructure updated with latest services to keep SM active and friendly with the citizens.

6. Conclusions

From the field study results, several conclusions can be drawn. Following are the leading points with precise quantum of the issue and explicit guidelines for future work.

- Positive impacts of SM on CSE are visible (15%) however, there is a lot of space for increasing its role through taking some technological and motivational measures;

- SM is appearing effective in reducing the PA (20%) as compared to its role in changing CSE however, there is need to work on the availability and access to SM for increasing the percentage of its impact on PA;

- Further research is needed to explore the issue with big and diversified samples to understand more factors which can make SM more effective.

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