



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Understanding Social Media's Impact on Political Behavior in the 2024 General Elections of Pakistan**

**Dr. Asma Iqbal**

Assistant Professor of Political Science, Govt. Graduate College for Women, Samanabad, Lahore

\*Corresponding Author: asma.iqbal79@hotmail.com

**ABSTRACT**

This study aims to explore the impact of social media on political attitudes and behaviors among Pakistani voters during the 2024 General Elections. Pakistan, a diverse and populous South Asian nation, has experienced a tumultuous political history, including periods of democratic governance and military rule. The 2024 General Elections represented a critical moment in its political landscape, with significant shifts in political behavior influenced by social media. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating Almond and Powell's political system model and the system theory of political communication. Data was collected through an online questionnaire from a population of voters in Lahore, with a sample size of 243 participants. The questionnaire was designed to ensure construct validity and reliability, with measures like Cronbach's alpha for internal consistency. Statistical analysis techniques were used to examine the data. Findings strongly support the hypothesis that exposure to political content on social media is associated with changes in political attitudes and behaviors among Pakistani voters during the 2024 General Elections. The study recommends that political parties should enhance their engagement on social media platforms to effectively influence voter behavior. Additionally, further research is suggested to explore the long-term impacts of social media on political engagement in different regions of Pakistan.

**KEYWORDS** General Elections 2024, Political Behavior, Social Media, Voter Turnout

**Introduction**

Elections are the main pillar of the democratic structure and acme the basic features of the establishment of a government and the political structuring of a specific state (Shively, 2003). In a democratic setup, Elections play the role of a bridge between people and political leaders. Moreover, elections play the most important role in enhancing political socialization and involvement (Palmer, 1975: 1). In Pakistan, personality politics have the upper hand as compared the party-based politics. However, personality stimulus still exists, in the current political landscape, and social media has emerged as a great instrument that plays a very important role in politics. The integration of social media and political behavior has become increasingly salient in modern democracies, reforming the dynamics of electoral processes and citizen engagement (de Zúñiga, et al, 2018). The General Elections of 2024 in Pakistan are an interesting example of the developing bond between social media and political behavior of people; the research is an attempt to investigate the complex collaborations between social media usage and political behavior during the 2024 elections and its effects on the complex socio- economic scenario, challenges, and outcomes produced by this interaction.

In this era of technological revolution, social media platforms are replacing the conventional tools of political communication very effectively. Political mobilization and information are intensively crossing geographical restrictions and connecting individuals across the globe in exceptional ways (Muzaffar, 2016; Zhuravskaya, et al,

2020). The 2024 elections can be considered a significant example of the use of social media by political parties, activists and citizens (Fareed, et. al., 2019). This source of communication proved an easy and quick forum to get connected with people, increase support and convince public in their favor. This forum also turned into battlefield due to the competing narratives, specific ideologies, party manifesto and political agendas.

Against this backdrop, this research seeks to explore a way forward for policy makers, law making institutions and political scholars to understand the importance of the complex interplay between advanced technologies and political process. This research is an examination of social media's impact on electoral campaigns, political participation and communication resulting in a massive transformation in political behavior in contemporary democracies.

## Literature Review

Social media offers a new platform for the propagation of political information since it brings people closer to interacting with one another. The domination of some communications that was previously held by a small field of "professional communicators" has been alleviated with the advent of Web 2.0 technologies, which make it very easy to use and afford for nitezens to propagate political facts and ideas with other country fellows (Muzaffar, et. al., 2020; Moy, Xenos, & Hussain, 2013). As a result of this ever-changing milieu, where people "increasingly give knowledge of politics" via digital media, academics are still evolving. There is mounting indication in the literature linking the use of social media to the political activism, both online and offline (Bode, 2012; Bond et al., 2012). Though, little is known about how users come to show these behaviors. This effort fills that gap by looking into how much social media users may learn about politics. Therefore, it is plausible to view people's valuations of media integrity as including the metrics they use to device their level of trust in the media. This can be a cause of why "news credibility" and "news media trust" are frequently used alternatively. Additionally, an essential component of practically all frameworks of both general and news media trust is the executors' anticipation that connections will result in profits rather than losses for them (Strömbäck et al., 2020). In spite of the simple phenomenon that "the influence of a message likely depends partly on the kind of the channel via which it is sent," they focused on specified correspondents. Since then, it became a common practice to differentiate between origin and medium legitimacy (Na, S., et al 2020).

Interaction between the candidates and the people of his/her constituencies via social media is very common now. Candidates and even the political parties communicate directly with their voters, enhance their political outreach win political support, and shape the public narrative via websites like Twitter and Facebook. (Muzaffar, et. al., 2019). As a result of this paradigm shift in communication patterns candidates now have easy access to a greater range of strategic substitutes. Should candidates deliberate on the topics of the public interest? Even though research on social media campaigning has exploded in the current age (Boulianne, 2016), it is still indistinct which problems candidates address on these platforms, previous studies had a tendency to focus primarily on the metadata produced by the use of interface norms like retweets, @-mentions, likes, or hashtags. By analyzing how representatives alter the substance of their messages to meet the specific geographies of various platforms, a better knowledge of how social media affects political activism 2018 (Stier et al., 2018).

## **Hypotheses**

**H0:** There is no substantial connotation between exposure to political content on social media and changes in political behavior among voters during the General Elections of 2024 in Pakistan.

**H1:** There is a very strong connection between Exposure to political content on social media and the changes in political behavior among voters during the General Elections of 2024 in Pakistan.

## **Research Methodology**

A mixed-methods approach, including quantitative analysis of social media data and qualitative examination of voter behaviors, the research offers insights into the complex impacts of social media on political behavior during the 2024 general elections. A quantitative method has been used to analyze the change in political behavior in district Lahore. It investigates the impact of social media on people's political behavior before the General Elections of 2024 in district Lahore. Respondents realized that their responses to the questions were significant and that they may help with understanding and analysis quality. Purposive sampling was used to acquire data from people of Lahore who are actively involved in political movements.

## **Population**

The study's participants include all men and women who belong to the district of Lahore

## **Sample technique**

243 people from district Lahore were selected as samples through a purposive sampling technique.

## **Sample Size**

The study's sample size is 243 men and women from the district of Lahore.

## **Variables of the study**

There are independent and dependent variables in this study.

## **Dependent Variables**

Dependent variables are those that are influenced by independent variables. User's political behavior is the dependent variable in this study

## **Independent Variables**

The independent variables are those that have an impact on the dependent variables. The independent variables in this study are social media.

## **Validity and Reliability**

### **Construct Validity**

The study integrates Almond and Powell's political system, which is an appropriate example to understand the importance of people's political recruitment,

political participation, and political communication while providing a theoretical framework to understand the characteristic of political systems and the behavior of both citizens and institutions within them (Sikander, 2015). By relating this political system theory with the analysis of social media's influence on political behavior, the study becomes clearer to understand the process of political communication and participation. Almond and Powell's theory emphasizes that the people's socialization and cultural values determine their political behavior, political beliefs and attitude toward the political system. (Almond & Powell, 1982). On the other hand electronic media, as a vital and the fastest source of spreading information and communication; is fully capable to depict the true scenario or to manipulate it. Social media that is an extension of electronic media and it plays important role in reshaping political culture and articulating new digital sphere. By analyzing patterns of cyber activism, it accesses the extent to which social media facilitates civic engagement in the context of the 2024 General Elections in Pakistan. The intention behind the Incorporation of the Almond and Powell's political system theory into the analysis of social media's effects on political behavior is to make the study an inclusive piece of understanding of the complex relationship between the increasing role of social media and democratic practices. This theoretical framework offers an effective lens through which the numerous challenges and chances posed by social media on political systems, governance and contemporary democracies can be analyzed.

### **Internal Validity**

To ensure internal validity, the study deliberates potential confounding variables. By focusing on the impact of social media exposure on political attitudes and behaviors, the research design incorporates controls to minimize the influence of extraneous factors. The online questionnaire was designed to minimize biases and ensure a clear relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

### **External Validity**

The sample comprises 243 participants from the district of Lahore, which, while providing valuable insights, also necessitates caution in generalizing findings to the broader Pakistani population. Efforts were made to ensure that the sample is demographically representative of Lahore's population, including variations in age, gender, socio-economic status, and education levels. Nonetheless, the unique socio-political context of Lahore means findings should be generalized with consideration of local specificities.

### **Reliability**

#### **Consistency of Measures**

The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha to ensure internal consistency among items measuring the same constructs.

### **Data Collection Process**

The data collection process was standardized to enhance reliability. All participants received the same instructions, and the questionnaire was administered uniformly across all respondents. The study achieved a high response rate, reducing the risk of non-response bias and enhancing the reliability of the findings.

## Data Analysis Technique

Frequency Distribution along with percentage is employed to analyze data ensuring the validity of the result

### Graphical Representation:

Bar Charts and Pie Charts used for graphical representation

### Ethical Consideration

This study followed the highest ethical standards throughout its design, implementation, and analysis phases to ensure the protection and respect of all participants involved. All individuals were provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. The confidentiality and anonymity of participants were strictly maintained

### Results and Discussion

The quantitative results are obtained by doing data collection on 243 respondents. The quantitative results show the impact of social media on the General Elections 2024 of Pakistan.

**Table 1**  
**Cross-tabulation among the Gender and Age of the respondents.**

			Age				Total
			18-24	24-30	30-36	Above 40	
Gender	Female	Count	191	6	10	6	213
		% of Total	78.9%	2.5%	4.1%	2.5%	88.0%
	Male	Count	12	11	3	2	29
% of Total		5.0%	4.5%	1.2%	0.8%	11.6%	
Prefer not to say	Count	1	0	0	0	1	
	% of Total	0.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%	
Total	Count	204	17	13	8	243	
	% of Total	84.3%	7.0%	5.4%	3.3%	100.0%	

The above table shows the cross-tabulation among the gender and age of the respondents. There is a total of 243 respondents, out of which 213 (80%) are females, 29 (11.6%) are males, and 01 (0.4%) unrevealed their gender. The respondents' ages are as follows; 204 (84.3%) respondents are between 18 -24 years, 17 (7.0%) are between 24 -30 years, 13 (5.4%) are between 30 - 36 and 8 (3.3%) are above 40 years of age. In the age bracket (18 -24) years, 191 (78.9%) respondents are females, 12 (5%) are males and 01 (0.4%) prefer not to say about gender. In the age bracket (24 -30) years, 6 (2.5%) respondents are females, 11 (4.5%) are males and none (0%) prefer not to say about gender. In the age bracket above 40 years, 6 (2.5%) respondents are females, 2 (0.8%) are males and none (0%) prefer not to say about gender.

**Table 2**  
**Frequency Distribution on the usage of social media platforms**

Usage	Frequency	Percent (%)
Daily	113	46.3

Never	13	5.4
Occasionally	36	14.9
Rarely	17	7.0
Several times a week	64	26.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 2 shows the frequency distribution of the usage of social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) to access political news and information related to the 2024 General Elections in Pakistan. 113 (46.3%) respondents use social media daily. 13 (5.4%) respondents never used social media, 36 (14.9%) respondents occasionally used social media, 17 (7%) respondents rarely used social media, and 64 (26.4%) respondents used social media several times a week to access the information related to 2024 elections.

**Table 3**  
**Frequency Distribution on the extent of belief that social media platforms**

<b>Influence</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
Neutral	52	21.5
Not influenced at all	11	4.5
Somewhat influenced	56	23.1
Somewhat not influenced	5	2.1
Strongly influenced	119	48.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>100.0</b>

In Table 3, there are 52 (21.5%) respondents felt neutral on the influence caused by social media on political opinion in the 2024 Elections in Pakistan. 11 (4.5%) respondents were not influenced at all, 56 (23.1%) respondents were somewhat influenced, 5 (2.1%) respondents were somewhat not influenced, and 119 (48.8%) respondents were strongly influenced.

**Table 4**  
**Frequency distribution of the respondents' active engagement in political discussions**

<b>Engagement on social media</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>No, never</b>	62	25.6
<b>No, rarely</b>	56	23.1
<b>Yes, frequently</b>	58	23.6
<b>Yes, occasionally</b>	67	27.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 5**  
**Frequency Distribution on the belief of the respondents that social media platforms have played a role in mobilizing voters**

<b>Role of social media in turnout</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Neither agree nor disagree	36	14.9
Somewhat agree	68	28.1
Somewhat disagree	7	2.9
Strongly agree	125	51.2
Strongly disagree	7	2.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 5 shows the belief of the respondents that social media platforms have played a role in mobilizing voters and increasing voter turnout during the 2024 General Elections in Pakistan. 36 (14.9%) respondents neither agreed nor disagreed on this, 68 (28.1%) respondents somewhat agreed, 7 (2.9%) respondents somewhat disagreed, 125 (51.2%) respondents strongly agreed and 7 (2.9%) respondents strongly disagreed.

**Table 6**  
**Frequency distribution of the respondents' trust in the political information**

<b>Trust in social media</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Completely trust	22	9.1
Do not trust at all	26	10.7
Mostly trust	90	36.8
Rarely trust	35	14.5
Somewhat trust	70	28.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 6 shows the respondents' trust in the political information and news shared on social media platforms regarding the 2024 General Elections in Pakistan. 22 (9.1%) respondents had complete faith in the political news shared on social media. 26 (10.7%) respondents didn't trust at all, 90 (36.8%) respondents had mostly trust, 35 (14.5%) respondents had rarely trust, and 70 (28.9%) respondents had somewhat trust.

## Discussion

Currently, social media is more popular than traditional media, it has an important impact on how viewers' brains are built. Regarding how viewers' minds are built, there are two media perspectives. Social media has the power to influence the viewers' minds positively as well as negatively. A positive development is vital for the development and prosperity of a nation. On the other hand, a Negative approach might devastate the situation in the country resulting in huge crises.

This study provides evidence that the use of new media terminology caused a change in political conduct. Butt et al. (2021) claim that contemporary régime and political behavior changes are viable as a result of new media known as Social and Digital Media. This new media affects people, who want to espouse the routines they see on numerous social media platforms. In politics, the same phenomenon has been witnessed. Now Social media influences how people perceive the different narratives by the different political parties. However, some previous research proved that the utilization of social media regularly can boost political awareness (Pasek et al., 2009). All kinds of communication, particularly those that use information technology, are denoted as "new media." Political parties and candidates interact with the masses by using a range of communication tools and since late 1950, the focus of the political elite has been on the developing and emerging new media (McQuail, 2011). Lo et al. (2018) defined new media as a broad spectrum of alterations to media production, distribution, and consumption. However, digital media is not a responsible platform for gathering information, despite of it, social media has the potential to utilize its influence to propagate any agenda that is advantageous to someone.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this research strongly support the hypothesis that exposure to political content on social media is associated with changes in political attitudes and behavior among Pakistani voters during the 2024 General Elections. The graph 5 shows that the majority of the respondents 125(51.4%) out of 243 correspondents strongly agreed that social media platforms have played a role in mobilizing voters and increasing voter turnout during the 2024 General Elections in Pakistan. The example of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) serves as a captivating case study, demonstrating how operative application of social media can meaningfully impact electoral outcomes and voter perceptions. Despite facing challenges such as the denial of its electoral symbol by the Election Commission and Supreme Court of Pakistan, PTI tactically used its social

media network to keep alive its connection with its supporters and intensify its campaign messages. By taking advantage of its digital platforms, PTI ensured extensive distribution of its political content, engaging voters and supporters directly, and had been successful in mobilizing grassroots support. The strategy to establish a devoted portal introducing the party's candidates together with their electoral symbols for the Feb 8 polls demonstrates PTI's state-of-the-art approach to yoking social media for electoral purposes.

The noteworthy vote share achieved by PTI independents (31%), surpassing established political rivals such as PML-N (24%) and PPP (14%), underscores the pivotal role of social media in determining electoral outcomes in Pakistan. In light of these findings, it is obvious that social media has become an influential tool for political communication, enlistment, and political outreach in Pakistan.

Moving forward, politicians, Legislature, political practitioners, and civil society stakeholders must identify the transformative impact of social media on political processes and governance. By acceptance of the digital innovation, nurturing digital literacy, and certifying transparency and culpability in online political discourse, Pakistan can yoke the full potential of social media to reinforce democratic governance and promote civic engagement in the years to come.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusions of the research, here are some recommendations for policymakers, political practitioners, and civil society stakeholders in Pakistan regarding the use of social media in political processes:

1. **Augment Digital Literacy:** Device initiatives to improve digital literacy among citizens, mainly in rural and marginalized communities, to empower them to censoriously evaluate political content on social media platforms and make informed decisions.
2. **Adoptive Civic Engagement:** Endorses initiatives that encourage active civic engagement and political participation among the masses through social media, such as online voter registration drives and interactive policy discussions.
3. **Contest Misinformation:** Make strategies to battle the spread of misinformation and disinformation on social media platforms, including public awareness campaigns and joint ventures with tech companies to implement effective content moderation policies.
4. **Provision of Digital Campaigning:** Training and provision of resources for political parties and candidates is very important for the effective use of social media for digital campaigning.
5. **Foster Multi-stakeholder Collaboration:** boost collective efforts by government agencies, civil society organizations, tech companies, and academia to work on measures to explore challenges and opportunities of social media in political processes, through dialogue, research, and joint initiatives.



## References

- Almond, G. A. (1997). The political system and comparative politics. *Kristen Renwick Monroe*.
- Almond, G. A., & Powell, G. B. (1982). Evaluating political goods and productivity. *International Political Science Review*, 3(2), 173-181.
- Anwar, M., & Jan, M. (2010). Role of Media in Political Socialization: The Case of Pakistan. *Dialogue (Pakistan)*, 5(3), 145-167.
- Bibi, F., & Yousaf, A. (2020). Role of Media in the Politics of Pakistan (2000-2019). *Global Pakistan Studies Research Review*, III, 15-23.
- Bike, W. S. (1998). *Winning political campaigns: A comprehensive guide to electoral success*. Chicago, Central Park Communications, Inc.
- Blais, A. (2006). What affects voter turnout?. *Annu. Rev. Polit. Sci.*, 9, 111-125.
- Bond, R. M., Fariss, C. J., Jones, J. J., Kramer, A. D. I., Marlow, C., Settle, J. E., & Fowler, J. H. (2012). A 61-million-person experiment in social influence and political mobilization. *Nature*, 489, 295-298. doi:10.1038/nature11421
- Boulianne, S. (2016). Campaigns and conflict on social media: A literature snapshot. *Online Information Review*, 40(5), 566-579. doi:10.1108/OIR-03-2016-0086
- Butt, H. R, Minhas, S, Sajid, K, Butt, A., (2021). Impact of COVID-19 on publics Internet and TV Watching behavior: A cross-national Study. *International Journal of Advanced Trends in Computer Science and Engineering*, 10(3), 2459-2468
- Christians, C. G., Glasser, T. L., McQuail, D., Nordenstreng, K., & White, R. A. (2015). Normative Theories. *The International Encyclopedia of Political Communication*, 1-12.
- de Zúñiga, H. G., Huber, B., & Strauß, N. (2018). Social media and democracy. *Profesional de la información/Information Professional*, 27(6), 1172-1180.
- Fareed, G., Muzaffar, M., & Riaz, A. (2019). Enigma of Political Parties in Political Socialization of Pakistan: A Case Study of Muslim League, *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*, 3(II), 268-281
- Gerbner, G., & Gross, L. (2017). Living with television: The violence profile. In *The Fear of Crime* (pp. 169-195). Routledge.
- Lee, T. T. (2010). Why they don't trust the media: An examination of factors predicting trust. *American behavioral scientist*, 54(1), 8-21.
- LO, W. H., & CHENG, B. K. (2018). Animated News and Credibility. The Evolving Landscape of Media and Communication in Hong Kong, 151. Hong Kong: City University of Hong Kong's Press.
- McQuail, D. (1987). *Mass communication theory: An introduction*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Moy, P., Xenos, M. A., & Hussain, M. M. (2012). News and political entertainment effects on democratic citizenship. *The international encyclopedia of media studies*.

- Muzaffar, M. (2016). Educational Institutions and Political Awareness In Pakistan: A Case of Punjab, Unpublished Ph. D Dissertation, International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan
- Muzaffar, M., Chohdhry, S., & Afzal, N. (2019). Social Media and Political Awareness in Pakistan: A Case Study of Youth, *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*, 3 (II), 1-13
- Muzaffar, M., Yaseen. Z., Safdar, S. (2020). Role of Social Media in Political Campaigns in Pakistan: A Case of Study of 2018 Elections, *Journal of Political Studies*, 27 (2), 141-151
- Sikander, T. (2015). Dimensions of Political System. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 6(4).
- Zhuravskaya, E., Petrova, M., & Enikolopov, R. (2020). Political effects of the internet and social media. *Annual review of economics*, 12, 415-438.