MODELING POLITICAL PARTICIPATION THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION EFFECTS: THE ROLE OF PARTISANSHIP AMONG YOUNG VOTERS IN PAKISTAN

REHAN TARIQ

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by

REHAN TARIQ

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my PhD journey equipped me with excellent research skills which I will transfer to my

students and will utilize to improve the academic standards in Pakistan. InshaAllah.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APP	Associated Press of Pakistan
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analyis
COAS	Chief of Army Staff
CMM	Communication Mediation Model
CMV	Common Method Variance
CR	Composite Reliability
CI	Confidence Interval
ECP	Election Commission of Pakistan
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
FIA	Federal Investigation Agency
GNP	Gross National Product
HTMT	Heterotrait-Monotrait
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IJI	Islami Jamhuri Ittihad
LV	Latent Variable
MQM	Mutahida Qaumi Movement
NA	National Assembly
NAB	National Accountability Bureau
OFP	Offline Political Participation
OIC	Organization of Islamic Cooperation
ONP	Online Political Participation
O-S-O-R	Orientation-Stimuli-Orientation-Response
O-S-R-O-R	Orientation-Stimuli-Reasoning-Orientation-Response
PTS	Partisanship
PEMRA	Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority
PILDAT	Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency
PTI	Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf
PNA	Pakistan National Alliance
PEF	Political Efficacy

PEX	Political Expression
PI	Political Interest
PT	Political Trust
PMLN	Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz
PML-Q	Pakistan Muslim League (Quaid-i-Azam)
PPP	Pakistan Peoples Party
PEMRA	Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority
PLS	Partial Least Squares
PPO	Press and Publications Ordinance
RPPO	Registration of Printing Press and Publications Ordinance
SIT	Social Identity Theory
SMU	Social Media Use
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
SEM	Structural Equation Modeling
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor

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PEMBANGUNAN MODEL PENYERTAAN MELALUI KESAN KOMUNIKASI MEDIA SOSIAL: PERANAN KEPARTISANAN POLITIK DALAM KALANGAN PENGUNDI MUDA DI PAKISTAN

ABSTRAK

Penyertaan politik sering dianggap sebagai satu komponen politik yang penting bagi kekuatan sistem politik di negara demokratik. Walaupun penyelidikan terdahulu telah membuktikan kesan positif penggunaan media sosial terhadap penyertaan politik dan mengenal pasti peningkatan penggunaan media sosial di Pakistan, namun masalah pelepasan politik di kalangan pengundi muda menimbulkan kebimbangan yang serius bagi negara yang mengamalkan sistem demokrasi. Untuk menangani masalah tersebut, kajian ini menerangkan kesan komunikasi media sosial bagi permodelan penyertaan politik di kalangan pengundi muda di Pakistan. Model cadangan kajian berdasarkan model Mediasi Komunikasi O-S-R-O-R (Orientation-Stimuli-Orientation-Response), menjelaskan bahawa laluan dari penggunaan media sosial ke penyertaan politik bukan sahaja rumit malah kompleks dengan jalan mediasi dan moderasi tertentu. Berfokuskan kepada partisan dalam konteks budaya Pakistan, kajian ini menerapkan Teori Identiti Sosial (SIT) untuk menjelaskan peranan partisan sebagai disposisi psikologi. Gabungan antara SIT dan O-S-R-O-R membantu dalam menjelaskan laluan mediasi dan moderasi yang berlainan. Satu kajiselidik telah diedarkan di kalangan pengundi muda di Pakistan yang berumur antara 18 hingga 29 tahun (N=410) bagi menguji model ini. Teknik persampelan bola salji digunakan untuk memilih sampel kajian. Dapatan kajian memajukan model mediasi komunikasi sebagai model mediasi kesan komunikasi media sosial. Ianya mempunyai implikasi polisi terhadap institusi politik, parti politik, dan organisasi media di Pakistan.

MODELING POLITICAL PARTICIPATION THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION EFFECTS: THE ROLE OF PARTISANSHIP AMONG YOUNG VOTERS IN PAKISTAN

ABSTRACT

Political participation has always been considered a decisive component of politics that is essential for the strength of the political system in a democratic country. While research has established the positive impact of social media use on political participation and identified a rise in social media use in Pakistan, the problem of political disengagement among young voters raised severe concerns for the democratic system of the country. To address this problem, this study described social media communication's effects for modelling political participation of young voters in Pakistan. The suggested model of this study, which is based on the O-S-R-O-R (Orientation-Stimuli-Orientation-Response) model of communication mediation, elucidates that the pathway from social media use to political participation is not simple but complex with specific mediating and moderating paths. Focusing on partisanship in the cultural context of Pakistan, this study applies Social Identity Theory (SIT) to explain the role of partisanship as a psychological disposition. A combination of SIT and O-S-R-O-R assisted in explaining different mediating and moderating paths. A survey was conducted to test the model on young voters (N= 410) in Pakistan aged between 18 to 29 years. A snowball sampling technique was used to select the study sample. The study findings advanced the communication mediation model as moderated mediation model of social media communication effects. The findings have policy implications for political institutions, political parties, and media organizations in Pakistan.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

A participatory public has always been considered a decisive component of politics and strength of political system in democratic deliberations. A well-informed and politically active electorate, in a democratic system, is the most important constraint on the negligence and malpractices of the elected governments. The notion made by social scientists confirmed that political participation should be the heart of democratic political formula. Without public involvement in political process, democracy will lack in its legitimacy and guiding force (Dalton, 2008; Guven, 2020). Similar perception, about the democratic power of politically active public, exist among scholars of less developed democracies like Pakistan. Mangi et al. (2019), in their discussion on democracy in Pakistan, identified political liberty, public trust and political awareness as fundamental factors which motivate or demotivate public to participate in the political and electoral process. In an assessment published by Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT), some very serious threats to the quality of democracy in Pakistan are depicted. The key areas, having impact on state and quality of democracy in Pakistan are identified as: (i) military involvement in policy spheres outside of its professional domain (ii) terrorism, (iii) electoral reforms, (iv) judicial activism, and (v) intensified political polarization due to biased mainstream media and disinformation on social media (PILDAT, 2018).

Modern philosophers (see Wood et al., 2018; Helberger, 2019; Laughland-Booÿ & Ghazarian, 2020) emphasize on the moral demand of active, responsible, and informed citizenship in contemporary democratic politics. According to Grechyna (2020) the increasing tendency of political disengagement among citizens is

accentuated as political stagnation in the pool of democratic system. Growing level of citizen participation in political activities is considered as one of the important indicators of democratic health. Therefore, exploring other decisive factors that can bring distanced citizens back to the participatory politics has turned into a corner stone in present day political communication research (Kim & Hoewe, 2020).

A large body of work (see Atkin et al., 1976; Chaffee & Frank, 1996; MacLeod et al., 1999; Eveland et al., 2005; Krishna & Sokolova, 2017) have discussed factors which shape political attitude and political behaviour of individuals. Fowler and Kam (2007) posit self-interest in politics as primal force that reinforce voter's sense of efficacy. Level of political interest is also considered as most important variable in explaining political participation. Political interest could come from higher level of news consumption and rich repertoire of media use to explore and reveal information (Xenos & Moy, 2007). It is argued that higher level of political information consumption among the people can be expected to influence trust and efficacy. Trust and efficacy provide citizens with a sense of political activation (Kiess, 2021). Level of trust indicates sufficient confidence on the performance of government institutions based on the understanding of their performance (Bekmagambetov et al., 2018), whereas efficacy reflects belief, confidence and courage to participate in political activities (Wolfsfeld et al., 2016). In the same way, Khan et al. (2019) in their study on Pakistan, argued that better participation is expected from highly informed citizens.

McAllister (2020) paid special stress to partisan loyalty as important factor in determining political behaviour. Strength of personal association and loyalty with any political group shapes the political attitude and behavior. In Pakistani culture people feel proud over their creed, caste or *biradri*[1]. Biradrism is considered as most important

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[1] *Biradri* is a group of families who are in blood relations and living in a community or in neighbouring villages.

aspect for political affiliation in Pakistan. People used to support the candidate who belongs to their caste or vote in favour of that political party which is supported by their biradri or caste. The most intensive implication of caste system was observed during local bodies elections in Pakistan, where political alliances are formed on biradri basis (Mahmood et al., 2014).

In addition, the influential role of communication media in defining participatory behavior has also grabbed the attention of previous researchers (see Pang, 2018; Zuniga et al., 2019; Yamamoto et al., 2020). Various media effects have been reported that provide more opportunity to participate and reinforcement of cognition, such as knowledge, efficacy and identification (Chen & Chan, 2017). Although there is a causal and reciprocal relationship between media use and people's political interest, which leads them to participate, it is also observed that politically interested people seek out media, especially social media, to a great extent as compared with politically less interested people (Strömbäck & Shehata, 2010; Ahmed, 2021). Through everyday communication practices, citizens reflect and deliberate about the political campaign and make sense of political issues and candidates, all of which is necessary to encourage political engagement (Cho et al., 2009).

In communication context, political discussion networks are important factors influencing citizen's behaviours including voter turnout. They promote political information and facilitate mobilization and conformity to social norms (Galandini & Fieldhouse, 2019). These networks are influential in encouraging public deliberation on democracy. Hussain et al. (2018) in their analysis of Pakistan's general election 2013, argued that exposure to political content on media venues enhances political awareness about candidates, it may also change the voting decision. Equally important is the celebration of public deliberation by citizens, that has a long history flows from

the city states of ancient Greece, to the townhall meetings of colonial New England, to the saloons and cafes of Paris, and most recently, the internet forums and chat rooms (Carpini et al., 2004).

Recently, due to its growing importance, previous studies (see Zuniga et al., 2013; Faris et al., 2017; Pétin & Tréguer, 2018) devoted increasing efforts to explain citizen's action via the social media. The rise of social media applications (i.e., Facebook, YouTube, Twitter et cetera) provide new perspectives of political discussion. It has been discovered that social media communication in the form of online news consumption and interpersonal political discussion promote both online and offline forms of political participation (Zuniga et al., 2012). The use of social media for self-expression led to the development of the social media communication typology (DePaula et al., 2018). Social media has also become an effective communication tool of political expression in Pakistani politics, and its popularity is growing especially among youth (Kaleemullah, 2016).

Furthermore, social media politically mobilize citizens in cyberspace where restrictions over political expression are difficult to impose by the governments. This creates a new space for political engagement and online political participation (Joseph, 2011). The significance of social media communication is meaningful in country like Pakistan where, recently, indirect involvement of military in political process and intimidation of journalists and media houses to manipulate the election results were massively reported (Haroon, 2018; Tharoor, 2018). It is noted that presence on online venues directly influence traditional or offline political participation. In this way, social media sites shed new light on political participation by creating new forms of sociability (Skoric et al., 2009).

Sociability in a democratic society is expected to promote a participatory civic culture that is crucial for the stability of a democratic society. Involvement in democratic practices increase political trust in society that potentially increase the voting trend (Kiess, 2021). Copious literature in political communication research affirmed the strong link between political trust and political participation. A society with stable political trust facilitates political participation. With the advancement in media technology and social media communication tools, democratic transformation has also been observed. Although these technologies facilitate frequent participation, a reverse effect on political trust is also observed (Su & Xiao, 2021).

Because of these democratic transformations research directions in political communication has shown great shift with regards to social media communication and its effect on political behavior of young citizens (Tariq & Zolkepli, 2021). Attention was highly given to study the motivation for using social media along with various mediating and moderating factors that lead to the political participation. Evidence from previous studies (see Mira Sotirovic, 2001; Holbert, 2005; Lee et al., 2012; Ardèvol-Abreu et al., 2019) has shown that scholars who investigate the role of these factors in enhancing political participation through an indirect and complex pathway, mostly taken their insight from communication mediation models. Communication mediation approach is established through Orientation-Stimuli-Orientation-Response (O-S-O-R) framework of Markus and Zajonc (1985), by rejecting the simple Stimulus-Response (S-R) framework, in cognitive social science. Later, McLeod et al. (1994) reinterpreted and applied this framework to the study of media effects. The phenomenon of communication mediation has been further explored in online domain as citizen communication mediation model and campaign communication mediation model (Shah et al., 2005, 2007). After identifying that S-O portion of O-S-O-R model was

underspecified, Cho et al. (2009) established Orientation-Stimuli-Reasoning-Orientation-Response (O-S-R-O-R) model. This proposed model accentuates the importance of reasoning cognitive effects in the domain of democratic citizenship and political communication.

Lake and Huckfeldt (1988), Heinrichs et al. (2011), Whiting et al. (2013), Zuniga et al. (2014), and Wolfsfeld et al. (2016) are among those who have addressed the relationship between motivation and use of social media with political participation but their studies lack in measuring the indirect and complex pathways. Thereby scholars (see Shah et al., 2007; Cho et al., 2009; Jung et al., 2011; Muñiz et al., 2017; Graham et al., 2020) consistently emphasized on the need to explore new pathways with other unknown contributing factors in O-S-R-O-R framework to determine social media communication effects on political participation of citizens. For this purpose, present study incorporated Social Identity Theory (SIT) to explore the pathways associated with partisan orientation. Partisanship is an important predictor of political engagement that depicts strength of democracy in society (Bartels, 2000). Social comparison assumption of SIT helps in developing the same connection by encouraging individuals with partisan behavior to indulge in activities on social media to support one's political party. As Tajfel and Turner (1979) explained in SIT assumptions, the desire to maintain a positive status of one's political identity enhances expressive political engagements. In this study SIT assisted in testing moderating role of partisanship and mediating role of online political participation. By incorporating SIT this research extends O-S-R-O-R in the context of less developed democracy, that is Pakistan, to examine how social media communication would influence political trust and political participation among young voters.

1.2 Research Context: Pakistan

Pakistan won its independence from British colonialism in 1947, under the Indian Independence Act 1947. At the time of freedom, the state of Pakistan consisted of two parts, West Pakistan, and East Pakistan, separated by 1600 km. But, due to some ethnic, political, and economic issues, East Pakistan seceded its union with West Pakistan and came into existence as an independent state of Bangladesh (Wynbrandt, 2009). Pakistan, previously West Pakistan, recognized Bangladesh as a country in 1974, during the second Islamic summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) held at Lahore in Pakistan (Weinraub, 1974).

With a total area of 796,095 sq km, Pakistan shares its borders with India on the East, Iran and Afghanistan on the West, China on the north and the Arabian sea on the south (The World Factbook, 2016). The country is subdivided into four provinces: Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. However, each province is named after its primary dominating culture, Punjabi in Punjab, Sindhi in Sindh, Balochi in Balochistan, and Pashtun in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Shah & Amjad, 2011). Even though there is a concept of national culture, still, people in different provinces demonstrate strong affiliations with their ethnic identities (Levesque, 2007). Similar is the case with political parties in Pakistan, where three major political parties; Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI), Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PMLN) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), always draw their strength from the provinces of their ethnic origins, i.e., Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh respectively (Blank et al., 2014).

Similarly, Pakistan possesses diversification in natural resources. The Punjab province contains fertile agricultural land, the largest salt range, and some petroleum reservoirs as well. Balochistan is enriched with uranium, natural gas, petroleum, and 720 kilometer long Makran coast and Gwadar port. The concentration of copper, gold,

arsenic, platinum and graphite is explored in Khyber Pakhtunknkhwa (Malkani & Mahmood, 2018). Sindh possesses fertile land for cultivation and a 270 kilometer long coastline enriched with marine resources (MFF Pakistan, 2016). All these resources can help to solve the continuing economic problems of the country.

Pakistan had to face financial challenges soon after its emergence. At the time of partition out of 14,677 factories, only 1,414 were in Pakistan. Similarly, out of 394 textile mills and 106 jute processing mills, Pakistan possessed only 14 textile mills and 0 jute processing units (Wynbrandt, 2009). More importantly, to manufacture defence equipment Pakistan was not handed over even a single ordnance factory out of 16 operational ordnance factories (Shahbaz & Shabbir, 2015). Despite all miseries and economic challenges, Pakistan gained robust economic growth in 1960 (Anwar et al., 2017) with a 5.2% annual growth rate in Gross National Product (GNP) (Wynbrandt, 2009). But the Soviet Union invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and US-led coalition forces' attack on Afghanistan in the aftermath of 9/11 destabilized the entire region, created a security dilemma for Pakistan and jolted its economy (Karim, 2017).

During the US led war against terrorism, that the US recently abandoned, Pakistan faced an economic loss of US$ 126.49 billion, equivalent to Rs. 10,762.64 billion. Despite this, the economic survey 2017-18 depicts that, with 5.80% growth in the industrial sector, 6.13% growth in large scale manufacturing, 3.81% growth in the agriculture sector, and 6.24% growth in manufacturing and mining, Pakistan is still striving for economic excellence. Likewise, tremendous growth is seen in the telecommunication sector, with 50.51 million broadband subscribers and 144.53 billion mobile subscribers, the telecommunication sector generated revenue of US$ 3.3 billion (Finance Division, 2018).

In Pakistan, a sharp division and tension between the civil-military bureaucracy are witnessed from the very birth of the country. From its inception, the imbalance persisted between political institutions and the public representatives, owing to its inherited legacy that bequeathed to Pakistan from Imperial British in India. This frequent tempering with the laws and conduct of the civilian institutions by military men caused significant set-back to the political system of the state (Khan & Wazir, 2011).

Pakistan's political reins have been in the influential hands of the army for more than thirty-eight years. Discussion about the country's political history always starts with depicting the conflict between the underdeveloped political system and a well-organized army. The most recent direct rule of General Pervaiz Musharaf supported this assessment and claimed a central position of the military in state structure (Nawaz, 2011). As a result of inconsistent democracy and political instability, Pakistan ranked 110th in the democracy index 2017 (Economist, 2017). However, the military's hidden manipulation in general elections 2018 and increasing involvement in deciding the country's foreign, internal, and even economic affairs has enlisted Pakistan in the column of the hybrid regime (Economist, 2020).

On the other hand, media, which is always considered a watchdog of democracy and guardian of the public interest, is also facing complex circumstances. It is an undeniable fact that in Pakistan, private media enjoyed astounding growth during General Pervaiz Musharaf's regime. He allowed the private sector to launch television news channels and FM radio stations. Furthermore, he formulated Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) to issue the license and check the transmission of licensed television channels and FM radio stations. Although Musharaf was kind towards the media, that kindness was only for a short time. When

the media started criticising his unpopular and undemocratic decisions, he imposed restrictions on the transmission various private news channels (Iqbal, 2012).

During the last decade, Pakistani media enjoyed freedom in covering political issues. Pakistani media is considered the freest media in Asia to cover the squabbling among politicians (Dawn, 2016). But research indicates that this free media of Pakistan is facing real problems in the form of immaturity, lack of professionalism and owner's business interest. These critical issues must be taken into consideration by journalistic organizations and media houses. These problems facilitate the government and other strong institutions to control media content indirectly. Media owners enter the media industry with radically different political and economic motives. Persuading political and economic power is at the top of their agenda. For the fulfilment of this agenda, some owners of media houses establish an understanding with the military establishment (Mezzera & Sial, 2010).

The media-military relationship is seriously observed in recently held general elections 2018. Military establishment remained seriously involved in prohibiting the media from covering the pre-election campaign of former Prime Minister Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharief in Punjab, his home province. Under the umbrella of the caretaking government, some media houses were indulged in a campaign against the last ruling party, PML-N, by depicting its leader as a corrupt and national security risk (Haroon, 2018). After elections, economic threat to media owners is used to engineer political issues.

The present government reduced its media spend by 70 per cent and private companies by 50 per cent (Jamal, 2018). The concept of non-aligned media, which already existed at a very small scale (Mezzera & Sial, 2010), is now almost missing. Many renowned journalists left the mainstream electronic media and started their own

YouTube channels to express their opinion. Fulfilment of the owner's economic goals is the fundamental reason for the current downsizing of media outlets in Pakistan (Hussain, 2019). Consequently, this ambiguous situation on the part of the media also doubted the reliability of media content (Hoodbhoy, 2018). Recently, the UN human rights panel also expressed its concerns over restrictions on media and freedom of expression in Pakistan (Iqbal, 2021). Political instability and aligned mainstream media created a gap in media coverage of political content, which was filled by social media.

In fact, there were 30 million Internet users in Pakistan, out of which 13 million were social media users, before the general election 2013 (Ali et al., 2013). Whereas during general elections in 2018, number of internet users inclined to 44.6 million in Pakistan (Statista, 2018), out of which 35 million were active social media users (Alphapro, 2018). Gallup Pakistan (2018) reports that 48% of the Internet users in Pakistan get news from social media at least once a day. In the same way, a considerable segment of youth, which is also a significant proportion of the population, engaged in political activities through social media (Ahmad, 2013).

The sharp rise in adoption of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) made access to information very easy for the citizens of Pakistan through interactive forms of social media (Michaelsen, 2011). Despite the rapid growth of social media globally and its revolutionary impact on the young generation's political attitude, the research in this area is still at the exploratory stage, particularly in developing countries of South Asia like Pakistan (Mir, 2012; Raza et al., 2020). Due to its democratic disposition, it is essential to examine the significance of social media communication and it's effect on the young population in the distinctive political circumstances of Pakistan.

Pakistan's democratic history witnessed two historical events provided by general elections 2013; the first-ever democratic transfer of power and the evolution of social media as a political campaign tool in electoral politics. PTI, known for its extensive social media campaign and youth backing emerged as the third-largest national party in the national assembly of Pakistan in general elections 2013 (Ahmed & Skoric, 2014). However, PPP, PML-N, Mutahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) and other political parties also followed the trend of using social media to interact with young voters and motivate them to participate in political campaigns (Eijaz, 2013). As compared by the Election Commission of Pakistan (2013), National Assembly turnout enhanced to 55%, whereas in 2008, general elections turnout was 44%.

General elections 2018 in Pakistan witnessed more intensive political campaigns over social media. Primarily, PTI and PML-N used social media as a political weapon against each other. Even though, according to the report of the Election Commission of Pakistan (2018), there was a 3.4% decline in turnout yet, the dominant party on social media, PTI, ensured a commanding position in National Assembly (NA).

Given this scenario, it is important to examine Pakistan, where a substantial proportion of the population, particularly young people, are having social media addiction (Shabir et al., 2014; Ida et al., 2020). Overall, this study is concerned with examining the social media communication effects by developing a comprehensive process for connecting motivation for social media use to political participation among the young population of Pakistan.

1.3   Research Problem

The purpose of the study is to describe social media communication's effects for modelling political participation among young voters in Pakistan. In political communication, the influential role of modern communication technology in the development of democratic strength, formation of political attitude and political participation have become matters of great concern for the scholars (Barber, 2006; Széll, 2018; Galandini & Fieldhouse, 2019). The advancement of internet structure and introduction of social media sparked scholarly interest in the study of political behaviors of young generation on social media venues (Lipschultz, 2015; Lane et al., 2021). A great deal of literary work (Zolkepli & Kamarulzaman, 2015; Talwar et al., 2019) has also stressed on the distinguished behavioral need to explore motivations for social media use.

In developing social media communication model the past literature has delineated a positive relationship between social media use and participation in political activities (see Zuniga et al., 2012; Halpern et al., 2017; Yamamoto et al., 2020). Instead of the increasing trend of new digital horizons, particularly social media, the problem of political disengagement in democratically less developed countries such as Pakistan remains a major concern (Ida et al., 2020). Despite the rise in social media use among young Pakistanis, voter turnout declined in the most recent general elections, held in 2018 (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2018). This is concerning situation for a country that is already struggling for democracy. Concentrating on the academic debate over social media communication and its contribution towards defining the political directions of society, this study found several issues that required attention, which direct the development of the research framework.

Firstly, the research concerned with social media communication effects, most often begin with social media use (Kahne & Bowyer, 2018; Lee & Xenos, 2019). This is why such studies overlook the hidden reasons for behavior change during social media communication that may be driven by distinguished political backgrounds such as political interest and partisanship (Chan, 2018; Lu & Lee, 2021). Similar weakness exist in communication mediation models where antecedent orientation has been extensively tested with demographic details rather than political orientations. A few studies investigated it, but only with a single antecedent orientation. Chen and Chan (2017) also demanded testing multiple antecedent orientation in communication mediation models. Therefore, this study has taken both political interest and partisanship as antecedents for social media use while keeping a typical Pakistani political background, where biradarism (caste ties) as partisanship is a major factor in determining political activities of people (Mahmood et al., 2014; Shahzad & Omar, 2021). Recent studies (see Weeks & Holbert, 2013; Barberá & Rivero, 2015; Ohme, 2021) have also highlighted the importance of partisanship while discussing the exposure and dissemination of political content on social media platforms. In academic deliberations, political affiliation, party attachment or loyalty of citizens with any political party is documented as a precursor of political activities (Huddy et al., 2010).

Furthermore, party identification leads people to evaluate the political issues on the basis of their party attachment (Campbell et al., 1960; Zaller, 2003). Such political evaluation involves polarization that implants extremity in citizen's political viewpoints (Sunstein, 2002; Westfall et al., 2015). Extremity sometimes cause decline in voting trend (Stevens et al., 2019), that is alarming for a democratic society. Similar trend of decline in voting trend was observed in Pakistan (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2018), where family affiliations and strong caste ties are predefined factors

of political activities (Mahmood et al., 2014). This significance and sensitivity towards political identity promotes media interaction to probe party-based political information. This media interaction further elicits partisan feelings (Lee & Song, 2017). This situation supports SIT's assumption that the strength of partisan identity (in-party feelings) plays an important role in defining political behaviour (Mckinley et al., 2014). However, the literature is silent on how this assumption will fare when it comes to defining multiple political behaviours within the same framework. Therefore, it is informative to explore the impact of partisanship in a polarized society while discussing the fundamental process by which individual's social media activities may lead to political participation. Furthermore, SIT contributed to the development of the missing link of partisan as moderator in the communication mediation model and online political participation as a mediator between partisanship and offline political participation.

Although the role of political interest as a precondition of political engagement is well established, political interest as psychological disposition determines the pattern of media use. Evidence proved that young citizens interest in politics have tendency to use social media for sharing political information (Chadwick & Vaccari, 2019; Salman & Salleh, 2020). In this context researchers have expressed concerns on sharing of misinformation in the form of fake news (Apuke & Omar, 2021). Young people's lack of maturity in evaluating the validity of social media material may lead to the spread of false information (Stefanone et al., 2019). When there is misinformation on the social media spectrum, the effects of social media communication on politically interested people are inextricable from its effects on political participation (Valenzuela et al., 2019). In Pakistan youth is highly interested in politics, social media is full of political scandals, and political parties are focusing

to attract youth through political campaigns. In this scenario it is of great importance to explore the trend of social media use among politically interested young voters of Pakistan and find its political outcomes.

Secondly, social media provides democratic environment to its users to express their political views. The act of social media use for self-expression developed the typology of social media communication (DePaula et al., 2018). Despite this facilitation, the trend of using social media for political expression is inconsistent. Identity based polarization might be a cause of this inconsistency (Yarchi et al., 2021). Similar is the situation in present political scenario of Pakistan, where use of social media for political purposes (Batool, 2018) and deep political polarization, based on strong party identities, is observed among Pakistani youth (Javed, 2018). The volume of literature that interrogates dark side of partisanship is dwarfed by the size of literature that contemplates positive aspects of partisanship (see Eveland et al., 2003; Fowler & Kam, 2007; Dilliplane, 2011; Hofbauer, 2015; Michelitch, 2012). There is a need to expand earlier social media research by exploring new links between partisanship and other factors that influence political cognition and political behavior. With this aim, this study introduced partisanship as a moderator between inconsistently linked constructs of social media use and political expression.

Thirdly, the literature on partisanship primarily assessed it for offline political participation (Berry et al., 2021; Bankert, 2020) even in the online environment the direct impact of partisanship is examined on offline political participation (Lane et al., 2017; Shahzad & Omar, 2021). In Pakistani society where social media communication has been decisively influencing political behavior, it is important to explore the impact of partisanship on online political participation. Likewise, the role of online political participation as a mediator between partisanship and offline political

participation is also novel in literature. To explore these missing links this study incorporated partisanship, simultaneously as an antecedent of social media use and online political participation; and, as a moderator between social media use and political expression. Most of the studies explained partisanship connections with participatory politics in the US. Exploring some new connections of partisanship in a different culture with a less developed democracy, such as Pakistan, would contribute to the existing body of knowledge. Moreover, these mediation and moderation links help to develop a clear line of action to model political participation of young voters through social media communication effects.

Fourthly, the decline in political trust and its disastrous impact on political behavior has been a growing global concern (see Lenard, 2005; Torcal, 2014; Wang & You, 2016; Weymouth et al., 2020). Erosion of political trust has become one of the critical political issues in Pakistan (Lodhi, 2020). It is argued that the present hybrid system of governance in Pakistan eroded public trust in the government institutions. Bad governance, mismanagement, worse fiscal and economic policies, and corruption are some of the milestones achieved by the present government, which apparently demolished the political trust among people (Jamal, 2020; Lodhi, 2021). But the consequential effects of low political trust are rarely discussed in empirical studies in Pakistan. The absence of political trust might be reason of decline in election turnout in Pakistan. Therefore, examining the role of political trust is a step in the right direction at the right time.

Moreover, political trust is rooted in the performance of government institutions. In a democratic culture the evaluation of these institutions is done by citizens in the form of political deliberations (Strandberg et al., 2021). These deliberations enhance strength of efficacy and develop confidence among individuals

to express themselves. Democratic sense of society requires freedom of expression so that citizens may evaluate these institutions without any fear (Bhagwat & Weinstein, 2020). In Pakistan the government is consistently trying to curb the freedom of expression by controlling mainstream media and social media (Scott, 2021). This situation is problematic for the young social media users in Pakistan who frequently express their opinion on the performance of political institutions. The draconian laws government is trying to impose may cause serious threat for the democratic political activities (Yusuf, 2021). This scenario requires to explore the impact of social media communication on political orientations. Thereby, this study examined the effect of political expression on political efficacy and political trust. This examination further assisted to explore the indirect influence of social media communication and direct influence of outcome orientations on the political participation of young voters in Pakistan.

Overall, the aforementioned problems need to be addressed in the light of theoretical explanation for extensive new pathways that influence political participation. However, recent literature (see Chen & Chan, 2017; Li & Guo, 2018; Yamamoto et al., 2020) also stresses the need for a comprehensive process to explain how social media use brings political outcomes. As discussed earlier, the communication mediation approach is considered a suitable approach to explore the process of social media communication that ends up in political participation. The digital revolution also demands exploring new perspectives which might influence the behavior of political disengagement. Therefore, the study's main concerns are to test social media communication effects with novel moderating and mediating links in the political landscape of Pakistan, as well as to build a more comprehensive process that leads to political participation.

Summing it up, a decline in political participation in Pakistan is observed despite the growing trend of social media use among the young population. Recent trends of social media communication led to the investigation of some missing connections that influence participatory behavior. There is a constant online assault on journalists and political opponents in Pakistan using abusive, threatening, and harassing language. The current ruling party's social media team is highly involved in fostering this culture (Jahangir, 2020). Perhaps this rising negative, non-productive, and unethical political culture distressed the youth, and depoliticization is quite visible at the crux of growing political culture. An ongoing pattern of political disengagement from the political sphere is also observed among young voters in Pakistan (Yusuf, 2019). Therefore, it is vital to explore the effect of social media communication on the young voters in the new political dynamics of Pakistan. Social Identity Theory (SIT) and O-S-R-O-R model act as the theoretical underpinning to address the aforementioned problems and answer the following questions in 1.4.

1.4   Research Questions

This study investigated the role of partisanship in modeling political participation of young voters in Pakistan through social media communication effects. Based on the research problem mentioned above, this research posits several questions concerning young voters in Pakistan as follows:

1. How do political interest and partisanship promote social media use among young voters in Pakistan?

2. What is the direct effect of social media use on political expression and indirect effect of social media use through political expression on political efficacy and political trust among young voters in Pakistan?

3. What is the influence of political efficacy on political trust among young voters in Pakistan?

4. How do partisanship, political trust, and political efficacy influence online political participation among young voters in Pakistan?

5. Do political efficacy, political trust and online political participation promote offline political participation among young voters in Pakistan?

6. What is the impact of partisanship on the relationship between social media use and political expression among young voters in Pakistan?

1.5 Research Objectives

This study explored how partisanship among social media users in Pakistan with political interests engages them in online and offline political activities. To this end, this study integrated the variables of political interest, social media use, partisanship, political expression, political efficacy, and trust to explain the online and offline political participation of young voters in Pakistan. This study has taken the O-S-R-O-R model and Social Identity Theory (SIT) as a guide for research framework development to advance the communication mediation model as moderated mediation model of social media communication effects. The model further helps in setting the following objectives for this study:

1. To examine the role of political interest and partisanship in influencing social media use among young voters in Pakistan.

2. To determine the connection between social media use and political expression and examine the mediating role of political expression between social media use and political efficacy and political trust among young voters in Pakistan.

3. To test the effect of political efficacy on political trust, online political participation, and offline political participation among young voters in Pakistan.

4. To examine the influence of political trust on online political participation and offline political participation among young voters in Pakistan.

5. To examine the mediating role of online political participation between partisanship and offline political participation and moderating role of partisanship between social media use and political expression among young voters in Pakistan.

6. To examine the extent to which political efficacy plays the role of mediator between political expression and online political participation and offline political participation among young voters in Pakistan.

1.6   Research Significance

Although there is increasing academic attention to social media and political participation, in Pakistan it is still in its early stages. Previous studies (see Weeks & Holbert, 2013; Kim, 2016; Ardèvol-Abreu et al., 2017) discussed the moderating role of partisan strength, but relatively less empirical research explored the same role while discussing the role of social media in political participation. This research contributes to the growing literature by investigating the moderating role of partisanship between social media use and political expression. This way, the existing research elaborates how partisan behaviour strengthens the relationship between social media use and political expression, enhancing political trust and political efficacy and finally leading

to political participation. In this way the present study comprises of theoretical, methodological and practical significance.

Theoretically, the O-S-R-O-R framework, in combination with SIT, is used to explore the pathway to political participation. This research introduces theoretical advancement in the model by considering partisanship and political interest as background dispositions for social media use in Pakistan. For instance, previous studies found an inconsistent positive relationship between social media use and political expression. This study posits that the relationship between social media use and political expression is strengthened with the moderating role of partisanship, which is very important in typical Pakistani political culture. Social media use and political expression represent social media communication in this study. Given that McLeod et al. (1994) proposed using an antecedent orientation as a moderator, the application of this technique is rarely tested in the literature. The current study advances the mediation model as moderated mediation model of social media communication effects by incorporating this suggestion.

This study also bridges the gap in existing literature related to political outcomes of social media communication. It strengthens the prediction towards political participation in the context of motivational use of social media, moderating role of partisanship, and cognitive process of trust and efficacy development. Thus, in contrast to the existing literature on developed democracies in Europe and the United States, it is anticipated that this study contributes to the introduction of new links for political participation in countries such as Pakistan, where democracy is still establishing itself as a well-rooted political system.

Methodologically, this study depicts its significance by utilizing segmentation approach to test the multiple mediating variables in O-S-R-O-R framework. The

relationship between social media use and outcome orientations of political efficacy and trust is mediated by social media expression. The relationship between partisanship and offline political participation is mediated by online political participation. This study introduced three mediators: political expression, political efficacy and online political participation, and one moderator, partisanship. The O-S-R-O-R model and SIT are utilized as foundation to understand these relationships and segmentation approach is used to test and incorporate mediating variables.

Practically, the findings of the study aimed to assist the government and political parties in Pakistan to strategize their political campaign on social media to attract more people, especially young voters, with reliable information to uplift public trust and enhance political participation. The research discussing predispositions of social media communication and its role in developing political participation among citizens of Pakistan is minimal. This study responds to this gap and illustrates how social media communication with unique moderated and mediated factors influences the political involvement of youth. Summing it up, the research findings highlight the role of social media communication in the revival of the true democratic political process in Pakistan.

1.7   Research Scope

The current study discussed the motivations for social media use and its possible outcomes in the form of political participation in Pakistan. The findings are helpful in addressing the concern over the decline in political participation among the young generation in Pakistan. Importantly, this generation is the largest user of social media, and for whom social media is a key factor in shaping their online and offline

social activities. Therefore, this study targets Pakistan's youth who have developed serious concerns regarding their participatory behaviour in political activities.

In addition, youth in Pakistan is depicted as people between 15 years to 29 years of age (Government of the Punjab, 2012), who contribute to 29% of the total population of Pakistan (United Nations Development Pakistan, 2018). According to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), people who are of 18 years age can cast their vote. Therefore, this study recruited people having age 18 years to 29 years. The same generation is also the largest part of the population who use social media platforms for political interaction.

Consequently, this study has selected political interest, partisanship, social media use, political expression, political efficacy, political trust, offline political participation, and online political participation as key variables for investigation. Political interest and partisanship are considered predispositions for social media uses. Predispositions of citizens' activism are broadly categorized into demographics (Chan & Ng, 2017) and political attitudes or motives (Atkinson, 2015). Because of the novelty in literature and to explore new relationships regarding predispositions, this study takes up political motives and behaviour. Therefore, political interest and partisanship are incorporated as predispositions for social media use that further leads to participation.

Moreover, this study focused on using social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, etc., as these venues are highly popular and intensively concentrated in terms of usage in Pakistan (Statcounter, 2020). Considering this, it explores the mediating role of political expression between social media use and the outcome orientations of political trust and political efficacy while discussing participation in the context of young voters in Pakistan. To explore the political trust,