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Exploring the Role of Social Media in Bridging Knowledge Gaps and Shaping Political Activism in the 21st Century: A Study of Intervention Factors

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Abstract

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Keywords: Social Media, Role, Knowledge Gap, Intervention Factors, Political Awareness

Authors:

Khayam Hassan: (Corresponding Author)

PhD Scholar, Department of Media and Communication Studies, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, Pakistan.
(Email: khayamhasan@gmail.com)

Khalid Sultan: Professor, Department of Media and Communication Studies, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Waqas Bin Ayaz: PhD Scholar, Department of Media and Communication Studies, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, Pakistan.

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Abstract

The study investigates social media's role in bridging knowledge gaps, influencing its intervention in political activism, and shaping 21st-century activism. The study used a quantitative research methodology to collect data from university students using self-developed questionnaires distributed online. The data was analyzed using SPSS version 25 and presented in descriptive statistics. The study explored that Social media can bridge socioeconomic gaps in political activation and awareness among students due to its interactive accessibility. High qualifications positively influence social media usage, suggesting that it can both increase and decrease knowledge gaps.

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Authors:

Khayam Hassan: (Corresponding Author)

PhD Scholar, Department of Media and Communication Studies, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, Pakistan.

(Email: khayamhasan@gmail.com)

Khalid Sultan: Professor, Department of Media and Communication Studies, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Waqas Bin Ayaz: PhD Scholar, Department of Media and Communication Studies, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Introduction

In the 21st century, the emergence and widespread adoption of social media platforms have revolutionized communication and information dissemination, profoundly impacting various aspects of society, including politics and activism. Social media has provided individuals with unprecedented access to information and has facilitated the rapid spread of ideas, enabling new forms of political engagement and activism (Castells, 2012; Tufekci, 2017).

As social media continues to evolve, it is essential to examine its role in bridging knowledge

gaps and shaping political activism. This study seeks to explore the factors that influence social media's intervention in political activism, particularly in the context of knowledge dissemination and participation in political movements. By investigating these factors, we aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between social media, knowledge gaps, and political activism in the 21st century.

Social networking sites have also been criticized for their ability to spread disinformation and misinformation. The ease with which information may be disseminated on social media platforms has



led to worries about the spread of propaganda and the manipulation of political discourse. Furthermore, social media has been accused of producing echo chambers, where users are only exposed to content that reinforces their current opinions, rather than being exposed to varied perspectives (Saadia, 2023).

Social media has had a tremendous impact on overcoming information gaps and changing political activity in the twenty-first century. The growth of social media platforms has allowed for the quick broadcast of information and mobilization of followers for various social movements (Cooper, 2023)

Social media has become a crucial tool for promoting collective participation and empowering individuals globally. Social media has evolved into a tool for staying informed about current events and exchanging information. It has become a venue for individuals to share their political opinions (Karamat, & Farooq 2016).

Misinformation, privacy issues, internet literacy, access gaps, and legislative barriers have all been said as problems. Social media platforms are great instruments for promoting global awareness, communication, and information sharing. By solving issues and using social capital and network theories, social media can help to close digital gaps and promote inclusive global communication (Fazli, et al 2024).

As social media continues to evolve, it is essential to examine its role in bridging knowledge gaps and shaping political activism. This study seeks to explore the factors that influence social media's intervention in political activism, particularly in the context of knowledge dissemination and participation in political movements. By investigating these factors, we aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between social media, knowledge gaps, and political activism in the 21st century.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the potential of social media to bridge knowledge gaps and empower political activism, there is a lack of comprehensive research that examines the specific factors influencing its effectiveness in these areas. While existing studies have explored the impact of social media on political engagement and information sharing, few have

focused specifically on the intervention factors that determine the extent to which social media can bridge knowledge gaps and shape political activism (Chadwick, 2013; Bennett & Segerberg, 2013).

Objectives

- To explore the role of social media in bridging knowledge gaps among individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds.
- To investigate the factors that influence social media's intervention in political activism.
- To examine how social media shapes political activism in the 21st century.

Research Questions

1. How does social media facilitate the dissemination of information and knowledge among individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds?
2. What are the key factors that influence social media's intervention in political activism?
3. Why does social media shape the political activism of prosumers in terms of mobilization, organization, and impact?

Hypotheses

Based on the knowledge gap hypothesis and existing literature, we hypothesize that

1. social media's intervention in political activism is influenced by factors such as user engagement, network structure, and platform design.
2. Social media plays a significant role in bridging knowledge gaps and shaping political activism, but its effectiveness depends on how individuals and groups use these platforms.

Literature Review

The development of global content can lead to disinformation among young individuals who lack verification of facts ability. False stories on Twitter go faster and further than accurate ones, making them more profitable for social media companies. Young individuals are more likely to propagate political disinformation due to lower obstacles and a tendency to hold false opinions. The rise of social media platforms as news providers has led to an increase in fake news. Users may create and share material without third-party screening, fact-

checking, or editorial judgment. This form of news is popular due to its lower production costs and customer preference for biased content. Fake stories become "real" when they are shared by millions, leading people to assume they are true (Schaeffer 2021).

This study aims to explore the influence of social media on raising political awareness among Pakistanis young. New interactive technologies can significantly enhance their political understanding. This study takes a descriptive and quantitative approach. This study focused on students pursuing BS and MS programs at public sector institutions in the Gujranwala division. Data was acquired by a questionnaire and test and analyzed using descriptive statistics.

The study found that social media plays an important role in socializing Pakistani young. However, the test results revealed lesser levels of political knowledge among students. The study suggests that educational institutions and governmental agencies should publish real material on social media to increase political awareness among students (Muzaffar, et al 2019).

It is essential to improve young people's political literacy and understanding in order to encourage their participation in politics. Public awareness efforts, political outreach programs, and educational initiatives can all contribute to this. Young people are more inclined to participate in politics when they understand the value of doing so (Kahne and Bowyer 2019).

Social media have been used to disseminate opinions, expanding their reach and

potential effect. Furthermore, low entry barriers combined with the capacity of online media users to repost, re-share, and reproduce content provided by others may weaken the reputation systems that serve to preserve the quality of information of conventional media sites (Cagé, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

This study will be guided by the knowledge gap hypothesis, which posits that as information spreads through society, individuals with higher socioeconomic status tend to acquire it at a faster rate than those with lower socioeconomic status (Tichenor et al., 1970). We will also draw on theories of social influence and network dynamics to understand how social media shapes political activism by influencing information diffusion and mobilization (Granovetter, 1973; Watts & Dodds, 2007).

Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research methodology of social media users. Data was collected by self-developed questionnaire from the university students. The questionnaire was distributed online to different student groups (WhatsApp) for data collection. A random sampling method was used for this purpose to collect data from different socioeconomic respondents. Statistical Package analyzed data for Social Sciences (SPSS: version 25). Data was presented in the form of descriptive statistics in tables and graphs forms.

Results and Discussion

Figure 1

Distribution of the respondents based on Gender

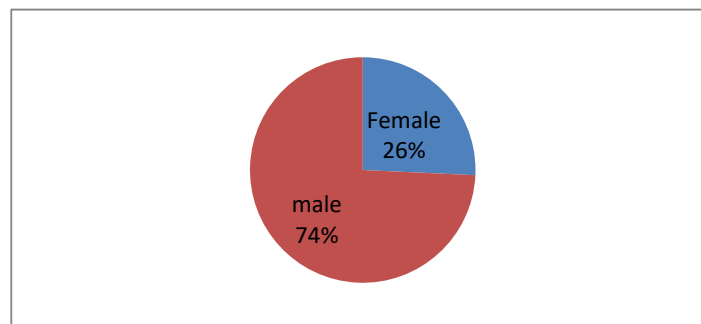


Figure 5.1. shows the gender of the respondents. It shows that 23.4% of the respondents are female and 75.5% are male. It is a fact that due to cultural

sensitivities females are reluctant to take part in such activities which is why the responses of males are more than female in survey results.

Figure 2

Distribution of the respondents based on Marital Status

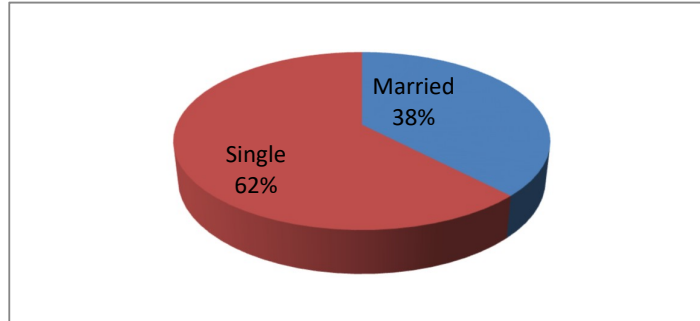
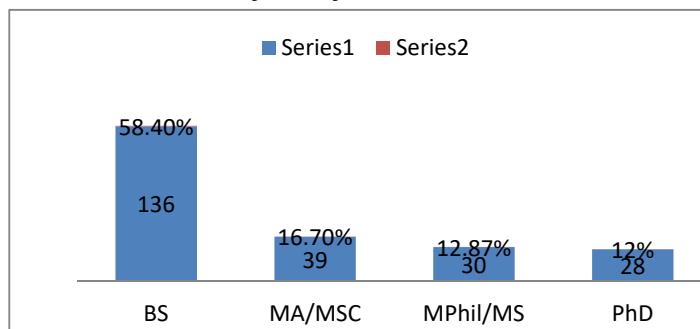


Figure 5.2. illustrates the marital status of the respondents among them 38% were married and 62% had single status. Data was collected from

students therefore the marital status of unmarried more than married.

Figure 3

Distribution of the respondents on the basis of Qualification

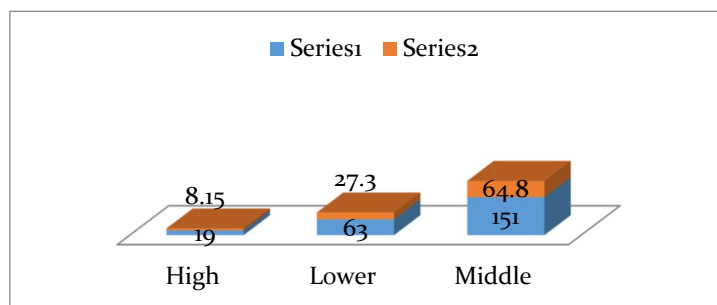


The chart explores the program in which the respondents are enrolled. It shows that 58.4% of the respondents are students of BS. 16.7% of the respondents are students of MA/MSc. The

respondents of the study who are students of MPhil/MS are 12% and 12% of the respondents are PhD students.

Figure 4

Distribution of respondents based on Economic class

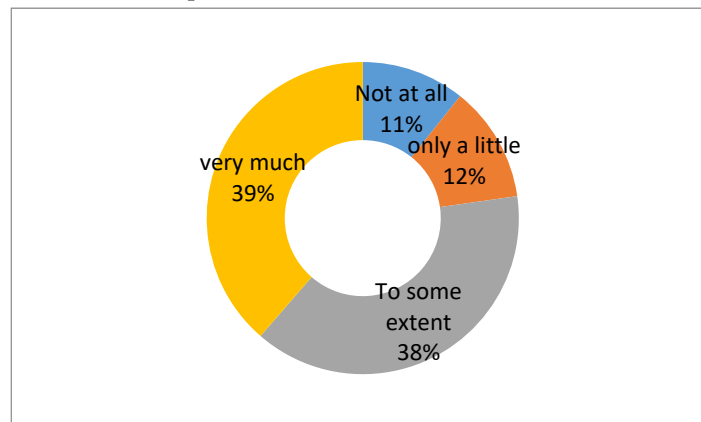


The distribution of respondents by economic class is depicted in the figure. Of them, the majority (64.8%) are from the Middle class, followed by the Lower class (27.3%) and the High class (8.15%). The aggregate percentages attest to the fact that every

response has been taken into consideration throughout the three economic strata. This distribution suggests that a larger percentage of respondents belong to the middle class.

Figure 5

Distribution of respondents based on exposure to Media



The 233 respondents' media exposure has been summarized in the chart. The majority of responders (38 & 39% of the sample) fit into one of two categories: either moderate media exposure or excessive media exposure. On the other hand, fewer respondents—11% not exposed at all and 12.0% just

somewhat exposed—reported little to no media exposure. The data indicates that a considerable proportion of the populace interacts with media to a certain extent, with a noteworthy focus on moderate to high levels of exposure.

Figure 6

Distribution of respondents on the basis of exposure to kinds of media

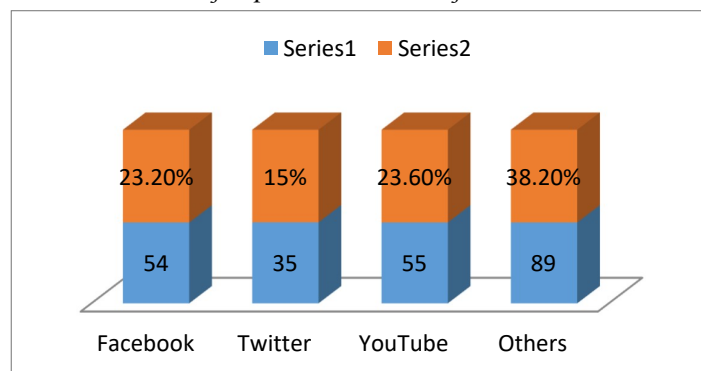


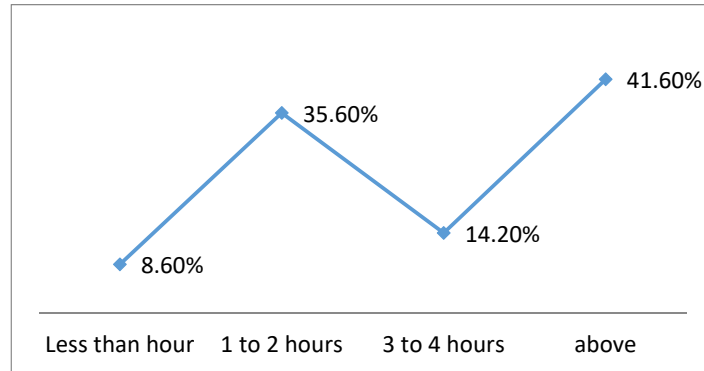
Figure 5.6 presents statistical data showing that respondents have been exposed to the greatest amount of media classified as "Others" (38.2%), with YouTube (23.6%), Facebook (23.2%), and Twitter (15.0%) coming in second and third, respectively.

The cumulative statistics, which demonstrate that 61.8% of respondents are exposed to at least Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube and that 38.2% of respondents are exposed to other forms of media,

aid in comprehending the respondents' gradual accumulation of media exposure.

Figure 7

Distribution of respondents based on time spent on media

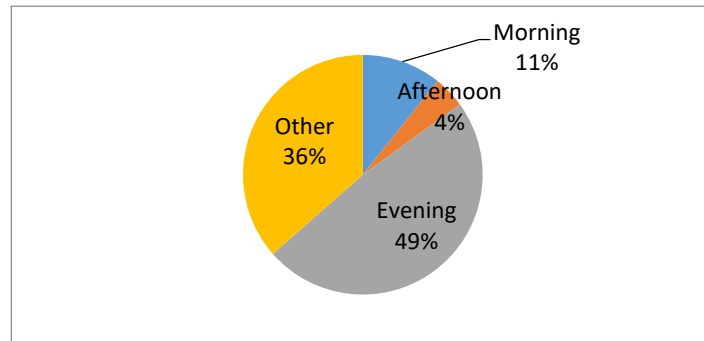


The majority of participants (41.6%) use media for more than four hours per day. 35.6% of respondents spend one to two hours, compared to 14.2% who spend three to four hours and 8.6% who spend less

than an hour. The cumulative percentages show how the number of respondents increased throughout the course of the time period, eventually reaching 233 respondents in total.

Figure 8

Distribution of respondents based on favorite time

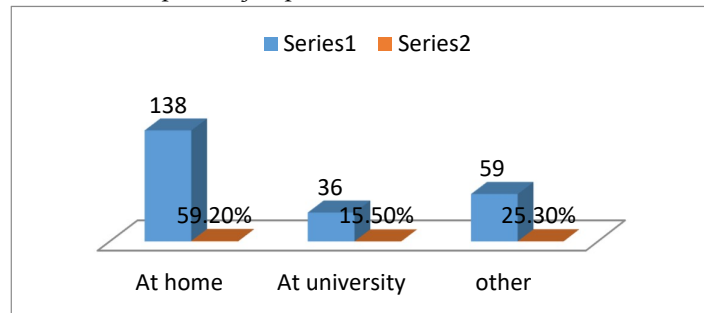


The figure shows the data indicates that over half (48.5%) of the respondents preferred the evening as their preferred time of day. The morning and afternoon are far less popular, at 10.7% and 4.3%,

respectively, while the night comes in second with 36.5%. There were 233 respondents in all, and all of them gave valid answers, as shown by the 100.0% total in the percent and valid percent columns.

Figure 9

Distribution of respondents based on place of exposure to media

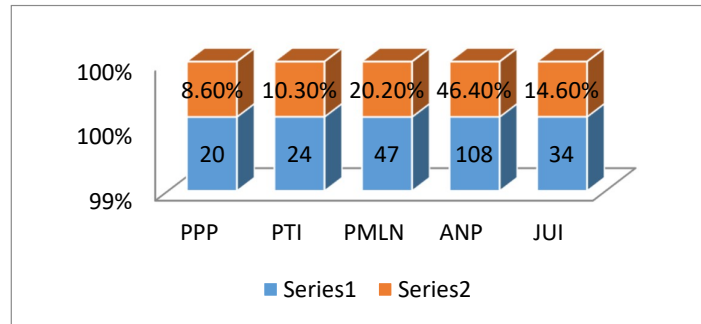


According to the data, the majority of respondents (59.2%) get their media exposure at home, followed by 15.5% at their place of higher education and 25.3%

elsewhere. This distribution shows that for the respondents in this sample, their primary media exposure location is at home.

Figure 10

Distribution of respondents on the basis of political party.



The ANP is the political party that is most represented among respondents, as the table reveals that the majority of respondents (46.4%) are members of this group. Next, at 20.2%, is the PMLN,

followed by the JUI with 14.6%. With their respective representations of 10.3% and 8.6%, the PPP and PTI are the least represented.

Table 1

Role of Social Media in Bridging Knowledge Gaps

	strongly disagree		disagree		neutral		agree		strongly agree	
	Count	Row Total N %	Count	Row Total N %	Count	Row Total N %	Count	Row Total N %	Count	Row Total N %
Social media helps me stay informed about political issues.	14	6.0%	33	14.2%	59	25.3%	109	46.8%	18	7.7%
I have learned about different socioeconomic perspectives through social media.	24	10.3%	39	16.7%	46	19.7%	106	45.5%	18	7.7%
Social media platforms provide accessible information to individuals from various backgrounds.	18	7.7%	36	15.5%	79	33.9%	79	33.9%	21	9.0%
. I use social media to educate myself on topics I am not familiar with.	17	7.3%	32	13.7%	60	25.8%	91	39.1%	33	14.2%
Social media reduces the knowledge gap between different socioeconomic groups.	15	6.4%	13	5.6%	59	25.3%	130	55.8%	16	6.9%

Table 5.1 indicates that a significant proportion of participants hold a good perception of social media with regards to being up to date on political matters, gaining insight into diverse socioeconomic viewpoints, obtaining information from a range of backgrounds, engaging in self-education, and mitigating knowledge gaps. Particularly, social

media's ability to close socioeconomic knowledge gaps (62.7%) and keep people informed about political concerns (54.5%) is where there is the greatest agreement. These data show that social media is seen as an important instrument for increasing awareness and filling in knowledge gaps across a wide range of subjects and populations.

Table 2

Factors Influencing Social Media's intervention in political Activism

	strongly disagree		disagree		neutral		agree		strongly agree	
	Count	Row Total N %	Count	Row Total N %	Count	Row Total N %	Count	Row Total N %	Count	Row Total N %
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Social media reduces the knowledge gap between different socioeconomic groups.	15	6.4%	13	5.6%	59	25.3%	130	55.8%	16	6.9%

The information shown in the table describes how respondents felt social media influenced political activity. Social media plays a critical role in the spread of political information, as demonstrated by the substantial majority (54.5%) who agree or strongly agree that it helps them keep informed about political topics. Social media has an important role in expanding users' comprehension of multiple ideas, as demonstrated by the majority (53.2%) who agree or strongly agree that they have learned about many socioeconomic perspectives through social media. More equally split are the responses: while a

sizeable number (33.9%) is indifferent, a noteworthy percentage (42.9%) agrees or strongly agrees that social media makes knowledge accessible to people from different backgrounds. Social media may be an effective educational tool, as demonstrated by the large majority (53.3%) who use it for self-education on new subjects. More than 50%. Additionally, Approximately half of the participants (62.7%) think that social media contributes to closing the knowledge gap between various socioeconomic categories, suggesting that social media has an equalizing influence on information availability.

Table 3

Knowledge Gap Hypotheses and Social Media

	strongly disagree		disagree		Neutral		agree		strongly agree	
	Count	Row Total N %	Count	Row Total N %	Count	Row Total N %	Count	Row Total N %	Count	Row Total N %
People with higher education levels benefit more from social media in terms of knowledge gain.	8	3.4%	31	13.3%	52	22.3%	108	46.4%	34	14.6%
Social media widens the knowledge gap between different socioeconomic groups.	10	4.3%	32	13.7%	45	19.3%	108	46.4%	38	16.3%
Social media helps lower socioeconomic groups access important information they otherwise wouldn't.	13	5.6%	12	5.2%	53	22.7%	112	48.1%	43	18.5%
. Individuals from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to use social media effectively for information.	12	5.2%	23	9.9%	73	31.3%	87	37.3%	38	16.3%
. The design and features of social media platforms influence the extent to which they bridge knowledge gaps.	12	5.2%	23	9.9%	73	31.3%	87	37.3%	38	16.3%

Table 5.3 presents the data, broken down by different hypotheses, that look at the connection between knowledge gaps and social media activity. The degree of agreement each respondent had with each hypothesis was shown. Higher education levels are positively correlated with more knowledge, according to a substantial majority of respondents (46.4%), of whom 14.6% strongly agreed. This implies a strong belief that educational background affects how well social media works to spread knowledge. Social media exacerbates the knowledge gap between various socioeconomic classes, according to nearly half of the respondents (46.4%), with a further 16.3% strongly agreeing. It appears that there is a general consensus that social media might exacerbate already-existing disparities.

Based on the comments, it appears that most people believe social media may both increase and

decrease knowledge gaps. This is mostly dependent on the educational and socioeconomic backgrounds of users as well as the platform design. There is a strong assumption that those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are better positioned to use social media efficiently, yet a significant number of respondents view social media as a tool that may offer lower socioeconomic groups essential information.

Conclusion

This study was conducted to explore students' perceptions about the role of social media in bridging gaps and intervention factors in shaping their activism. It is concluded that social media has the power to close the socioeconomic gap among them regarding political activation. It is concluded that interactive and easy accessibility of social media

can change the gap between the have's and have's not. This medium is a vital tool for increasing political awareness among students.

Independent variables influence in the knowledge gap and social media usage that high qualification is positively associated with positive usage of social media and visa-versa. It appears that

most people believe social media may both increase and decrease knowledge gaps.

Although many respondents felt that social media may give lower socioeconomic groups access to vital information, higher socioeconomic groups are frequently seen as more adept users of the platform.

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