Digital Transnationalism: Social Media As A Tool For Political Engagement Among Pakistani Expats

Faiz Ullah[1] , Shahid Hussain[2] , Babar Hussain[3] , Shahbaz Aslam[4]

Abstract

This study explores the role of social media as a tool for political participation of the Pakistani diaspora, examining the use of various platforms, factors affecting the level of participation, and the challenges and opportunities faced. Drawing on the concepts of digitalism and interconnectedness, the study used a mixed method combining survey data with in-depth interviews with 500 Pakistani expatriates from various countries. The analysis shows that Facebook and WhatsApp are the most important platforms for political discussions, sharing content, and organizing events, reflecting their broad use and ease of access. Young expats and highly educated people are more likely to participate, while recent immigrants (those who have lived abroad for less than five years) are stronger than those who have lived abroad longer. The main issues identified include censorship, online bullying, and access to reliable information; The significant opportunities are to make connections, provide support, and work with organizations. Findings show that participation in digital politics fosters a sense of connection with the country and strengthens diasporic identity. Moreover, its collaboration with social organizations, international advocacy groups, politicians, and NGOs demonstrates the transnational nature of its activities. This research contributes to the understanding of digital aliens and political participation by providing insight into how social media supports political activism and manages transnational connections among expatriates. This study highlights the need for supporting policies and infrastructure to mitigate challenges and harness the political participation potential of digital platforms.

Keywords: *social media, political engagement, Pakistani expatriates, digital transnationalism, connective action, diaspora, transnational ties, censorship, online harassment, networking.*

Introduction

In a democratic nation, the citizen participates in political activities, express their opinion and influence the policy making through political and social movements in the country. With the advent of modern technologies of communication, the citizens within and outside of the country become more connected and active towards political and social events. The use of these digital technologies, especially social media, by the expatriates in different countries to maintain connections with their home countries, stay engaged with social and political developments and expressing their voice for social and political issues is called digital transnationalism (Levitt & Schiller, 2004). The rapid advancement of information and communication technologies revolutionized the ways of political participation and sharing political and social thoughts by the expatriates through the use of social media (Vertovec, 2009). This phenomenon, digital transnationalism, is important to understand that how expatriates influence political discourse across hose and homeland countries.

1. PhD Media & Communication Studies, University of Central Punjab, Pakistan.
2. Assistant Professor, AIOU, Islamabad, Pakistan.
3. PhD Scholar, University of Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.
4. PhD Media & Communication Studies, University of Central Punjab, Pakistan.

The digital transnationalism is a result of the fusion between the global economy and the progress of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in terms of value as well as sophistication. Unlike traditional notion of the transnationalism that predominantly revolve around physical displacements and interpersonal engagements or face-to-face interactions, digital transnationalism underscores the significance of virtual space in fostering social interactions spanning across nations (Diminescu, 2008). In this era dominated by digital technologies, social media stand as virtual bridges connecting individuals from different corners of the world— facilitating cross-border communication, helping people stay tethered to their home countries, and enabling participation in social, cultural, or political issues irrespective of territorial boundaries (Goggin & McLelland, 2009).

Social media has made its way into political participation— a vital component for diasporic communities in this age of never-before-seen connections. The research delves into the birth of digital transnationalism, with a spotlight on how the Pakistani diaspora leverages social media as their political participation tool: ensuring they remain connected and actively involved in their home country's politics. Pakistan's political setup is marred by intermittent instability and continual defiance to democratic governance. The influence from the outside has aided not just business but policy too, via word-of-mouth referrals, advocacy efforts and even digital activism (Fida & Zakaria, 2011).

The Pakistani diaspora is estimated to more than 9 million spread across regions such as the Middle East, North America, Europe and Southeast Asia (Fatima, 2018). The community maintains transnational ties with its country mostly through digital technology. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp are important digital spaces for the Pakistani diaspora to participate in political discussions, raise awareness and participate in political events remotely (Jan-Khan, 2014).

These virtual exchanges serve as a prime illustration of digital transnationalism— where ex-pats make use of online platforms to uphold relationships and engage in events socio-political, even when miles apart (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Vertovec, 2004). Most existing literature talks only about the money matters when it comes to foreigners' involvement and hardly ever delves into their political actions or how they get caught up with local politics (Kapur, 2014; Mazzucato, 2008). This research seeks to bridge this void by closely dissecting the weave of patterns, motivations, and hurdles that compose the fabric of digital participation within the Pakistani diaspora.

The media's impact on political engagement has been extensively studied across different contexts. Research by Bennett and Segerberg (2012) and Castells (2008) demonstrates how digital platforms empower dissent to circumvent power structures and gatekeepers fostering collaboration. Within diaspora communities, social media platforms play a role in monitoring communications and nurturing virtual citizens engaging in political discourse and personal interactions (Brinkerhoff, 2009). Among the diaspora Facebook and Twitter serve not as social networking tools but also as arenas, for expressing political views and advocating causes (Arafa & Armstrong, 2016).

This research was carried out from the perspective of transnationalism and networking theory. Transnationalism theory sheds light on how diaspora activities are interconnected across borders (Portes, Guarnizo, & Landolt, 1999). It illustrates how immigrants maintain economic and political connections, to their home countries, which are aided by information and communication technologies (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). Online communication is valuable for exploring how social media structures and networks either

facilitate or limit involvement. Networking communication theory adds depth to the analysis by investigating how social media structures and networks either enable or hinder political engagement (Castells, 2012). This theory underscores the significance of tools in organizing and supporting initiatives while considering the influence of communication methods, on social movements (Juris, 2012).

Literature Review

The emergence of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram has democratized the production and dissemination of information, empowering people to engage in public discourse, express dissent, and mobilize collective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). For diasporic communities, social media not only facilitates communication with friends and family back home but also provides a platform for identity expression, cultural preservation, stay connected to engage in political participation (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2017). By transcending physical borders and temporal constraints, social media platforms enable Pakistani expatriates to navigate the complexities of dual or multiple identities, negotiate belongingness, and participate in shaping both local and transnational narratives (Maestrini).

The Pakistani diaspora is characterized by its diverse origins, with migration patterns shaped by historical, economic, and political factors. The earliest waves of Pakistani migration occurred during the colonial period, with laborers recruited to work on British colonial projects in various parts of the world, including East Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia (Ballard, 1994). Subsequent waves of migration were driven by factors such as post-independence economic opportunities, political instability, and conflict-induced displacement (Lahiri-Dutt & Samanta, 2004). Today, the Pakistani diaspora comprises a heterogeneous population, spanning multiple generations and socio-economic backgrounds, with significant concentrations in countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and the Gulf states (Vertovec, 2009).

The demographic composition of the Pakistani diaspora reflects a complex interplay of factors, including labour migration, family reunification, and educational pursuits across globe. In host countries like the United States and the United Kingdom, Pakistani expatriates are found in diverse occupational sectors, including healthcare, IT, academia, and business (Mann, 2012). Similarly, the Gulf region, particularly countries like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar, has emerged as a major destination for Pakistani migrant workers, drawn by employment opportunities in sectors such as construction, transportation, and hospitality (Naseemullah, 2019). Despite the socio-economic diversity within the diaspora, Pakistani expatriates share common experiences of cultural adaptation, transnational mobility, and negotiation of dual identities in host societies (Zubair, 2022).

The geographically dispersed diaspora of Pakistani nationals is facilitated by the advances in the information and communication technologies have facilitated transnational connections and the maintenance of ties with the homeland. Remittances sent by Pakistani expatriates play a crucial role in the country's economy, serving as a lifeline for many families back home (Jensen, 2022). Beyond economic remittances, diasporic engagements encompass a wide range of activities, including cultural exchanges, philanthropic initiatives, and political advocacy (Newland & Patrick, 2004). Against the backdrop of globalization and digitalization, the Pakistani diaspora navigates the complexities of transnationalism, forging hybrid identities and fostering connections that transcend borders (Brudvig, 2018).

The widespread adoption of social media platforms among Pakistani expatriates has transformed the landscape of diasporic communication and engagement. Platforms such as

Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp serve as virtual meeting spaces where individuals can connect with fellow expatriates, share news and updates from Pakistan, and participate in discussions on various topics of interest (Farooq et al., 2021). These digital spaces not only facilitate interpersonal communication but also enable collective action and political mobilization, allowing diasporic communities to amplify their voices and advocate for change (Drus & Khalid, 2019).

One key aspect of social media use among Pakistani expats is its role in fostering transnational political engagement. Diasporic individuals utilize social media platforms to stay informed about political developments in Pakistan, express their opinions on socio-political issues, and mobilize support for their relevant ideological and political thought they care about. From organizing online campaigns to participating in offline protests and rallies, Pakistani expatriates utilize social media as a tool for political activism and advocacy (Qaisrani & Jokic, 2021). Moreover, social media enables diasporic individuals to connect with like-minded activists, build coalitions across borders, and coordinate efforts to address shared concerns (Martin, 2014).

However, the use of social media for political engagement among Pakistani expatriates is not without challenges. Issues such as online harassment, censorship, and the spread of misinformation pose significant obstacles to meaningful dialogue and democratic participation (Miller & Vaccari, 2020). Furthermore, diasporic communities may encounter backlash or surveillance from state authorities, both in host countries and in Pakistan, leading to self-censorship and reluctance to engage in online political discourse (Hassan, 2018). Despite these challenges, social media remains a powerful tool for diasporic political engagement, enabling Pakistani expatriates to connect, organize, and mobilize for social change across borders (Rafique Wassan et al., 2017).

Apart from the political activism, the social media also serves as a forum for cultural expression and identity negotiation among Pakistani expatriates. Through online communities, forums, and cultural groups, diasporic individuals share stories, traditions, and cultural practices, fostering a sense of belonging and solidarity to their homeland (Diamandaki, 2003). Social media platforms offer spaces where Pakistani expats can celebrate their cultural heritage, showcase artistic talents, and engage in cross-cultural exchanges with both fellow diaspora members and individuals from other communities (Wakefield, 2020). This digital cultural activism not only strengthens bonds within the diaspora but also contributes to the visibility and recognition of Pakistani culture on a global scale.

Moreover, social media plays a vital role in shaping diasporic identity narratives and perceptions of Pakistan. Through curated content, personal narratives, and user-generated media, Pakistani expatriates construct and share representations of their homeland, influencing the perception about Pakistan and its people (Raza, 2021). By showcasing the diversity, vibrancy, and resilience of Pakistani culture and society, diasporic individuals challenge stereotypes and counter negative portrayals of Pakistan in mainstream media (Khan, 2013). Social media thus serves as a platform for cultural diplomacy, enabling Pakistani expatriates to participate in nation-branding efforts and shape global discourses about their homeland (Yousaf et al., 2021).

Social media offers unique opportunities for engagement, however there are myriad of challenges that must be navigated by Pakistani expatriates. One significant challenge is the prevalence of online harassment and hate speech directed towards diasporic individuals, particularly those who are vocal about political or social issues related to Pakistan as we

witnessed in recent years (Adnan et al., 2019; Jamil, 2020). Such harassment can have real-life consequences, including threats to personal safety and emotional well-being, leading some individuals to self-censor or withdraw from online political activism (Vitak et al., 2017). Additionally, the spread of misinformation and propaganda on social media platforms can exacerbate social tensions and deepen divisions within diasporic communities, undermining efforts towards constructive dialogue and collective action (Sanchez, 2021). The state of digital media literacy is not up to the mark where the users can extract and differentiate the false information and propaganda.

Moreover, the political engagement on social media often has consequences like surveillance and censorship by state authorities, both in host countries and in Pakistan (Howard et al., 2011). The social media users generally and expatriates specifically may face repercussions for expressing dissenting opinions or participating in online activism, including threats of legal action, deportation, or restrictions on travel (Lam, 2022). This climate of surveillance can have a chilling effect on freedom of expression and hinder the ability of Pakistani expatriates to fully engage in political discourse on social media platforms (Al-Jizawi et al., 2020). Despite these challenges, social media remains a powerful tool for diasporic mobilization and advocacy, offering avenues for resilience, solidarity, and resistance against oppressive regimes and discriminatory policie (Joseph, 2012).

The intersection of digital transnationalism and political engagement among Pakistani expatriates presents a complex and dynamic terrain for scholarly inquiry and social action. Social media platforms serve as virtual bridges that connect diasporic communities across borders and contested spaces where individuals negotiate identities, navigate power dynamics, and assert agency in shaping their collective futures (Boichak & Kumar, 2022). While challenges such as online harassment, censorship, and surveillance persist, the opportunities afforded by social media for diasporic mobilization, cultural expression, and political advocacy are undeniable (Ghorashi & Boersma, 2009). Moving forward, it is imperative for researchers, policymakers, and civil society actors to critically engage with the complexities of digital transnationalism, amplify marginalized voices, and foster inclusive spaces for diasporic participation and empowerment in the digital age (Ortiz et al., 2019). By harnessing the potential of social media as a tool for social change and collective liberation, Pakistani expatriates can continue to challenge hegemonic narratives, build resilient networks of solidarity, and advance the cause of justice and equity in both virtual and material realms (Sandbrook et al., 2007).

The emergence of digital transnationalism has transformed the landscape of diasporic engagement, offering new opportunities for political participation and activism among Pakistani expatriates. By leveraging social media platforms, diasporic individuals can transcend physical borders, forge transnational alliances, and amplify their voices on issues of common concern. However, the widespread use of social media also poses challenges related to privacy, misinformation, and state surveillance. Future research should continue to explore the dynamics of digital transnationalism, with a focus on understanding how migrant communities navigate these challenges and harness the potential of social media for collective action and social change.

Transnationalism theory, as articulated by scholars such as Linda Basch (1994), provides a foundational framework for understanding the interconnectedness of social, economic, and political processes across national borders. Studies such as Vertovec (2009) examination of transnational social fields and Levitt and Schiller (2004) research on transnational social ties among migrants offer insights into how diasporic communities maintain connections with their homeland while residing abroad. Within the context of political activism in Pakistan, transnationalism theory helps explain how Pakistani expatriates leverage social

media platforms to mobilize support, raise awareness, and advocate for political change in their country of origin.

Networked Communication Theory: Networked communication theory, as articulated by Castells (2008) and further developed by scholars such as Bennett and Segerberg (2012), explores how digital technologies mediate social interactions and shape collective behaviours in networked societies. Studies such as Hussain and Howard (2013) research on social media use during the Arab Spring and Nithyanand et al. (2017) examination of online political discourse provide insights into the structure and dynamics of digital networks. In the context of political activism in Pakistan, networked communication theory helps uncover the mechanisms through which social media platforms enable diasporic activists to build coalitions, mobilize resources, and challenge authoritarian regimes.

By integrating insights from these theoretical perspectives and relevant studies, this theoretical framework provides a comprehensive understanding of the role of social media in facilitating political activism among Pakistani expatriates and its impact on political dynamics in Pakistan. It highlights how diasporic communities navigate transnational spaces, mobilize collective action, and contribute to political change both locally and globally.

Research Questions

1 How do Pakistani expatriates utilize social media platforms for political engagement, and what key factors influence their level of engagement?

2 What challenges and opportunities do Pakistani expatriates encounter in their political engagement through social media?

3 How does digital political engagement impact the diasporic identities and transnational ties of Pakistani expatriates, and in what ways do they collaborate with organizations to advance their political agendas?

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to comprehensively explore the phenomenon of digital transnationalism and political engagement among Pakistani expatriates. This approach allows for a multifaceted understanding of the research topic, incorporating in-depth qualitative insights alongside quantitative data analysis. The sampling strategy involves purposive sampling to select participants who are Pakistani expatriates residing in various host countries. Both online and offline recruitment methods will be employed to reach a diverse range of participants. Snowball sampling may also be utilized to access individuals who are actively engaged in political activism within the diaspora.

3. Data Collection:

a. Qualitative Data: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Pakistani expatriates to explore their experiences, perceptions, and practices related to digital transnationalism and political engagement. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

b. Quantitative Data: A survey questionnaire was designed to gather quantitative data on social media usage patterns, political attitudes, and engagement in political activism among Pakistani expatriates. The survey was distributed online through social media platforms and diaspora networks.

1**. Qualitative Data Collection:**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Pakistani expatriates to explore their experiences, perceptions, and practices related to digital transnationalism and political engagement. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select participants representing diverse demographics, including age, gender, occupation, and geographic location. Interviews were conducted either in person or via video conferencing platforms, based on participants' preferences and availability.

2. **Quantitative Data Collection:**

A survey questionnaire was designed to gather quantitative data on social media usage patterns, political attitudes, and engagement in political activism among Pakistani expatriates. The survey was distributed online through social media platforms, diaspora networks, and community organizations. Participants were asked to provide demographic information, such as age, gender, education, and country of residence, as well as their frequency of social media use, preferred platforms, and participation in political activities both online and offline.

Data Analysis

1. Qualitative Data Analysis:

Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the qualitative data collected from interviews. The transcripts were coded and categorized to identify recurrent themes, patterns, and discourses related to digital transnationalism and political engagement among Pakistani expatriates. Initial codes were generated through open coding, followed by axial coding to explore relationships between codes and themes. The themes were refined through constant comparison and consensus among the research team.

2. Quantitative Data Analysis:

Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the quantitative survey data. Frequencies and percentages were calculated to summarize participants' responses regarding their social media usage, political attitudes, and engagement in political activism. Inferential statistical techniques, such as regression analysis or chi-square tests, were applied to explore relationships between variables of interest, such as demographics and levels of political engagement. Statistical software, such as SPSS or R, was utilized for data analysis.

Results

Qualitative analysis revealed several key themes related to digital transnationalism and political engagement among Pakistani expatriates. These included the role of social media in maintaining connections with homeland politics, experiences of online activism and advocacy, challenges related to censorship and surveillance, and opportunities for collective action and solidarity within diasporic communities.

Participants highlighted the importance of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter as spaces for political discourse and mobilization. Many expressed frustrations with censorship and surveillance by both host and homeland authorities, which they perceived as limiting their freedom of expression and inhibiting their ability to participate in online activism. However, participants also identified opportunities for collaboration and solidarity with fellow expatriates, as well as with activists and organizations in Pakistan, through digital networks.

Quantitative analysis of survey data provided insights into the social media usage patterns and political engagement levels among Pakistani expatriates. The majority of respondents reported using social media platforms frequently, with Facebook and WhatsApp being the most commonly used platforms for communication and information sharing. A significant proportion of participants indicated that they actively engaged in political discussions and shared political content on social media.

Regression analysis revealed that factors such as age, education level, and length of residence in the host country were associated with varying levels of political engagement among Pakistani expatriates. Younger participants and those with higher levels of education were more likely to participate in political activism online, while length of residence in the host country was negatively correlated with political engagement, suggesting a potential "assimilation effect" over time.

Data Analysis

The following tables present the data analysis results related to the research questions, providing insights into social media usage, influencing factors, challenges, opportunities, and impacts of political engagement among Pakistani expatriates.

Table 1 Social Media Platforms and Types of Political Engagement

Social Media Platform	Political Discussions (%)	Sharing Political Content (%)	Organizing Events (%)	Supporting Campaigns (%)
Facebook	80%	70%	50%	65%
Twitter	60%	55%	35%	50%
WhatsApp	75%	65%	40%	55%
Instagram	45%	40%	20%	35%

This table shows how expatriates utilize social media platforms for political engagement, and what key factors influence their level of engagement. The table highlights the usage of different social media platforms by Pakistani expatriates for various types of political engagement. It shows that Facebook is the most widely used platform for political discussions (80%), sharing political content (70%), organizing events (50%), and supporting campaigns (65%). WhatsApp also plays a significant role, particularly in political discussions (75%) and content sharing (65%). Twitter is moderately used, while Instagram is less popular for political engagement activities among Pakistani expatriates.

Table 2 Factors Influencing Political Engagement

Demographic Factor	High Engagement (%)	Medium Engagement (%)	Low Engagement (%)
Age (18-30)	70%	20%	10%
Age (31-45)	60%	25%	15%
Age (46 and above)	40%	35%	25%
Education (Undergraduate)	50%	30%	20%
Education (Graduate)	70%	20%	10%
Length of Residence (<5 years)	60%	25%	15%
Length of Residence (>5 years)	50%	30%	20%

This table shows the demographic factors influencing political engagement levels among Pakistani expatriates. Younger individuals (ages 18-30) and those with higher education levels (graduate degrees) exhibit higher engagement rates (70% and 70%, respectively). The length of residence in the host country also impacts engagement, with those living abroad for less than five years showing higher engagement (60%) compared to those residing for over five years (50%).

Table 3 Challenges in Political Engagement

Challenge	Reported Frequency (%)
Censorship and Surveillance	65%
Online Harassment and Trolls	50%
Access to Reliable Information	40%
Technical Barriers (Internet Speed, Platform Restrictions)	35%

Research question 2 is about the challenges and opportunities Pakistani expatriates encounter in their political engagement through social media. This table identifies the primary challenges faced by Pakistani expatriates in their political engagement on social media. The most frequently reported challenge is censorship and surveillance (65%), followed by online harassment and trolling (50%). Access to reliable information (40%) and technical barriers (35%) also pose significant challenges, hindering effective political activism.

Table 4 Opportunities in Political Engagement

Opportunity	Reported Frequency (%)
Networking with Like-minded Individuals	75%
Mobilizing Support for Political Causes	65%
Organizing and Participating in Events	55%
Collaborating with Local and International Organizations	50%

This table highlights the opportunities available for political engagement via social media. The most commonly reported opportunity is networking with like-minded individuals (75%), which facilitates community building and solidarity. Mobilizing support for political causes (65%), organizing and participating in events (55%), and collaborating with local and international organizations (50%) are also significant opportunities that enhance political activism among Pakistani expatriates.

Table 5 Impact on Diasporic Identities and Transnational Ties

Impact on Identity/Ties	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Enhanced Sense of Connection to Homeland	60%	25%	10%	3%	2%
Strengthened Diasporic Identity	55%	30%	10%	3%	2%
Increased Political Awareness and Participation	65%	20%	10%	3%	2%

Research question 3 is about digital political engagement's impact on the diasporic identities and transnational ties of Pakistani expatriates, and in what ways they collaborate with organizations to advance their political agendas. This table reflects the impact of digital political engagement on the diasporic identities and transnational ties of Pakistani expatriates. A significant proportion of respondents strongly agree that their engagement enhances their sense of connection to the homeland (60%) and strengthens their diasporic identity (55%). Additionally, increased political awareness and participation are reported by 65% of respondents, indicating a positive influence of social media engagement on their political and social identities.

Table 6 Collaboration with Organizations

Type of Organization	Collaboration Activities (%)
Local Community Organizations	50%
International Advocacy Groups	45%
Political Parties	40%
Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)	35%

This table details the extent to which Pakistani expatriates collaborate with various types of organizations to advance their political agendas. Collaboration with local community organizations is the most common (50%), followed by international advocacy groups (45%), political parties (40%), and NGOs (35%). These collaborations illustrate the

transnational dimension of their political activism, leveraging partnerships to enhance their impact.

The tables and their explanations collectively provide a comprehensive analysis of the data, addressing the research questions and offering insights into the political engagement of Pakistani expatriates via social media.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of social media in facilitating political engagement among Pakistani expatriates, to identify the key factors influencing their engagement levels, and to examine the challenges and opportunities they face. This discussion will interpret the findings presented in the data analysis tables and connect them with relevant research studies.

The data indicate that Facebook is the most widely used platform for political engagement among Pakistani expatriates, followed by WhatsApp, Twitter, and Instagram. These findings align with previous studies highlighting the prominence of Facebook in fostering political discourse and mobilization (Ahmad, 2019; Khan & Hassan, 2016). Facebook's features, such as groups, pages, and live streaming, provide versatile tools for discussing political issues, sharing content, organizing events, and supporting campaigns.

WhatsApp, often used for more private and direct communication, also plays a significant role, particularly in political discussions and content sharing. This aligns with the findings of Rauf and Asif (2017), who noted the app's utility in circumventing public scrutiny and surveillance. Twitter's relatively lower but still substantial usage highlights its role in fast-paced information dissemination and public political discussions (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Instagram, being more visually oriented, is less central to political engagement but still serves as a platform for political expression through images and short videos.

The demographic analysis reveals that younger expatriates (ages 18-30) and those with higher education levels (graduate degrees) exhibit higher levels of political engagement. This finding is consistent with the work of Castells (2012) and Earl et al. (2010), who emphasize the role of younger, educated individuals in leveraging digital tools for activism. Younger expatriates are likely more adept at using social media technologies and more motivated to engage in political discourse.

The length of residence in the host country also influences engagement levels, with those living abroad for less than five years showing higher engagement. This could be attributed to a stronger connection to current political events in their homeland, as suggested by Levitt and Jaworsky (2007). Over time, expatriates might integrate more into their host societies, potentially reducing their direct political engagement with their country of origin.

Censorship and surveillance emerged as the most significant challenges faced by Pakistani expatriates in their political engagement on social media. This is corroborated by Khalid and Akhtar (2018), who highlight the Pakistani government's efforts to monitor and censor online political content. Online harassment and trolling are also major concerns, reflecting the broader global issue of digital safety for political activists (Howard & Hussain, 2013).

Access to reliable information and technical barriers such as internet speed and platform restrictions are additional challenges that can hinder effective political activism. These challenges underscore the need for better infrastructure and policies to protect and facilitate online political engagement (Zubair, 2016).

Social media provides significant opportunities for networking with like-minded individuals, mobilizing support for political causes, organizing events, and collaborating with local and international organizations. The high frequency of these opportunities reported by participants aligns with Bennett and Segerberg's (2013) concept of connective action, where digital media enables decentralized and scalable forms of activism.

Networking with like-minded individuals (75%) and mobilizing support for political causes (65%) are particularly prominent, indicating the crucial role of social media in creating virtual communities and amplifying political messages. This reflects the findings of Brinkerhoff (2009), who emphasizes the potential of digital diasporas to maintain strong transnational ties and influence homeland politics.

The data reveal that digital political engagement significantly enhances the sense of connection to the homeland and strengthens the diasporic identity of Pakistani expatriates. This is supported by Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004), who argue that transnational activities help migrants maintain strong ties to their countries of origin. Increased political awareness and participation reported by 65% of respondents further indicate the empowering effect of social media on expatriate communities.

The collaboration with local community organizations, international advocacy groups, political parties, and NGOs underscores the transnational dimension of digital political engagement. These collaborations not only facilitate political activism but also contribute to a sense of collective identity and purpose among expatriates (Khan & Malik, 2020).

Challenges and Opportunities:

The qualitative findings shed light on the challenges faced by Pakistani expatriates in navigating digital transnationalism and political engagement. Participants highlighted issues such as censorship, surveillance, and online harassment, which they perceived as hindrances to freedom of expression and effective activism (Nawaz & Iqbal, 2017). These challenges underscore the importance of safeguarding digital rights and fostering inclusive online spaces for diasporic communities to engage in political discourse and advocacy (Khalid & Akhtar, 2018).

However, alongside these challenges, participants also identified opportunities for collaboration, solidarity, and collective action within digital networks. Social media platforms provide diasporic activists with unprecedented reach and visibility, enabling them to amplify their voices, mobilize support, and effect change across borders (Hussain & Shah, 2021). The qualitative analysis reveals instances of online activism and advocacy initiatives led by Pakistani expatriates, illustrating the potential of digital technologies to catalyse transnational social movements and advance social justice agendas (Abbasi, 2021).

Implications and Future Directions:

The findings of this study have several implications for theory, practice, and policy. They contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities of digital transnationalism and

political engagement among Pakistani expatriates, highlighting the interplay between online communication technologies, diasporic identities, and political activism (Zubair, 2016). The identification of demographic factors associated with political engagement underscores the importance of targeted interventions and outreach efforts to engage diverse segments of the diaspora in digital activism.

Moreover, the study points to the need for policies and initiatives aimed at promoting digital literacy, protecting online freedoms, and fostering inclusive online spaces for diasporic communities to engage in political discourse and advocacy. Future research could further explore the role of social media in facilitating cross-border collaborations, transnational solidarity networks, and digital diplomacy initiatives involving Pakistani expatriates. Additionally, longitudinal studies could investigate the evolving nature of digital transnationalism and its impact on diasporic identities and political participation over time.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provides a comprehensive analysis of how Pakistani expatriates use social media for political engagement, the factors influencing their engagement, the challenges they face, and the opportunities available to them. The findings highlight the pivotal role of social media in enabling political activism and maintaining transnational ties. They also point to the need for supportive policies and infrastructure to address the challenges of censorship, online harassment, and technical barriers. By understanding these dynamics, scholars and policymakers can better support the political engagement and contributions of diaspora communities in their homelands and beyond.

Reference:

Adnan, M., Ali, A., & Aslam, S. (2019). Economic issues and ethical journalism in Pakistan: Prospects and challenges. Global Social Sciences Review, 4(1), 11-22.

Al-Jizawi, N., Antis, S., Chan, S., Senft, A., & Deibert, R. J. (2020). Digital transnational repression. Citizen Lab.

Arafa, M., & Armstrong, C. (2016). " Facebook to Mobilize, Twitter to Coordinate Protests, and YouTube to Tell the World": New Media, Cyberactivism, and the Arab Spring. Journal of Global Initiatives: Policy, Pedagogy, Perspective, 10(1), 6.

Ballard, R. (1994). The Emergence of Desh Pardesh: Introduction.

Bennett, W. L., & Segerberg, A. (2012). The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics. Information, communication & society, 15(5), 739-768.

Boichak, O., & Kumar, P. (2022). Mapping the national web: Spaces, cultures and borders of diasporic mobilization in the digital age. Global Networks, 22(2), 242-258.

Brinkerhoff, J. M. (2009). Digital diasporas: Identity and transnational engagement. Cambridge University Press.

Brudvig, I. (2018). Im (mobility), Digital Technologies and Transnational Spaces of Belonging.

Castells, M. (2008). The new public sphere: Global civil society, communication networks, and global governance. The aNNalS of the american academy of Political and Social Science, 616(1), 78-93.

Chouliaraki, L., & Georgiou, M. (2017). Hospitability: The communicative architecture of humanitarian securitization at Europe's borders. Journal of Communication, 67(2), 159-180.

Diamandaki, K. (2003). Virtual ethnicity and digital diasporas: Identity construction in cyberspace. Global media journal, 2(2), 1-14.

Diminescu, D. (2008). The connected migrant: An epistemological manifesto. Social science information, 47(4), 565-579.

Drus, Z., & Khalid, H. (2019). Sentiment analysis in social media and its application: Systematic literature review. Procedia Computer Science, 161, 707-714.

Farooq, K., Bashir, S., Zafar, H., Zarar, R., & Sadiq, W. (2021). The Study on the Role of social media in Social Change in Society. International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change, 15(2), 1298-1313.

Fatima, N. (2018). The Pakistani Diaspora in North America.

Fida, B. A., & Zakaria, M. (2011). Democracy and Growth: A Case Study of Pakistan. International Journal of Economic Perspectives, 5(1).

Ghorashi, H., & Boersma, K. (2009). The 'Iranian Diaspora'and the new media: From political action to humanitarian help. Development and Change, 40(4), 667-691.

Goggin, G., & McLelland, M. (2009). The internationalization of the internet and its implications for media studies. In Internationalizing Media Studies (pp. 308-321). Routledge.

Hassan, K. (2018). Social media, media freedom and Pakistan's war on terror. The Round Table, 107(2), 189-202.

Howard, P. N., Agarwal, S. D., & Hussain, M. M. (2011). When do states disconnect their digital networks? Regime responses to the political uses of social media. The Communication Review, 14(3), 216-232.

Hussain, M. M., & Howard, P. N. (2013). What best explains successful protest cascades? ICTs and the fuzzy causes of the Arab Spring. International studies review, 15(1), 48-66.

Jamil, S. (2020). Suffering in silence: The resilience of Pakistan's female journalists to combat sexual harassment, threats and discrimination. Journalism Practice, 14(2), 150-170.

Jan-Khan, M. (2014). Media consumption, identity and the Pakistani diaspora.

Jensen, J. (2022). The ILO World Employment Program research agenda on development and migration. Global Social Policy, 22(2), 263-280.

Joseph, S. (2012). Social media, political change, and human rights. BC Int'l & Comp. L. Rev., 35, 145.

Kapur, D. (2014). Political effects of international migration. Annual Review of Political Science, 17, 479-502.

Khan, G. K. (2013). Narrating Pakistan transnationally: identity, politics and terrorism in Anglophone Pakistani literature after" 9/11" University of Warwick].

Lahiri-Dutt, K., & Samanta, G. (2004). Fleeting Land, Fleeting People: Bangladeshi Women in a Char land Environment in Lower Bengal, India. Asian and Pacific migration journal, 13(4), 475-495.

Lam, V. (2022). Information and communications technologies, online activism, and implications for Vietnam's public diplomacy. Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs, 41(1), 3-33.

Levitt, P., & Jaworsky, B. N. (2007). Transnational migration studies: Past developments and future trends. Annu. Rev. Sociol., 33, 129-156.

Levitt, P., & Schiller, N. G. (2004). Conceptualizing simultaneity: A transnational social field perspective on society. International migration review, 38(3), 1002-1039.

Linda Basch, N. G. S., Cristina Szanton Blanc. (1994). Transnational projects: A new perspective. Routledge.

Maestrini, G. Gabriella Maestrini.

Mann, M. (2012). The sources of social power: volume 1, a history of power from the beginning to AD 1760 (Vol. 1). Cambridge university press.

Martin, M. E. (2014). The Political Power of Diaspora as External Actors in Armed Civil Conflict: Ethnonationalist Conflict-Generated Diaspora Use of Social Media in Transnational Political Engagement in Homeland Conflict: The Case of Rwanda University of Bradford].

Mazzucato, V. (2008). Simultaneity and networks in transnational Migration: lessons learned from an SMS methodology. Migration and development within and across borders, 71-102.

Miller, M. L., & Vaccari, C. (2020). Digital threats to democracy: Comparative lessons and possible remedies. The International Journal of Press/Politics, 25(3), 333-356.

Naseemullah, A. (2019). Violence, Rents and Investment: Explaining Growth Divergence in South Asia. Comparative Politics, 51(4), 581-601.

Newland, K., & Patrick, E. (2004). Beyond remittances: the role of Diaspora in poverty reduction in their countries of origin, a scoping study by the Migration Policy Institute for the Department of International Development. Migration Policy Institute.

Nithyanand, R., Schaffner, B., & Gill, P. (2017). Online political discourse in the Trump era. arXiv preprint arXiv:1711.05303.

Ortiz, J., Young, A., Myers, M., Bedeley, R. T., Carbaugh, D., Chughtai, H., Davidson, E., George, J., Gogan, J., & Gordon, S. (2019). Giving voice to the voiceless: The use of digital technologies by marginalized groups.

Qaisrani, A., & Jokic, J. (2021). Engaging Diasporas in Information Campaigns on Migration. In: Vienna.

Rafique Wassan, M., Hussain, Z., Ali Shah, M., & Amin, S. N. (2017). International labor migration and social change in rural Sindh, Pakistan. Asian and Pacific migration journal, 26(3), 381-402.

Raza, Q. (2021). Integration through social media: How social media platform "Facebook" helps Pakistani minority living in Norway to integrate into Norwegian society

Sanchez, L. (2021). Bolstering the Democratic Resilience of the Alliance Against Disinformation and Propaganda. NATO Parliamentary Assembly. https://www. nato-pa. int/document/013-cds-21-edemocratic-resilience-against-disinformation-and-propaganda-report-sanchez.

Sandbrook, R., Edelman, M., Heller, P., & Teichman, J. (2007). Social democracy in the global periphery: Origins, challenges, prospects. Cambridge University Press.

Vertovec, S. (2004). Trends and impacts of migrant transnationalism.

Vertovec, S. (2009). Transnationalism. Routledge.

Vitak, J., Chadha, K., Steiner, L., & Ashktorab, Z. (2017). Identifying women's experiences with and strategies for mitigating negative effects of online harassment. Proceedings of the 2017 ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work and Social Computing,

Wakefield, S. (2020). Cultural heritage, transnational narratives and museum franchising in Abu Dhabi. Routledge.

Yousaf, S., Tauni, M. Z., & Xiucheng, F. (2021). Migration intentions: a sign of a weak nation brand? A multi-group analysis between China and Pakistan. Journal of Product & Brand Management, 30(2), 262-280.

Zubair, S. (2022). Learning to be 'glocal': Reflections on transgressive theories and transcultural flows in a Pakistani ELT classroom and curriculum. In Transcultural Humanities in South Asia (pp. 326-337). Routledge.