The Relationship Between Social Media Usage And Political Socialization Among Youth In Kp

Inam Ullah[1], Dr. Muhammad Imran Khan[2], Qazi Muhammad Nadeem[3]

ABSTRACT

This study explores that how social media shapes the political socialization of youth in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan, focusing on participation, knowledge, efficacy, and attitudes. Based on data from 385 respondents across urban and rural areas, it finds that social media significantly influences political engagement, with high usage levels[1] (M=6.003) and strong correlations to attitudes (r=0.991) and participation (r=0.986). Regression analysis shows social media accounts for 98.1% of variance in political socialization. Younger respondents (18-25) are more engaged, while higher education levels are inversely related to socialization scores. Despite its benefits in fostering political awareness and enabling civic participation, challenges such as misinformation and echo chambers remain. The study highlights the need for the digital literacy programs and equitable technology access to bridge the urban-rural divide. The social media is concluded to be dynamic space for shaping political identities, with significant potential to strengthen democratic processes in KP. The study offered some recommendations as extracted from the conclusion of current study.

Keywords: *Social Media Usage, Political Socialization, Youth. KP, Pakistan.*

INTRODUCTION

The social media has become a significant medium for the political engagement and socialization, especially among youth (Razzaq, Asif & Ahmad, 2020). The advent of social media has redefined the political engagement and participation globally, particularly among younger demographics. The platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram have become essential tools for the political communication, fostering interactions that transcend geographical boundaries. The social media enables the users to share information, discuss political issues, and mobilize for the civic activities (Zafar, Kalsoom & Jafar, 2024). The existing studies reveal that frequent social media enhances political knowledge, shapes opinions, and encourages civic participation. This digital shift holds significant implications for the youth political socialization, which is the process through which individuals acquire political attitudes, belief and behaviors. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), province in Pakistan, presents a unique context for studying the interplay amid social media and political socialization. The region is characterized by a blend of traditional values and increasing digital modernization, offering a fertile ground for exploring how social media influences the political landscape. In this connection, youth in KP, representing significant proportion of the

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Research Assistant Department of communication and media studies, Gomal University Email. inamkhangu1122@gmail.com
lecturer/ Head of department, communication and media studies department. Gomal University. Email. imran@gu.edu.pk
PhD Scholar, Institute of Education & Research (IER), Gomal University.
qazinadeem.gu@gmail.com

population, are particularly active on the social media, using it as a platform for both social interaction and political discourse.

Problem Statement

In Pakistan, studies on political socialization have traditionally emphasized older demographics and conventional media, leaving impact of social media on younger audiences largely unexplored. This gap is particularly significant given the growing reliance of KP's youth on social media for accessing political content and participating in civic activities. This study seeks to address these gaps by providing an in-depth analysis of how social media usage shapes the political socialization of KP's youth. In KP, where the youth comprise a large portion of the population, understanding how social media affects political socialization is critical. In this drive, this study seeks to examine the extent and nature of this relationship, focusing on implications for democratic engagement in the region.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the extent and patterns of social media usage among the youth in particular context (KP).
2. To explore the dimensions of political socialization, political participation, knowledge, efficacy, and attitudes among social media users.
3. To analyze the relationships and impacts of social media usage on political socialization of KP's youth.
4. To identify demographic variations in impact of social media, including differences based on age, education, and region.

Research Questions

1. What are the patterns of social media usage among the youth in particular context (KP)?
2. How do social media platforms donate to political participation & knowledge acquisition?
3. What is the impact of social media on the political efficacy and attitudes of KP's youth?
4. Are there demographic differences in how social media influences political socialization?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media's role in political engagement has been well-documented globally. Scholars such as Ohme and Vreese (2020) highlight the personalization of political media diets, while studies by Anderson (2020) focus on nuanced role of digital spaces in civic education. In Pakistan, research by Khan et al. (2021) underscores the growing influence of digital platforms in political discourse, yet regional variations, particularly in KP, remain under-researched. Social media platforms, branded by interactivity, user-generated content, have become central to political communication in the 21st century. Kaplan and Haenlein (2021) describe social media as a transformative space for fostering political discourse and mobilization. Role of social media in political socialization, a process over which individuals acquire political values, attitudes, and behaviors has garnered significant academic attention, particularly in the context of youth engagement. The political socialization, historically influenced by the traditional agents like family, peers, and educational institutions, now prominently includes digital platforms. Studies by Ohme and Vreese (2020) and Boulianne (2020) highlight the dual role of social media as both an informational resource and a participatory tool.

This study synthesizes existing literature to explore the multidimensional relationship between social media and political socialization, with a focus on its implications for youth in developing

regions like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan. The social media platforms have redefined the political landscape by bridging gaps in communication and fostering direct interaction between citizens and political actors. Anderson (2020) emphasizes the accessibility of these platforms, noting their capacity to democratize political communication. Studies by Valenzuela et al. (2012) and Gil Zúñiga et al. (2012) illustrate how platforms like Facebook and Twitter facilitate diverse forms of political expression, from sharing opinions to participating in the online campaigns. However, the influence of social media is not uniformly positive. Echo chambers, as highlighted by Sunstein (2023), and the proliferation of misinformation (Guess et al., 2019) are significant challenges that undermine the quality of political discourse. These phenomena are particularly pronounced in the regions with lower levels of digital literacy, such as KP. In this connection, the Political socialization encompasses four primary dimensions: participation, knowledge, efficacy, and attitudes.

The following sections detail how social media influences each dimension. Political participation refers to activities that allow the individuals to express opinions and influence political processes. Boulianne (2020) found that the social media enhances participation by lowering barriers to entry and providing platforms for activism. Kietzmann et al. (2023) argue that the interactive nature of social media fosters civic engagement, particularly among younger demographics. In Pakistan, studies such as Ahmad et al. (2019) highlight role of social media in mobilizing youth for protests and campaigns. However, the effectiveness of this participation varies across the urban and rural contexts, with rural youth often facing infrastructural and cultural barriers. Social media serves as a repository of political information, offering users access to diverse viewpoints and real-time updates. Kahne and Bowyer (2018) found that social media enhances the political knowledge by exposing users to debates and educational content. However, Guess et al. (2019) caution that the quality of information on these platforms is inconsistent, necessitating critical media literacy. In KP, where traditional media often dominates, social media has emerged as an alternative source of political knowledge.

Studies by Hussain et al. (2018) suggest that social media platforms provide youth with insights into both local and global political issues. Political efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to effect political outcomes. The internal efficacy relates to self-confidence in understanding politics, while external efficacy concerns perceived responsiveness of political systems. Kahne and Bowyer (2018) note that social media fosters efficacy by aiding direct interface with political actors and peers. In KP, digital platforms have empowered youth by providing tools for civic engagement. Ahmad et al. (2019) highlights those structural inequalities, such as limited internet access in rural areas, affect levels of efficacy. Social media impacts political attitudes by exposing users to diverse perspectives. Valenzuela et al. (2012) and Zúñiga et al. (2012) emphasize the role of social media in shaping opinions through discussions and debates. Sunstein (2023) warns of risks associated with echo chambers, where users exposed only to like-minded views, reinforcing biases. In KP, social media plays a dual role, it broadens perspectives for urban youth, rural users often encounter challenges in accessing diverse viewpoints due to algorithmic biases and limited content diversity.

The KP, a region with a rich cultural heritage and dynamic socio-political environment, presents unique challenges and opportunities for the digital political socialization. Studies by Khan and Shahbaz (2015) highlight the increasing penetration of social media in KP, particularly among urban youth. However, the region's socio-cultural dynamics, characterized by traditional values and varying levels of digital literacy, create disparities in how youth engage with social media. While social media offers unprecedented opportunities for political socialization, it also poses challenges: Limited access to technology in rural KP exacerbates inequalities. The spread of fake news undermines the informed decision-making. Algorithmic

biases limit the exposure to diverse perspectives. This study draws on Giddens' Structuration Theory, which emphasizes reciprocal relationship between individuals and social structures. Social media, as a structuring medium, both enables and constrains political actions. This framework is complemented by the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which examines how individuals actively use media to fulfill their needs, including political engagement. While it enhances political awareness and engagement, quality of political socialization is depending on content authenticity and user literacy. The findings align with global research but climax unique challenges in KP, limited digital infrastructure and socio-political constraints.

Figure I Theoretical Framework
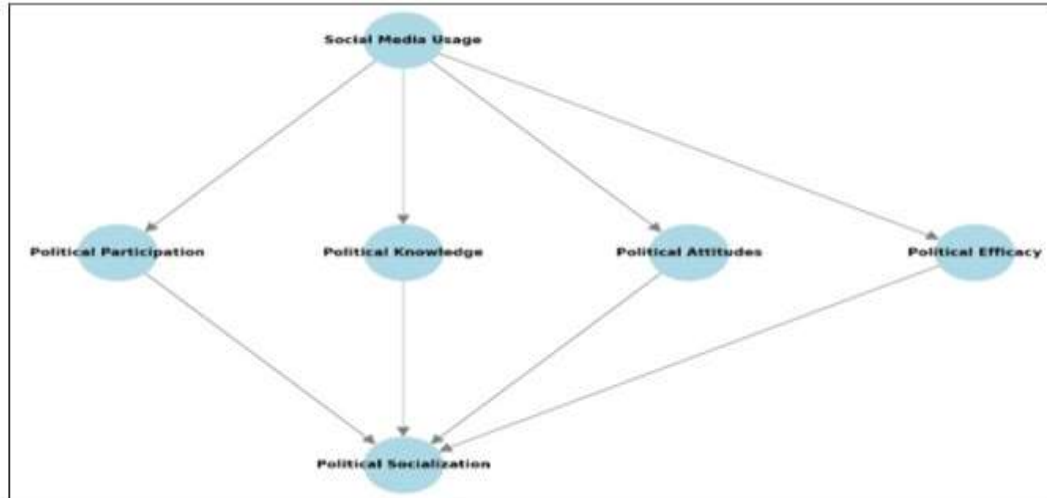
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to investigate the relationship between social media usage and political socialization among youth in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan. The design allows for a snapshot of current behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions, providing empirical evidence for the relationships between key variables. The target population comprises youth aged 18-40 residing in urban and rural regions of KP. This demographic is relevant due to their active social media engagement and pivotal role in shaping political future of the region. Using Cochran's formula for determining sample size with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, the study includes 385 respondents. The sample ensures representation across: Urban (50.1%) and rural (49.9%). In this linking, Matric/Intermediate, Bachelor/Master, MPhil/PhD. Divided into four categories: 18-25, 26-32, 33-39, and 40-46. A stratified random sampling method was employed to ensure representation from the diverse geographic and socio-demographic backgrounds. A structured questionnaire was developed, comprising two sections: Collects information on respondents' age, gender, education, and region. Measures social media usage and political socialization dimensions using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree).

The questionnaire items were adapted from validated scales used in prior studies (e.g., Boulianne, 2020; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012). The pilot testing was conducted with 30 respondents to ensure clarity and reliability, resulting in minor revisions. Data were collected through online and in-person surveys to accommodate the diverse geographic and technological access of respondents. Urban participants primarily responded online, while rural respondents were approached via in-person interviews. Thus, the participation was voluntary, with informed consent obtained from all respondents. Data confidentiality and anonymity were ensured. Collected data were analyzed using SPSS software to test study's hypotheses and

address research objectives. The following techniques were applied: descriptive statistics (mean, SD) summarized respondents' demographics and levels of social media usage and political socialization. in this regard, Pearson correlation coefficients examined linear relationships between social media usage and political socialization dimensions. Multiple linear regression determined extent to which social media usage predicts political socialization.

Hypotheses of Study
1. H01: Social media usage has no significant impact on political participation.
2. H02: Social media usage has no significant relationship with political knowledge.
3. H03: Social media usage does not significantly influence political efficacy.
4. H04: Social media usage has no significant effect on political attitudes.
5. H05: There are no significant differences in urban and rural respondents about variables.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Descriptive Analysis
- Region of Respondents: Urban (50.1%) and Rural (49.9%).
- Education Levels: Matric/Intermediate (33.2%), BA/MA (33.5%), MPhil/PhD (33.2%).
- Age Groups: Evenly distributed across four categories (18-46 years).

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Social Media Usage	6.003	0.442
Political Participation	5.992	0.517
Political Knowledge	6.053	0.552
Political Efficacy	5.968	0.489
Political Attitude	5.989	0.500

Correlation Analysis
The Pearson correlation coefficients revealed strong positive relationships between social media usage and political variables:
- Political Participation: $r = 0.986$, $p < 0.01$
- Political Knowledge: $r = 0.955$, $p < 0.01$
- Political Efficacy: $r = 0.978$, $p < 0.01$
- Political Attitude: $r = 0.991$, $p < 0.01$

Regression Analysis
The regression analysis showed that social media usage explains significant variances in political variables:
- Political Socialization ($R^2 = 0.981$): 98.1% variance explained.
- Political Participation ($R^2 = 0.972$): Strong predictive impact.
- Political Knowledge ($R^2 = 0.912$): Substantial influence.
- Political Efficacy ($R^2 = 0.957$): Very strong association.
- Political Attitudes ($R^2 = 0.983$): Extremely strong correlation.

Group Comparisons
- By Age: Younger respondents (18-25) showed the higher political socialization scores compared to older groups.

- By Education: Higher education levels were inversely related with political socialization scores.

DISCUSSION

The analysis revealed high levels of social media engagement among KP youth, consistent with global trends of digital adoption. Platforms like Facebook and Instagram dominate the digital landscape, acting as primary sources of political information and interaction. These findings align with Boulianne (2020); Anderson (2020), who emphasize increasing reliance of youth on digital platforms for political engagement. The high usage rates in urban areas underscore the role of infrastructure and access in facilitating digital connectivity. The study found a strong positive relationship ($r = 0.986$) amid social media usage and political participation, supporting the notion digital platforms lower barriers to civic engagement. Social media enables youth to participate in protests, petitions, and online campaigns, as highlighted by Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2012). However, the urban-rural disparity suggests that infrastructural challenges in rural KP hinder equitable participation. This finding calls for targeted interventions to bridge the digital divide. The social media was shown to enhance political knowledge amid youth ($r = 0.955$), reflecting its role as an informational hub.

These results are consistent with Kahne and Bowyer (2018), who argue that exposure to diverse content on social media fosters the political awareness. However, the spread of misinformation remains a critical concern, as noted by Guess et al. (2019). For KP, where traditional media often lacks diversity, social media provides an alternative avenue for political learning, albeit one that requires critical media literacy to navigate effectively. The study confirmed a strong relationship ($r = 0.978$) between social media usage and political efficacy. By enabling direct interaction with political actors and peers, social media fosters a sense of agency among youth, consistent with Sunstein's (2023) work on participatory democracy. However, rural youth report lower efficacy, likely due to systemic barriers such as limited internet access and sociocultural constraints. The influence of social media on the political attitudes ($r = 0.991$) highlights its ability to shape the perceptions and opinions. Platforms expose users to diverse perspectives, fostering nuanced political views. However, the risk of echo chambers, as highlighted by Sunstein (2023), remains significant, mainly in rural areas with limited exposure to diverse viewpoints. Urban respondents exhibited higher levels of social media usage and political socialization compared to their rural diverse counterparts.

This disparity underscores the impact of digital infrastructure upon the political engagement. Policymakers should prioritize extending internet access and digital literacy programs to rural areas to promote equitable participation. In this connection, younger respondents (18-25 years) demonstrated greater engagement with social media and higher political socialization scores. This finding aligns with Anderson (2020), who notes that the younger demographics are more adaptable to digital platforms. In this drive, efforts to sustain this engagement as youth transition into adulthood could involve integrating civic education into the digital campaigns. An inverse relationship between education levels and political socialization was observed, with less-educated respondents reporting higher engagement. This could reflect the accessibility of social media as a platform for informal learning and participation, which compensates for formal educational gaps. The results affirm the reciprocal relationship between the social structures and individual agency, as posited by Giddens. In this connection, the social media platforms act as structuring mediums, enabling youth to navigate political processes while simultaneously shaping the digital political environment. Consequently, this theory's emphasis on active media use is evident in the study's findings.

Youth in KP use social media to fulfill needs for political information, participation, community building. The varying levels of engagement across demographics highlight the contextual factors that influence media use. The spread of fake news poses a significant threat to informed political engagement. Developing critical media literacy programs is essential to mitigate this issue. The urban-rural disparity in social media usage political socialization reflects systemic inequalities in digital infrastructure and access. Addressing this divide is crucial for fostering inclusive political participation. Traditional norms in rural KP may limit extent to which youth can engage with social media for political purposes. Efforts to address these barriers should involve community-level interventions that align with cultural values. Social media is a powerful tool for political socialization among youth in KP, enabling access to information and fostering engagement. Still, its potential is undermined by challenges such as misinformation and limited digital literacy. To harness its benefits, stakeholders must address these issues through the targeted educational and policy interventions.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that social media is a catalyst for political socialization among KP youth. The findings of study underscore the potential of social media to transform the political landscape of KP by empowering youth as active and informed citizens. However, realizing this potential requires concerted efforts from policymakers, educators, social media platforms, and communities to address structural and cultural barriers. Findings align with global studies emphasizing the pivotal role of social media in political engagement. Still, the unique context of KP, marked by traditional societal norms and varying access to digital resources—adds depth to these insights. While urban youth exhibit higher engagement, rural youth face barriers due to infrastructural limitations. By fostering a more inclusive and informed digital environment, social media can serve as catalyst for democratic empowerment and social change in KP and beyond. To maximize this potential:

1. The educational institutions should integrate digital literacy into their curricula, focusing on critical media consumption, fact-checking, and responsible online behavior.
2. The social media platforms and civil society organizations should collaborate to design campaigns that educate youth about political systems, rights, and responsibilities.
3. Governments and policymakers should prioritize infrastructure development to expand internet access in rural areas. Public-private partnerships play pivotal role in achieving this goal.

Implications & Future Research

1. Implementing initiatives to improve critical thinking and media literacy skills can help youth navigate misinformation and make informed decisions.
2. Expanding internet access in rural areas is vital for reducing the digital divide and promoting equitable political engagement.
3. Leveraging social media for civic education can sustain and enhance youth engagement, particularly in underserved areas.
4. Investigate impact of specific social media platforms (e.g., TikTok, YouTube) on political socialization. Explore role of cultural and linguistic diversity in shaping online political engagement.
5. Analyze the impact of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality, on political behaviors.

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