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Political Information Sharing through Facebook: A survey of Pakistani Netizens

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ABSTRACT

People engage in online political debates through Facebook and online political information sharing leads to offline political participation. This study aims to analyse the use and influence of Facebook on the information-sharing practices of Pakistani netizens. A quantitative research design based on an online questionnaire survey was used to collect data from Pakistani netizens who were also active users of Facebook. Data showed that the majority of the respondents positively used Facebook during an election to enhance their political knowledge and participation. They also forwarded political information and influenced their friends to vote for a specific candidate in the election. The Facebook campaign had a positive influence on election results as well as the turnout of the election. Findings also revealed that demographic factors of respondents did not have any effect on their information sharing practices during a general election. Moreover, caution should be exhibited to avoid posting derogatory and appalling comments and fake news. The use of Facebook among educated netizens in the Pakistani General election may fill the gap in the psephology and context of a developing country. Findings may apply to other developing countries with similar contexts.

Keywords: *Social Media-Facebook, Political Communication, Political Participation, Digital Democracy, Pakistan General Election 2018, Information Sharing; Internet Citizens, Netizens*

Introduction

Political communication is considered an important function of the political system. It is the use of communication to affect citizens' knowledge, opinions, and action related to political issues including campaigning for elections. Initially, it was face-to-face communication between politics and citizens though specialized structure got developed over time. The authoritarian regimes used to monopolize these structures to manipulate and control information. However, the emergence of democracy insisted on freedom of speech, press, and communication. In democratic states, communication is of vital importance as every citizen/voter, public office holder, and political leader is dependent on information received. Internet citizens have also termed netizens who are active participants in the online community and have changed the information-sharing landscape from traditional media to electronic and social media due to the affordable access to digital technologies. Advancement in ICT gave an impetus to the process of political communication. Consequently, different social networking sites got developed for sharing and receiving information. Due to the rapid flow of information in the age of social media, the processes of political socialization, political mobilization, and political participation are enhanced which are the backbone of all democracies of the world. Despite strict control on print and electronic media, information can be conveyed via social media platforms, which is beyond the control of modern regimes. Social media is used for political communication due to its competitive advantage over traditional media such as electronic and print media, election rallies, and posters, etc. Political strategies have been changing due to social media and election campaigns being brought to wider coverage. Internet citizens and other political forces enjoy greater freedom of expression while using Facebook (Salvador, Vivar, de Vera, Inocian, and Rosaroso, 2017). The proliferation of social networking sites (SNSs) has made sharing of information (Loureiro and Ribeiro, 2017) more convenient. These sites are the emerging platforms to socialize and interact with internet citizens on political issues in Pakistan (Masiha, Habiba, Abbas, Saud, and Ariadi, 2018).

Facebook is regarded as a new voter bank for politicians, which allows individuals to share their opinions and interests (Kanagavel and Chandrasekaran, 2014). It is one of the most accessible and widely used SNS by candidates to communicate with and influence voters with their ideas, plans, opinions, and ultimately get a vote in return. Without making personal contact between voters and political aspirants, Facebook assists the political process by bringing the stakeholders closer to each other, casting more votes, and promoting candidates' agendas (Pariabras, 2013). Facebook is a political instrument used by many politicians for their political promotion and representation of their ideology to the masses (Sánchez, et al. 2018). Facebook assists users to communicate with each other in an online environment (Bene, 2017). It also offers a shared space to its users to interact and share their opinions on different social and political issues. Particularly, Facebook groups have networking ability and users may share their political information online (Chan, 2016).

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan came into being in 1947. The process of democratization in-country faced many setbacks due to certain domestic factors since its inception. The first constitution of the country was introduced in 1956 i.e. nine years after its inception. The first indirect elections in Pakistan were held in

1954 i.e. seven years after its birth. The first constitution was abrogated in 1958 and the second constitution was adopted in 1962, which was eventually succeeded by the 1973 constitution of the country. Pakistan has a parliamentary system of government as per the 1973 constitution. The process of democratic transition and consolidation has never been smooth due to successive military interventions covering more than three decades. Civil-military conflict eased in the country in 2008. General Elections were held in the country in 2008 and 2013 respectively. Civilian governments formed as a result of these elections completed their five-year tenure for the very first time in the history of the country followed by the 2018 General elections. Due to excessive use of social media in general and Facebook in particular, the General Elections of 2018 were different from previous ones. It enormously changed the political campaigns of political parties and the participation of voters.

Facebook is considered a good tool for campaigns, mobilization, and political communications between candidates and voters (David, San Pascual, and Torres, 2019; Hussein and Hafez, 2016; Sánchez, et.al 2018). Facebook is being used as an advertising tool for the masses and politicians of developing countries with limited resources. Hence, the current study assessed the influence of Facebook on political information sharing during the 2018 Pakistani General Elections.

Literature Review

We live in a digital democracy that focuses on the use of technologies to increase citizens' participation in the political process. Social media platforms such as Facebook are used to create connections to share content online and exchange private messages among users. Several studies have been conducted by social scientists regarding the effect of social media on voters' participation. Facebook is considered a good tool for breaking voters' uncertainties about candidates and for deciding on the most credible candidate (Pei, Pan, and Skitmore, 2018; Salvador et al., 2017).

BagićBabac and Podobnik (2018) discussed the implementation of different ways election campaign strategies via social networking sites among political parties for effective communication with Croatian citizens. Findings reveal that political messages with neutral content are better to convince voters. It is also noted that citizen engagement is increased through the communication of political stockholders. Using Facebook as an electoral tool revealed that internet users download candidates' advertising content, and share their viewpoints on different political groups. Internet users may engage in political discussions and get an update regarding current affairs via Facebook (David, San Pascual, and Torres, 2019) to be more socially and politically informed (Hussein and Hafez, 2016).

Sánchez, et.al (2018) discussed that candidates get many followers who may help them to access Facebook as an electoral device. Facebook might assist to strengthen their campaigns rendering personal interests along with sharing voters' opinions and thoughts. Borah (2016) argued that inclinations and advancement towards social media platforms seem to be corroding the significance of print and electronic media. Especially the political communication strategies opted by Obama in the 2008 US elections have changed the scenario of electoral campaigns globally due to the use of social media. Social media platforms provide freedom to voters to provide their feedback through two-way communication.

Facebook has been playing a key role to assist voters and candidates to communicate effectively. The use of Facebook for political communication also influenced the conventional political participation of the masses. Thus both candidates and voters have been using Facebook for elections. Research demonstrated that social media sites have a significant impact on citizens' attitudes and political behavior (Bode et al., 2014). Wani and Alone (2014) in their study, "A Survey on Impact of Social Media on Election System", projected that now the trends of social networking sites users would determine the results of the election. The urbanization and adoption of technology may lead to an increase in the number of Facebook followers. The candidate and his/her party that have an impression on Facebook lead to more probability to win the election. A well-designed political strategy through social media is vital to make election campaigns a victory among politicians.

President Roa Duterte won the 2016 presidential election in the Philippines due to the effective use of Facebook among the young generation even with scarce resources. The Philippines had around 47 million Facebook users with the second largest users in Southeast Asia. Facebook is more popular among Filipinos as compared to other SNS. Through the use of the Facebook campaign, President Roa Duterte had got a margin of 12 percent winning votes from each of the three other candidates during the election (Pariabras, 2013). Lama (2013) argued that Facebook also brings politicians and political parties closer to their potential voters in the context of the Indian election. It allows voters to converse with candidates and other stakeholders along with participation in online political discussions.

Hussein and Hafez (2016) highlighted the importance of social networks' role in general and Facebook in particular during the political processes in Egypt. They determined the influences of new media use on political knowledge, participation, and voting decisions of youths during the Egyptian Presidential Election Campaign. Findings revealed that a comprehensive communication strategy and a deliberate plan were vital to deal with important political issues through social networks. Working on the activation and development of the youth's political interaction through Facebook that may open direct channels with officials and decision-makers by using official pages. Similarly, Vitak et al. (2011) analyzed the influence of Facebook use on the political mobilization of Nigerian youths in the 2011 Elections.

Yang and DeHart (2016) conducted a questionnaire survey of US college students after Election 2012 to examine the effect of their psychological factors related to social media on their online political participation. It is interesting to note that political self-efficacy, social media participation, and online social capital were positively influenced by online political participation. Moreover, the political use of Facebook was a positive indicator of online political participation.

Literature is available on the use and influence of Facebook in the Pakistani context among different user groups. However, only a few studies are available on the use of social media especially Facebook for political purposes. Ahmad, Alvi, and Ittefaq (2019) explored the relationship between political activities and political awareness among social media users in Pakistan. They investigate the effect of online political activities on political efficacy and real-life political participation among university students in rural Pakistan. Results show that citizens use social media for political awareness and to participate in real-life political activities. Moreover, online

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political activities strongly correlate to political awareness and offline political participation among the younger generations in rural areas of Pakistan. Malik and Haider (2019) consider Facebook as an influential forum for active citizenship among its users. These users may educate people through the distribution of information, participation in political discussions by emphasizing their role as active citizens. Saud (2020) conducted a study of Pakistani youth participation in political activities regarding their voting behavior among youth in the General Election. Findings show a relationship between, social activities, companion's political opinion, and political learning. Moreover, it found that Pakistani youth is better politically informed, interested to take part in political activities and discussions. They also acknowledge the role of peer groups sensitize the community on social issues.

It is concluded that the role of Facebook for political mobilization, information sharing, and participation has been recognized across the globe. Social media contributed to the electoral process and all stakeholders used it to tap into opportunities for effective political communication. Candidates also used Facebook to a great extent to engage with voters and constituents. However, there is a gap in the literature on political information sharing practices in the electoral process in the context of a developing country.

Research Objectives

The current study explores the use and effect of Facebook on information sharing practices of Pakistani netizens during the 2018 general election. It also examines the use of Facebook to understand voters' attitudes and participation patterns in the election. To meet the objectives of the current study, the following research questions were formed:

- What was the frequency of Facebook use among netizens and their level of interest during the 2018 General Elections of Pakistan?
- How did the netizens use Facebook for electoral activities in the 2018 General Elections of Pakistan?
- How did the netizens perceive information sharing through Facebook during the 2018 General Elections of Pakistan?
- What was the difference among the respondents' opinions about information sharing through Facebook based on their gender, age, and level of education during the 2018 General Elections of Pakistan?

Research Design

This research is an exploratory study that aims to investigate the use of Facebook and its influence on political communication and information sharing among netizens through Facebook during the 2018 General Elections of Pakistan. For the study, a quantitative research design based on the survey method was adopted. A questionnaire was used as an instrument of data collection and was developed with the help of relevant literature. Literature also established that most studies about the use of Facebook for political communication or political information sharing used survey questionnaires for data collection (Hussein and Hafez, 2016; Kanagavel and Chandrase Karan, 2014; Loureiro and Ribeiro, 2017; Masiha et al., 2018; Oyesomi, Ahmadu and Itsekor, 2014; Salvador et al., 2017).

Thus the current study used a structured questionnaire that was consisted of two parts; the first comprised of demographic information while the second part was related to the use of Facebook among voters for electoral activities and the influence of Facebook on information sharing in the 2018 General Elections of Pakistan. A five-point Likert scale was used. An online questionnaire was distributed after the election i.e. from January 7, 2019, to February 5, 2019.

The population of the study consisted of Pakistani netizens who cast their votes and used Facebook in the election. An online survey questionnaire was used to distribute/share among different online groups. Researchers shared the link to an online questionnaire among Pakistani voters. Total 320 questionnaires were received and 293 useable responses were entered in SPSS for data analysis. To ensure internal consistency and reliability of the scale, Cronbach-*alpha* value was calculated (0.828) and it was found reasonable to acquire survey data.

Findings

Demographic Information

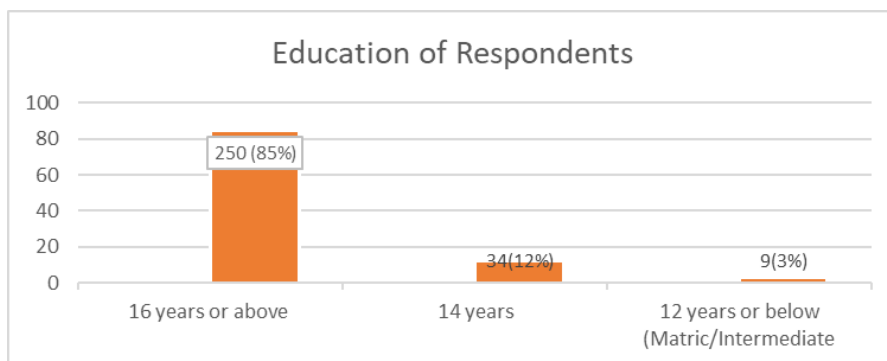
The current study was conducted to investigate the use and influence of Facebook on political information sharing in the 2018 General Elections of Pakistan. The first section of the questionnaire was related to respondents' demographic information. Statistical data explained that among 293 total respondents, 152 (52%) were male and 141 (48%) were females. The percentage also showed that the ratio of male and female respondents was almost equal and had a difference of only 4% based on their gender. Moreover, the age of the respondents was divided into five categories ranging from 30 to 60 years and above (Table 1).

Table 1. Frequency of the age of the respondents

Age	Male	Female	Total	Percent
Up to 30	79	80	159	54.3
31-40	47	39	86	29.4
41-50	13	12	25	8.5
51-60	6	8	14	4.8
61 and above	7	2	9	3.1
Total	152	141	293	100.0

More than half of the respondents, 159(54.3%), were up to 30 years of age, representing the young population of the country. Respondents belonging to 31 to 50 years of age were 111(37.9%), while only 23(7.9%) respondents were of 50 years or above.

Fig. 1. Qualification of the respondents



It was also noted that the majority of respondents i.e. 250(85%), were highly qualified and had postgraduate (16 years or above) education level. They had 16 years or more qualifications including MPhil (18 years) and Ph.D. degrees. Only 9(3%) respondents had 12 years or below qualification (Figure 1). Data showed that most of the respondents were well qualified and it was assumed that they might better know the use of Facebook for informative purposes.

Frequency of Facebook use among voters and their level of interest during 2018 General Elections of Pakistan

Respondents were asked about the frequency of Facebook use in their daily routine. Out of 293 total respondents, 216 (73.7%) reported that they used Facebook several times a day or were always logged in. It means a majority of respondents had a keen interest in this social media tool.

Table 2. Frequently of Facebook Use among Respondents

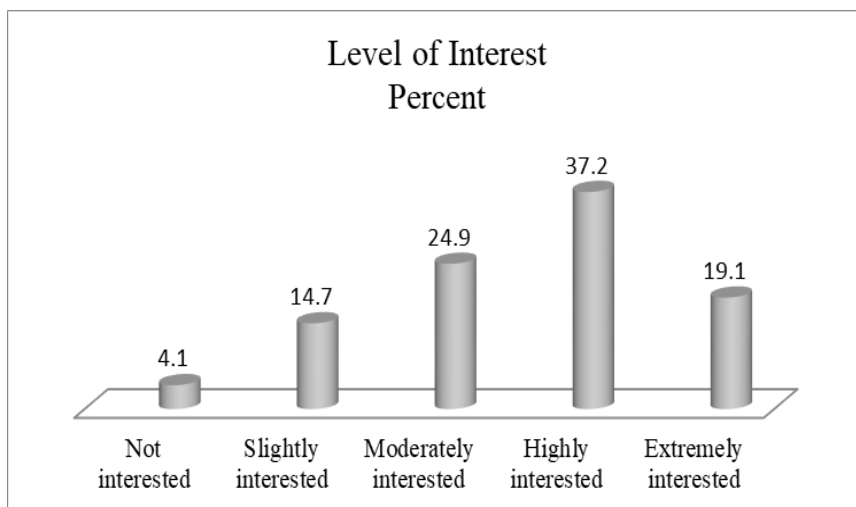
Facebook use	Frequency	Percent
Rarely	17	5.8
1-2 times in a week	16	5.5
Once a day	44	15.0
Several times in a day	123	42.0
Always logged in	93	31.7
Total	293	100.0

It is noted that one-fifth of respondents i.e. 60(20.5%) used Facebook once a day or once or twice a week. Only 17 (5.8%) rarely used Facebook in their daily life. Findings showed that the majority of respondents were active users of Facebook as almost 89 percent used it daily.

To know the level of interest of the respondents, a five-point scale ranging from not interested to extremely interested was used. Two hundred and eighty-one i.e. (96%) respondents were interested in the 2018 General Elections of Pakistan with different levels ranging from slightly interested to extremely interested. Data showed that 109 (37.2%) respondents were highly interested and 73(24.9%) were moderately

interested. It was worth noting that almost one-fifth of respondents, 56(19.1%) were extremely interested in the Pakistan General Elections, 2018.

Fig.2.Respondents' level of interest in Pakistan General Elections 2018



Data revealed that only 43(14.7%) respondents were slightly interested and 12(4%) respondents were not interested at all in the 2018 General Elections of Pakistan. (Fig. 2).

Use of Facebook for electoral activities during General Elections, 2018

When the people were asked about the use of Facebook for their election-related activities on a nominal scale (Table 3), the respondents could check all the statements relevant to them. Data showed that 219(74.7%) respondents used Facebook to see and upload election-related pictures during the general election 2018, while 182(61.2%) used it to search election-related information. It is noted that 179 (61.1%) respondents used Facebook to upload or watch election-related videos and also participated in political discussions. Respondents also used Facebook to like, share and comment on their friends' posts about a political party/ a candidate during election 2018.

It is interesting to note that more than half of the respondents, 154(52.6%), forwarded election-related information to others and even 127(43.3%) respondents were able to convince their friends to support a party/candidate in an election. Data showed that 113(31.6%) respondents liked to post/upload election-related information on their Facebook profile pages.

Table 3. Frequency Distribution of Use of Facebook for Electoral Activities during General Elections, 2018

Use of Facebook During Election	Frequency	Percent
Upload or see an election related picture	219	74.7
Search for election related information	182	62.1
Upload or watch an election related video	179	61.1
Participate in/read election related discussions	179	61.1
Post a 'like', message or a comment on someone else's message on profile page of a political party/candidate	176	60.1
"Friend" or "Like" the page of a political party/candidate	170	58
Forward election related information to others	154	52.6
Search for information on the page of a political party/candidate	136	46.4
Ask a friend to support a party/candidate	127	43.3
Post/upload election related information on your profile page	113	38.6
Create or join a Facebook group for or against a political party/candidate	72	24.6
Total	293	100

On the other hand, only 72 (24.6%) respondents liked to create or join a Facebook group for or against a political party/candidate. The frequency of the above-mentioned responses revealed that people used Facebook not only to enhance their election-related information but also motivated their friends to do so during the General Elections, 2018, and positively used this social media tool.

Perception of voters about information sharing through Facebook in Pakistan's General Elections, 2018

Respondents were also asked to express their opinion about information sharing through Facebook during the 2018 General Elections. Their opinion was sought on a five-point Likert scale. Respondents perceived that the Facebook campaign had a positive influence on the election results and the turnout in elections with the highest mean value (M=3.79). Respondents thought that Facebook enhanced their political

knowledge (M=3.74) during the election and keep them abreast with the latest updates and news.

Data revealed that respondents' online political engagements lead to their offline political activities. Respondents thought that the use of Facebook enhanced their participation in political activities (M=3.73).

Table 4. Respondents' Opinion about Information Sharing through Facebook during General Elections, 2018

Statements	Mean	SD
Facebook campaign has an influence on the election results	3.79	.948
Facebook campaign has a positive influence on the turn out in elections	3.79	.881
Facebook enhances political knowledge of the users	3.74	.907
Facebook enhances participation of users in offline/practical political activities	3.73	.836
Facebook is a good place for political engagement of citizens	3.67	.959
Information shared via Facebook is credible	3.00	.995

Scale: Strongly disagree=1, Disagree=2, Neutral=3, Agree=4, Strongly agree=5

Data showed that respondents considered Facebook as a good place for political engagement of netizens with a 3.67 mean value on a five-point scale. It demonstrated that Facebook is a favorite avenue among respondents to get information and they perceived it as an appropriate tool for political participation during the 2018 General Elections in Pakistan. Astonishingly, respondents gave the lowest mean score to the statement '*information shared via Facebook is credible*' (M=3.00). It means that they had issues with the credibility of Facebook information. This point needs to be addressed in future researches on the subject.

The difference among respondents' opining about information sharing through Facebook based on their demographics during General Elections, 2018

To meet the objectives of the study about the opinion of respondents regarding information sharing through Facebook during General Elections 2018 based on their demographic characteristics, inferential statistical tests were applied.

One-way ANOVA was applied to assess respondents' opinions regarding information sharing through Facebook during an election about their level of education.

Table5: Difference of Respondents' Opinion about Information Sharing through Facebook Based on Education Level

	Mean	SD	F	Sig.
12 years or below (Matric/Intermediate)	3.45	.975	1.810	.166
14 years (BA/BCom)	3.43	.92215		
16 years or above (MA/MPhil/PhD)	3.65	.623		

Mean, standard deviation, F score, and *p*-value were calculated. Education level was arranged in the following three categories: 12 years or below (Matric/Intermediate), 14 years (BA/B. Com), and 16 years or above (MA/MPhil/Ph.D.).

Data revealed that *the p-value* or value of significance based on education difference was 0.166, which was higher than the alpha value (0.05). This high value showed that there was no significant difference in the opinion of the respondents about Facebook based on their education level (Table 5). Respondents with different qualifications had the same opinion about information sharing through Facebook during the 2018 General Elections.

To assess the difference of opinion among respondents who had different age groups regarding information sharing through Facebook during the General Elections, 2018, one-way ANOVA was applied. Mean, standard deviation, F score, and *p* value were calculated.

Table 6: Difference of Respondents' Opinion Regarding Information Sharing through Facebook Based on Age

Age	Mean	SD	F	Sig
Up to 30	3.60	.680	1.229	.298
31-40	3.65	.633		
41-50	3.74	.723		
51-60	3.63	.589		
61 and above	3.18	.925		

Results showed that *the p-value* or value of significance based on age level difference was 0.298 which was higher than the alpha value of 0.05. Value of significance indicated that there was no significant difference in the opinion of the respondents about information sharing through Facebook based on their age. People of different age groups equally liked Facebook and had the same opinion about Facebook as a tool to share information during General Elections, 2018.

To evaluate the difference between male and female opinions regarding information sharing through Facebook, an independent sample t-test was used.

Table7: Difference of Respondents' Opinion Regarding Information Sharing through Facebook based on Gender

Gender	Mean	SD	T	Sig
Male	3.7	.703	2.414	.596
Female	3.5	.633	2.423	

The results showed that the value of significance based on gender difference was 0.596, which was higher than the alpha value (0.05). This high value exhibited that there was no significant difference in the opinion of the respondents about the use of Facebook based on their gender. Both males and females had the same opinion about political information sharing through Facebook during the election.

Table 8: Multiple regression analysis by the influence of Facebook during Pakistan general Elections

Variable	B	t	P
Perception about Facebook during general election			
Gender	-.107	-1.811	.071
Age	-.102	-1.686	.093
Level of education	.093	1.639	.102
Level of interest in Elections	.281	4.905	*.000
Political ideology	-.052	-.899	.370

*Significant ($p < .05$)

The regression output shows that the 'level of interest in Elections' predictor variable is statistically significant because its p-value equals 0.000. On the other hand, gender, age, and level of education are not statistically significant because their p-values (0.071, 0.093, 0.102) are greater than the usual significance level of 0.05. These values are higher than the alpha value (0.05) and showed that there was no significant difference in the influence of Facebook during Pakistan general Elections based on respondents' gender, age, and level of education. They have the same opinion based on their gender, age, and level of education regarding the influence of Facebook during Pakistan general Elections.

Discussion

The current study mainly focused on the use of Facebook for electoral activities and its influence on respondents' political information sharing through Facebook during Pakistani General Elections 2018. Pakistan has more than 65 percent of its youth below the age group of 35 years and they are a frequent user of social media platforms especially Facebook that plays a vital role in their lives. Both male and female respondents equally took interest to use Facebook and the literature also supported that Facebook was one of the most popular social media tools among the youth (Bene, 2017). It is noted that the majority of respondents were active users of

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Facebook as almost 89 percent used it daily during the election. To know the level of interest of the respondents in the 2018 General Elections, a five-point Likert scale ranging from not interested to extremely interested was used. Almost 96 percent of respondents were interested in Pakistani General Elections, 2018, with different levels from slightly interested to extremely interested.

Most of the respondents enthusiastically used Facebook for electoral activities during the election to watch/upload election-related pictures/videos and to search for information about elections and politics. They also participated in political discussions and like/share/comment on their friends' posts about a political party or a candidate during the election. They also forwarded election-related information to others and even influenced their friend to vote for a specific party/candidate in the election. It is noted that in the local context voters also relied on print and electronic media to discern whom to vote for. Literature established that Facebook played a key role in the election and candidates design their political communication strategies accordingly (Salvador et al, 2017; David, et al., 2019). These findings are supported by Masiha et al. (2018) who highlighted that Facebook is widely used for political communication. The majority of respondents were induced to use Facebook not only to enhance their election-related knowledge and share information but also to motivate their friends to do the same during elections and positively use this social media tool. Some respondents also liked to create or join a Facebook group for or against a political party/candidate. Their use of Facebook for electoral activities revealed that they positively used this social media tool to keep them up-to-date about political information and encouraged their friends to participate in political activities.

Political parties and citizens used Facebook to form a public opinion (Choden, 2019). Respondents also perceived that the Facebook campaign had a positive influence not only on the election results but also on the turnout rate in elections with the highest mean value. They also showed keen interest to use Facebook for enhancing their political knowledge and participation. They thought that Facebook was a good place for political engagement that lead to their offline political activities. Facebook has a significant influence on the voting behavior of developing countries' voters too (Latif, 2018). Facebook has also proved to be a favorite informative tool among respondents that kept them abreast about political news during elections. Facebook has been used to predict individual voting intention by parsimonious political likes (Kristensen, et al.,2017). Candidates' ability to acquire Facebook "likes" is a significant factor that boosts their electoral performance.

The findings of the current study indicated that they believed in the credibility of information shared via Facebook with the lowest mean score and researchers should explore it in the future. According to Reuters Institute Digital News Report, Brazilian citizens have more apprehensions regarding fake news spread on social media (McCarthy, 2019).

The result of the current study indicates that Pakistani netizens are neutral about the credibility of information shared via Facebook with a 3.0 mean value on the five-point Likert Scale.

Another purpose of the study was to assess whether qualification, gender, and age of the respondents had any effect on their opinion regarding information sharing through Facebook. Findings revealed that there was no significant difference in the

opinion of the respondents about information sharing through Facebook based on their age, gender, and qualification. Spreading politically mobilized messages on Facebook persuades the electorate to vote. However, its intensity depends on voters' social characteristics and demography (Bond, Settle, et al., 2017).

The findings of the current study indicated that respondents had the same opinion about political information sharing through Facebook during the election based on their age, gender, and qualification. Respondents of different qualifications, gender, and age have equally influenced the information shared through Facebook and had the same opinion about it. However, these results contradicted with literature (Bond, et al., 2017; Mellon and Prosser, 2017;) that social and demographic factors had an effect on the voters' behaviour and attitude towards political decisions. Bond, et al. (2017) stated that besides the positive use of Facebook in the political process, some negative usages also threaten the backbone of democracy. The use of fake accounts and hate speech emerged as a major challenge affecting the pattern and quality of political communication and participation through Facebook.

Conclusion

This study provides a holistic overview of Facebook use and its influence on users during General Elections, 2018 in Pakistani politics. The results of the quantitative analysis revealed that the majority of the respondents had a post-graduate level education and belonged to a young age group of the society. This study described the influence of Facebook on netizens' political information sharing and aimed to identify the effects of Facebook, as an electoral tool, on the netizens' opinion regarding electoral candidates; and examine the effect of demographic variables on political information sharing in the election through Facebook. The present study showed that Facebook was equally important among all members of the society and people were highly interested in election-related activities in Pakistan. It is found that Pakistani youth use Facebook regularly to share, like and tag election-related pictures, videos, and posts with their friends. Respondents thought that Facebook was an informative source and they used it positively during the 2018 General Elections. The study also found that demographics of the respondents such as gender, qualification, and age did not affect their information sharing through Facebook.

The present study may be useful to guide the voters to discern whom to vote for. It may further encourage social media entrepreneurs to provide user-friendly access to netizens on the use of political campaigns. The paper recommended that there is a need to establish social media credibility as many fake political stories went viral that were mere gossips. Also, it was noted that caution should be exhibited by those who post comments as some of these comments were derogatory and appalling. The findings of the study would be helpful for politicians and political parties to design their promotional strategies according to the information-sharing behaviour of voters during the next election. They should realize the power of social media platforms and use them as an ineffective way to interact and communicate with netizens that may lead this society to digital democracy. Furthermore, the use of technology in election campaigns among educated netizens also fills the gap in peshology in the context of a developing country.

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This study is limited to active Facebook users who cast their votes in Pakistan General Elections, 2018. It used a non-random sampling technique to collect data online that represented 'online political users'/'Pakistani netizens'. The findings of the current study may not be generalized to other Pakistani voters. Moreover, this study is limited to exploring the effect of Facebook on the political information-sharing practices of Pakistani netizens during the election.

The current study has certain technological implications. It validated that technology uses to make it negative or positive. It is noted that technology has made citizens more politically and socially informed. However, it also has the potential to manipulate their opinions. Similarly, Information sharing through Facebook has many benefits along with risks for netizens in the electoral process. This may address qualitatively in future studies.

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