

SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL POLARIZATION AMONG EDUCATED YOUTH IN ISLAMABAD

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Abstract

This paper analyzed the political engagement of Pakistani millennial educated people living in Islamabad through social media as well as it investigated the connection between the political engagement and political awareness and engagement. A mixed-method design was also used and a purposively chosen sample of 150 university students was used and recruited with the help of Quaid-i-Azam University, COMSAT University, FAST University as well as the international Islamic university Islamabad. The presence of quantitative survey tools that obtained demographic data and self-reported social-media-based political engagement and open-ended survey items provided qualitative data which were complementary. The results indicate that social media serves as a focal point towards political engagement among youths, as an important medium of political expression, information exchange, and deliberation. The respondents also reported that the continuous use of the internet increased their awareness of politics and encouraged them to participate in meaningful political debates. The results showed that undergraduate or higher education contributed to political engagement as it increased political understanding; furthermore, stable employment was associated with reduced political polarization, again suggesting that one's socio-economic status, particularly employment status, affects one's political identity. In sum, the research provides insights into the roles of digital platforms, education, and employment in youth political engagement in Islamabad. The results raise the important need for initiatives to support balanced online communication, political media literacy, and accessible inclusive forms of civic engagement in the reality of Pakistan's digital society.

Keywords: Social Media, Political Participation, Youth Political Awareness, Education and Employment, Political Polarization

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Introduction

People's interest has increased with each passing year in the field and impact social media has on political participation especially educated youth. The cause and effect of social media on educated youth participation in politics is the way that social media has changed the way they consume as well as exchange political information and content through new digital media platforms, namely, Facebook. The sites have become very significant in the political life of higher educated young millennials and they have a big influence on them and how they view and interact with their surroundings.

Social media can stimulate political engagement, given that it facilitates communication and interaction among individuals. Furthermore, on social media, users have many options for different views. Beyond that, they will be able to engage with various types of political content. Social media access allows users an avenue to become more politically aware and engage in political dialogue when these users are no longer limited to mainstream media and can engage in real conversations with a global audience (Kim, 2023).

It is not automatically easy to gain access. The same characteristics which allow social media to be an effective tool of political mobilization are the ones that contribute to political misunderstanding: the existence of the algorithmic systems that filter the content depending on the interests of users, as well as the possibility to interact with other users sharing their political perspectives (Gelovani, 2023). The modern democratic states have been an object of academic interest due to the growing ideological polarization that has been witnessed among various divisions in the society. The latter polarization is often also expressed in digital space, with the help of tools like the echo chambers and filter bubbles preventing people to be exposed to opposing ideas, and thus enhancing their already established ideological standpoints.

The realization of heightened political polarization is becoming more apparent in the digital realm of political life of a nation like Pakistan. Online social networks, such as Facebook, X (previously Twitter), and YouTube, have become platforms of political interaction, the followers of specific political parties form virtual communities, the purpose of which is to spread their ideological stance and increasing partisan orientation and isolate perceived opponents.

On these Internet spaces, users develop a habit of using hashtags, viral content, and memes to express excitement or anger, thus making the Internet a war zone between incompatible ideological positions. Not only does this phenomenon reflect a new, more easily accessible avenue through which young people can indulge in politics in Pakistan, but it is also exploiting the already existing rifts within the society between the younger population of Pakistan, turning social media into a hub of civic participation and a source of even greater divisiveness.

Young people who are educated and politically informed might also exhibit forms of political polarization through their engagement and participation with political discourse on social media. When young people with higher education and political orientation enter political discourse online, they also tend to utilize or engage with political ideals more so their peers and may even have a form of socio-political capital usable in their influence on political polarization.

Algorithms on social media sift through the information presented to users based on their own past preferences which could lead users to experience a constricting scope of information. As a result, the educated youth could be 'politically reinforced' in their experiences while representative divisions in society deepen.

Moreover, social media's ability to facilitate sharing of content, organizing around issues, and engaging in conversations about a political topic makes it possible that educated youth are becoming more politically active, from participating in living discussions, to planning and organizing political action. However, the same characteristics of social media can help the spread of misinformation and extremist ideas. The ease in which to share content, alongside the difficulty in verifying information in the Internet age, may lower political participation, and exacerbate the fragmentation of political discourse (Bennett, 2012).

The connection between political divergence and social media calls for digital literacy (Milenkova and Lendzhova, 2021). Young people with higher education levels are usually more familiar with digital devices and platforms and possibly even more skilled at critically engaging with material and navigating complicated political topics. However, one general concern about cognitive and behavioral facilitation is with more access comes more information, and not all of that information is factual, true, or

unbiased. In line with this, the abundant amount of information available on the internet can cause some problems, even to the users who hold a high level of digital literacy. Therefore, to achieve a comprehensive analysis of the role played by social media in polarizing politics, there is an urge to analyze the tendencies of the more educated young generation to respond.

Social media sites have become a hub for political mobilization and organization. Educated youths, who often lead social and political movements, use the platforms to organize events, raise awareness and advocate for change (Jost, Barberá et al., 2018). Such an organizational behavior, whereby individuals or groups work together to solve a given problem or reason, can contribute to political participation and activism. On the other hand, it may also bring in polarization in political language. Mobilization events can remake the opinion of the citizens, guide the choice of the policy, and the general quality of the political discourse. As such, there are consequential implications of these dynamics on the operation of democracy itself, as well as on the cohesion in a given society.

In addition, the impact of social media on the political behavior of educated youths is not limited to engagement and mobilization, but also informative of shaping and strengthening of political views. All the exposure to political content does not allow for contemplation of alternative options. This idea is referred to as ideological entrenchment (Hogan, 2013) and it can further prevent the cultures from coming together and harm the ability to talk about important subjects. Social media does not help develop critical thinking and conversations but instead appears to have a more rigid and partisan approach to political subjects. This is only going to further incite difficulties in bringing people together politically.

Also, social media has changed the power dynamics of political communication in orthodox ways. Educated youth previously reliant on mainstream media and political institutions to receive political messages, now have direct access to political leaders, political activists and alternative sources of information. Overall, this seemingly simplification of educated youth's receiving of information seems to have a greater implication of an "impact in becoming empowered"? One that answers to viral events, whether it be a game, movie, song, artist or politician response. Due to social media's often obsession with trending, viral and emotive content, political discourse may often become more sensational than factual. Therefore, the youth might get influenced by one-sided narratives and may fail to take sound political decisions.

Social media has changed how educated youth participates in politics. However, it does create new challenges at the same time. On the one hand, it promotes greater civic engagement, discussions, and activism. On the other, it may lead to more polarization, and hardening of beliefs like ideologies. In order to address these challenges, we all want to promote critical thinking, wise action, and continued innovation enabling everyone to challenge all kinds of ideas to be heard. When such threats are not addressed, then social media cannot be used as a tool of political involvement; instead, it becomes a source of destruction.

To conclude, social media has modified the forms of political participation in educated youths which may contribute to higher participation levels in political activities, at the same time causing the challenges related to polarization. It has helped in dialogue between conservative and liberal players, creating different points of view and the tone of politics has shifted within the last ten years or so. Simultaneously, the social media has only intensified ideological differences and has made it easy to escape into the comfort of their insulated chambers of fellow believers. In order to manage the problem of polarization in the digital era and in order to encourage political engagement in the present day, educated young people need to understand how they are involved in the different spheres.

Problem Statement

The challenge is determining which variables of social media especially among educated millennials contribute to political polarization. Social media is capable of elevating political awareness and cognition, but it also allows destructive behavior to spread prolifically, and filter bubbles to enlarge. The research study endeavors to determine the mechanisms whereby political polarization is shaped by social media for educated young people.

Objectives of the Study

The goals of this research are:

1. To find out the role of social media in mobilizing youth in politics
2. To see if education affects youth involvement in politics.
3. To ascertain whether the employment status of social media users affects political polarization.

Background

Diverging ideologies are a key characteristic of polarization, which has become a dominant feature of politics today (Rekker, 2021). Social media websites help in the magnifying of these differences because they create echo chambers which reinforce preexisting beliefs through spreads of misinformation. Even though the interactive features of these platforms allow users to join the political discussions, they also promote false information and exclusive community building (Zhuravskaya, Petrova et al., 2020).

Social media creates polarization or the process of increasing the division of people as its algorithms curate the content (Gausen, Luk et al., 2022). Each user receives a personalized “feed” of their historical interactions with the platform. This process customizes your feed in such a way that you not only get to see less of the contradictory, but also have more interactions with the like-minded ideologies. Through this selective exposure, users usually interact with like-minded individuals in the digital world which leads to further polarization. Educated youth may find themselves stuck in self-reinforcing communities filled with individuals like themselves, one which discourages any challenge of alternative viewpoints and encourages their existing beliefs. This can lead to a lack of healthy political discourse and discussion. Moreover, polarization has been aggravated by the spread of misinformation using social media. The fast growth of fake information on online platforms is growing at an alarming rate, and likewise, conspiracy theories are emerging, which affect individual and political practices in a manner that is harmful to democratic leadership (Kubin and Von Sikorski, 2021). Because information can be shared almost instantaneously - false information spreads even quicker than true information because the false material, without fail, is simply more viral than the truth. Educated young people may use these social media tools, but they are not immune either - something that resonates emotionally will have greater impact than a rational argument. The longer people are on social media, the more they create exclusive communities leading to social segregation. People explore groups and discussions based on their political affiliation, creating ideological silos where dissent is discouraged or dismissed. It limits chances and scope for a proper debate even on very important social and political issues. As politics becomes more and more polarized, these exclusive communities may hinder meaningful discourse, increasing hostility instead of fostering understanding (Wardani, 2025).

Literature Review

New research about the importance of the social media to the educated youth in relation to political polarization suggests that while it encourages engaging with politics, it also gives rise to polarizing politics (Ferreira and Ferreira, 2025). Young educated people are accessing different perspectives, mobilizing and participating in civic actions at this platform which has made the social discourse more active (Cortés-Ramos et al., 2021). Though, the same platforms create echo-chambers and filter-bubbles which expose the users only to that information which reaffirms their beliefs (Crinnion et al., 2024; Haug, et al., 2025). Political preference-displaying algorithms that make social media use delightful are similarly undermining your exposure to adverse views, causing your political ideology to ossify (Li and Shen, 2023). A rising number of studies show the impact of social media on the political mobilization of the youth (Kharel, 2024). Particularly the educated youth use it for knowledge, debate, and activism. Because social media is immediate and accessible, it allows users to participate in real-time political issues discussions and to form communities based on identified ideologies (Jost, Barberá et al., 2018). Experts at universities feel that all this networking is leading to greater political awareness and participation (Alami, 2017). As a result, youth participation in elections, protests and policies is rising (Giugni and Grasso, 2021). But this does not come with a cost. Political engagement on social media often brings polarization, where people get stuck in partisanship and think the other side is just stupid (Kharel, 2024).

Research also looks into the role of socio-economic factors in digital polarization (Magida, 2023). According to research, employment is important in shaping political attitudes (Touseef et al., 2023). Youth who are well-employed are less likely to have extreme sentiments because their socio-economic security acts as a buffer against those sentiments (Shabi, 2024). Individuals who are unemployed or underemployed are likely to engage in discussions that are politically polarized for expressing their dissatisfaction with the social and political order (Carpini, 1986). This shows that the educated youth hold more stable political identities if they are economically secure. Another major insight that has emerged from studies done recently is that misinformation and disinformation have a big impact on political polarization (Huang, 2024). While social media sites are meant for people to “engage”, they are also “encountering an avalanche” of harmful conspiracy theories to false narratives (Jost et al., 2018). Research shows that educated youth do suffer from misinformation and disinformation, even though they are digitally literate (Melo-Pfeifer and Gertz, 2022). This quick distribution of sensationalized material, in turn, exacerbates the ideological divide, and contributes to the difficulty of reaching shared consensus on political realities (Sanseverino, 2023). The importance of media literacy programs that aim to help young people evaluate the political content they encounter online is underscored by efforts to reverse this trend (Head et al., 2020).

Literature also talks about digital activism and its effect on political unity (Cheng et al., 2024). While online mobilizations can successfully connect young people for many social and political issues, they contribute to the fragmentation of ideologies (Theodorakis, 2012). As online communities allow for online to organise political campaigns more effectively, it may also silence dissenting voices (Garrison, 2017). Without the presence of dissenting perspectives that improve political bipartisanship and the polarization of communities, deliberation about ideal politics would be impossible (Edwards, 2013).

Scholars suggest various ways to lessen the division social media causes among the educated youth despite the challenges. Encourage exposure to opposing viewpoints, critical and creative thinking, and algorithmic transparency (Sehdave and Justice, 2024). In addition, promoting a culture of respectful political debate on social media may help bridge ideological divides and boost more inclusive democratic participation (Haider, 2024).

Although international scholarship offers important perspectives, political communication in South Asia has a character of its own. For example, in Pakistan, social media - whether it is Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), or WhatsApp - have largely developed into platforms for political discussion, disseminating news, and civic mobilization, but these same platforms have also become sites for political conflict and ideological contestation (Ayaz et al., 2024; Chaudhary et al., 2024).

Research by Khan and Qureshi (2021) and Ali (2020) has also found that online political deliberations of Pakistani youth still reflect their offline divisions along the same lines as class, religion, and political loyalty. Similar patterns have been found in India, and Bangladesh in the region, as social media drives and contributes to digital polarization along political lines, sectarian lines, etc. (Banoet al., 2021; Okafor and Sciences, 2025).

In Pakistan's digital culture, politically motivated polarization is visible through emotional hashtags, one-sided news sharing, and echo chambers around party-based news pages and influencers. Digital groups simultaneously reinforce in-group loyalty and group hostility to others. Thus, young people are often torn between advocacy and hostility, where one can engage in political participation, sometimes expressive but not fully informed, as a result (Khanet al., 2023; Mir et al., 2023).

To sum up, according to current studies, social media has changed the political participation of educated youth (Ibrahim, 2021; Alodatet al., 2023; Utariet al., 2023). Social media, while useful in increasing participation and awareness, can also lead to greater polarization due to algorithms, misinformation, and echo-chambers (Haider, 2024; Rodilosso, 2024). Dealing with this issue would require a combination of measures including education, policy intervention, and changing the technology itself.

Research Gap

While previous studies both in Pakistan and internationally have explored social media's role in political engagement and polarization, there has been limited research on the effects of educated youth in urban areas of Pakistan. Most studies in the area are descriptive and focus on political campaigning rather than the relationship across education, employment, and digital participation on youth political awareness and polarization.

This research is looking to close that gap through consideration of how the more educated millennial population located in Islamabad utilizes social media for the purpose of forming political beliefs and civic discourse. By using both qualitative and quantitative approaches, this research aims to provide complex knowledge on how online networking, along with socio-economic status and educational background, contribute to political polarization among youth in Pakistan.

Methodology

Research Design

This research adopts a methodology that consists of both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis as part of a mixed-methods design. The mixed-methods design facilitates examination of some more complex relationships such as social media use and political polarization; education, occupation, and political behaviour for educated youth. The quantitative data collected through the survey provided quantitatively measurable insight. The qualitative data collected from open-ended questions also provided more insightful, contextual, and empirically grounded understanding related to the quantitative responses. Being able to capture, and use both forms of data leads to a deeper, more balanced understanding of the phenomena in common.

Population

This study investigated educated youth in Islamabad, Pakistan, as a key population that contributes to the emerging online political discussion in a modern and digital world.

Sample

A sample of 150 participants was gathered from four of the major universities in Islamabad Quaid-i-Azam University, Comsats University, FAST University and International Islamic University Islamabad . By interacting with students from a variety of academic disciplines, a more comprehensive perspective of the educated youth in the city was captured.

Sampling Technique

A purposeful sampling approach was utilized to gather the relevant demographic information to meet the goals of this study. This purposeful sampling approach enabled recruitment of respondents who were social media users and also political discourse users of social media.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The criteria for inclusion consisted of youth aged 15-35, having completed at least a higher secondary level of education, residing in Islamabad, and having utilized social media to discuss politics. Respondents who were outside the age criteria, and those who qualified within the age criteria but did not engage with social media in some form of political engagement, were excluded for specificity and clarity of the study.

Instrument for Data Collection

To gain knowledge about demographic features, social media use habits, and political orientations, researchers designed a standardized survey. The survey included Likert scale items that captured political awareness, political participation, and political polarization, along with a couple of open-ended questions designed to elicit qualitative data on perceptions about the role of social media in the development of political knowledge.

Data Collection Method

Data were gathered by means of an online questionnaire using Google Forms, which provided organization, development, and access to the study while maintaining the anonymity of participants. Participants were made aware of the educational purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any time.

Instrument Design and Validation

The wording for the questionnaire items was informed by existing research and refined based on expert reviews done by two faculty members from the Department of Sociology and Department of Communication Studies. There were pre-pilot tests conducted with 15 participants, while the expert review clarified and/or improved the flow and connections of items. Because this was an exploratory paper, the study did not run reliability tests statistically (i.e., Cronbach's alpha); the reliability and validity of the items were ensured by expert review and pre-pilot testing. The expert reviews brought important comments to ensure logical alignment with purpose of the study for certainty and other suggestions which informed minor wording and/or structure changes. Overall, the piloting and expert reviews worked to maximize reliability and content validity of the questionnaire.

Data Analysis Technique

The analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data followed a rigorous process. Qualitative data were coded thematically from the open-ended questions in order to identify themes and patterns within the data. The analysis of quantitative data included frequency distribution and cross tabulations, to see any patterns and relationships within variables. Inclusive of the analysis, thematic analysis was incorporated to analyze qualitative data. Ideas, and phrases, that emerged from the coded responses like, "I only follow pages that talk about the same views as me," and, "Social media gives me a voice I do not have in person," were coded as a thematic title, "selective exposure," and, "empowerment," respectively.

Ethical Concerns

The study adheres to strict ethical standards. All participants provided informed, prior consent to participate in the interview study, and where applicable, data confidentiality was provided through anonymized responses. Prior to the data collection, the ethical approval for the data collection was granted by accredited university ethics committees.

Results

Demographic Data Analysis

Gender Distribution

Out of the 150 participant respondents, 70 (45.2%) were identified as female; 80 (54.8%) were identified as male.

Age Distribution

Age groups 18–24 accounted for 52% of the responses (n = 80), followed by 25–34 (32.9 %, n = 50).

Educational Attainment

The majority of respondents had bachelor's degrees (38.8%) or master's degrees (36.8%).

Current Employment Status

Of the respondents, 39.7% reported being students, 21.2% reported being employed full time, and 15.9% reporting being

Current Household Size

The majority of household sizes were 5-7 members (43.7%); however, 33.8% reported 2-4 members.

Current Household Income

The majority of respondents (23.7%) indicated that their monthly income level resided in the range of 25,000-50,000, followed by 22.4% who indicated their monthly income level was 50,000-75,000.

Quantitative analysis

Selection of Social Media Platform By the Respondents

Respondents primarily use Facebook as their social media platform of choice.

Effect of Social Media platform on Political Beliefs

Facebook was the social media platform that had the most impact on respondents' political beliefs, followed by Twitter and Instagram.

Effect of Social Media on the Political Views

The participants unanimously concurred that social media is significantly impactful in shaping the political opinions of youth which subsequently increases the level of political participation and political engagement. Participants noted that interaction via social media posts assisted in aligning the political beliefs of youth. Moreover, it may be posited that social media assist youth to connect with others who endorse the same beliefs while developing their political views. Respondents showed a strong agreement that media provides youth more political awareness and education. Moreover, respondents showed that they preferred deliberating issues online or via social media-platforms, as compared to face-to-face discussions. This indicated the substantial role of social media in developing and navigating youth political deliberation. In the end, the results also indicated that social media has developed in to being an important public sphere for youth to be politically informed and politically engaged, while gaining information to compare political or popular information, peer validation, or emotional involvement. Most participants agreed that social media has increased youth engagement in overall political participation. Respondents acknowledged that social media also increased overall voter turnout among youth.

Higher Education, Social Media Usage and Political Awareness

Higher education has positive effects on young people's engagement in political awareness. Also, postsecondary education respondents tend to vote and have civic engagement. Education allows them to be truly informed about their voting decisions.

This means education enhances political reasoning and political vulnerability to misinformation is likely lessened, and in relation to social media and political contexts, educated young people are thought to have stronger critical perspectives.

Job Status

Individuals occupying senior organizational positions were less likely to exhibit indicators of political polarization, while social media users who were employed in positions of high job status generally adhered to more moderate political ideologies than anticipated. Based on job status, this response suggests that social media users vary in relation to their political views. Respondents indicated they perceived individuals with high job status differently from those with low or very low job status. Respondents suggested that employment status influenced their political perspective, supporting the perceived value and efficacy of economic agency, suggesting that socio-economic stability politically moderates and aligns political attitudes to informed and moderate political attitudes suggesting that economic independence may provide possible buffers to ideological extremism.

Correlation Analysis and ANOVA

This research involved the use of SPSS to conduct a bivariate correlation analysis to explore the association among three primary variables: social media use in shaping political views, education level and political views, and employment status and political views. The results are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: social media usage in shaping political views, education level and political views, and job status and political views

Correlations				
		Social Media	Higher Education	Job Status
Social Media	Pearson Correlation	1	.732**	.657**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	152	152	151
Higher Education	Pearson Correlation	.732**	1	.726**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	152	152	151
Job Status	Pearson Correlation	.657**	.726**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	151	151	151
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

Findings

The results suggest a meaningful relationship between the investigated variables. The influence of variables such as education and employment status plays a role in the political beliefs of young people through the platforms of social media. These strong relationships highlight the interwoven relationships of social and economic capital in giving young people a political education; all of which speak to notions of social identity and stratification. ANOVA was conducted to assess the relationship between age, education level, income, and the role of social media and/or social media in developing political beliefs or mitigating political polarization, even in young people. The results are presented in Tables 1 to 7.

Table 2: Age-based Distribution for Social Media Usage and Mean Values

Age	N	Mean

(Years)		
18-24	81	21
25-34	50	29.5
35-44	17	39.5
45-54	4	49.5
Total	152	27.9

Table 3: ANOVA Results for Age-based Distribution

ANOVA						
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
Between Groups	3.871	3	1.290	1.449	.231	
Within Groups	131.798	148	.891			
Total	135.668	151				

The ANOVA findings on age-related distribution show non-significance between age groups and social media for political views, suggest an equivalent effect by age groups for social media.

Table 4: Income-based Distribution for Social Media and Mean Values

Income (Rupees)	N	Mean
25000-50000	36	37500
50000-75000	34	62500
75000-100000	35	87500
100000-200000	31	150,000
200000 and above	16	-

Table 5: ANOVA Results for Income-based Distribution

ANOVA						
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
Between Groups	10.813	4	2.703	3.183	.015	
Within Groups	124.855	147	.849			
Total	135.668	151				

In terms of income groups, the ANOVA results showed a significant relationship between income rates and social media use, which means that individuals with higher income rates may be less affected by social media in shaping their political perspectives.

This trend suggests that individuals who come from a higher income level may use other sources of information such as professional networks or traditional media rather than social media to inform their political learning.

Table 6: Level of Education-based Distribution for Social Media Usage

Descriptives									
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
High school diploma or less		3	3.1795	1.10495	.63794	.4346	5.9243	1.92	4.00
Some collage		20	3.4154	.85927	.19214	3.0132	3.8175	2.08	4.69
Bachelors		59	3.4342	.99342	.12933	3.1753	3.6930	1.00	5.00
Masters		56	4.0151	.82202	.10985	3.7950	4.2352	1.31	5.00
Doctorate		12	3.4167	.94920	.27401	2.8136	4.0198	2.23	4.85
FSC pre engineering		1	4.3077	.	.	.	.	4.31	4.31
DAE civil		1	5.0000	.	.	.	.	5.00	5.00
Total		152	3.6554	.94787	.07688	3.5035	3.8073	1.00	5.00

Table 7:ANOVA Results for Education Level-based Distribution

ANOVA						
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
Between Groups	14.883	6	2.480	2.978	.009	
Within Groups	120.785	145	.833			
Total	135.668	151				

Based on the results of an ANOVA on education-level, it looks like people with higher levels of education are more susceptible than others to help in creating political opinions on social media, and that education levels in individuals matter in the relationship between social media and political development, as suggested by the exploratory analysis.

The finding also reflects the role of educational institutions as spaces for political socialization, where exposure to diverse perspectives encourages more analytical engagement with online political content.

Table 8:Descriptive Analysis (distribution of social media use by platform)

Descriptives									
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Minimum	Maximum
Facebook	21	3.0330	1.13903	.24856	2.5145	3.5514		1.00	4.92
Twitter	4	3.3077	.74580	.37290	2.1210	4.4944		2.77	4.38
Instagram	16	3.4375	.67804	.16951	3.0762	3.7988		1.92	5.00
Tiktok	25	3.6769	.94472	.18894	3.2870	4.0669		2.08	5.00
Linkedin	29	3.7294	.97640	.18131	3.3580	4.1008		1.31	4.92
Snapchat	52	3.9083	.86708	.12024	3.6669	4.1497		1.46	5.00
Others	5	4.0769	.48345	.21621	3.4766	4.6772		3.31	4.54
Total	152	3.6554	.94787	.07688	3.5035	3.8073		1.00	5.00

Table 9: ANOVA (the impact on youth political polarization)

ANOVA						
	Sum Squares	of	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	13.764		6	2.294	2.729	.015
Within Groups	121.905		145	.841		
Total	135.668		151			

Tables 8 and 9 present the distribution of social media use by platform and the impact on youth political polarization, respectively. Moreover, the different social media platforms influence political ideas in a noticeably different manner. When examining the effects of social media on political polarization and attitudes of youth, it is essential to consider demographic variances. A thematic analysis of the open-ended survey questions highlighted three major themes related to the effects of social media, post-secondary education, and occupational status on political awareness of youth.

To complement quantitative patterns, qualitative data were analyzed to understand the motivations behind these patterns.

Theme 1: Role of Social Media in Political Awareness

Respondents indicate that social media sites help make youth more politically engaged. Social media sites do this by building political networks, connecting like-minded individuals, and promoting youth's politically engaged futures. Social media is a place for political engagement, to strengthen voices, and to engage in dialogue. As one participant stated, "Social media allows me to connect with people who are like-minded and helps me to be connected to political events in real time." Another participant stated, "I have more confidence in expressing my opinion online, social media just feels like the space where I feel my voice matters." These encapsulated perspectives revealed characteristics of social media as a space for political forum, as a place of empowerment, and as a mode for information.

Theme 2: Higher Education and Political Awareness

It is thought that a higher education will have a constructive effect on the political cognizance of young adults. As a result of schooling, young adults can think critically, acquire huge amounts of information and grasp troubling political phenomena. Higher education fosters civic engagement, accountability of authorities and increased awareness. Higher-educated people are thought to have greater power in politics. One participant reflected, "University helped me learn not just facts but also the reasonings behind political choices, and made me question and analyze." Another educator asserted, "Education has you thinking analytically - you don't just take what's on social media as gospel, you research and verify." The quotes illustrate how education serves to equip youth with analytical skills for political participation.

Theme 3: Job Status and Political Polarization

Based on survey respondents, the higher up in one's career someone is, the less politically divided they are. A high status employment position diminishes political polarization because it allows access to resources, multiple information sources, and specialized networks that promote civil opinions, diverse views and fact-based discussions. For example, one student said, "I work in a profession where I am able to engage with people of all political stripes, which expands my knowledge and helps to temper bias." Another student said, "When you have a stable career, you can feel confident considering arguments and views instead of only looking at things from one-point." The results suggest that employment has an impact on political polarization in educated young people, through separate socio-economic determinants. To conclude, the qualitative results support that formal education and employment shape political awareness and mediate how young people interpret, respond to political messages on social media, and sustain conversations about politics as both educators and ideological battlefields. The critical issues raised reflect the complex nexus among youth political awareness, employment and educational status, and social media. Social media has the capacity to promote political participation or less political polarization, depending on an informed citizenry, employment and education. Young people's socioeconomic position is a factor in their political engagement via their access to social media.

Discussion

The study's results provide confirmation and expansion of previous research on the spotlighted importance of social media for youth civic engagement. In keeping with the Uses and Gratifications Theory, findings provide evidence that youth are actively using social media for information, self-expression, and political conversation. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of participants felt that social media platforms greatly increase political awareness and involvement among educated youth in Islamabad, supporting work globally including Kahne & Bowyer (2018) and Boulianne (2020) who promoted the idea that digital platforms can empower youth to be politically informed and expressive.

Moreover, the impact of education on political awareness was another key facilitator, in line with prior sociological empirical evidence which supports education as fostering civic obligations and an ability to think critically, while providing possibilities to involve oneself in democracy. Education also made respondents more open to discussing political issues and to arguing against misinformation about those issues. This bears resemblance to Verba et al.'s (1995) concept of education as a "civic resource."

Moreover, the study contributes to our understanding of the extent to which socioeconomic status, particularly employment status, acts as a moderator of political polarization on social media. Respondents benefitting from stable employment were typically less extreme in their political views than those working a less secure job. This finding aligns with Social Identity Theory, which suggests that people with different social roles and social ties are less likely to display extreme in-group bias. Overall, this finding is a valuable contribution to local conversations that economic security may be an important factor in lessening online polarization and increasing more tolerant political discourse.

In conclusion, the discussion shows the intersections of social media, education, and employment in shaping contemporary youth's political attitudes. This research is a sociological contribution that bridges present global digital trends with the socio-cultural context of Pakistan, demonstrating that the political behavior of the digital generation is both globally influenced and situated locally.

Limitations of the Study

This research adds to our understanding of the impact of social media, education, and employment on political engagement among today's youth in Islamabad. However, as the research used purposive sampling, the findings are limited and cannot extend

the claims made in this study beyond the sample and access to the three selected universities. While the sample size and responses were moderate, the responses may do not reflect all aspects of youth from rural or less urbanized areas of Pakistan. Also, self-reported data are subject to social desirability bias, while qualitative responses lacked depth for stronger thematic representation. Future research should consider larger, randomized samples drawn from different provinces, as well as more mixed designs to help improve reliability and representation.

Conclusion

The current research demonstrates that social media has now become a central site for political engagement for young people in Pakistan. This site is expanding young people's access to information, opportunities to build communities, and space to express political views; thereby supporting the primary tenets of the Uses and Gratifications Theory. Higher education acts to mediate these effects one step further through analytic thinking, civic awareness, and informed participation - while moderation of polarization appears to come from stable employment by exposing people to different viewpoints, while also increasing emotional distance to those viewpoints.

Policy and Practical Recommendations

In order to foster a progressive and constructive engagement in digital contexts, policymakers and educators should direct their efforts toward:

1. Integrating digital literacy programs into university curriculums that can enable students to critically examine political information online.
2. Investing in processes for fair political deliberation that dampens polarization in youth, and students more broadly.
3. Furthering collaboration between higher education institutions, civil society and media organizations to promote political engagement and tolerance.
4. Providing job- and internship-based programs where recent graduates are exposed to work with diverse social groups as a means for fostering understanding across partisan divisions.

If these initiatives are adopted, Pakistan will have the capacity to cultivate a more informed, tolerant, and participatory youth who can help champion democratic values in a digital age.

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