



Social Media Influence on Students Voting Behavior: A Case Study of District Bannu

Misbah Hayat^{a*}, Dr.Fayyaz Ali^b, Asif Khan^c, Yasir Khan^d

^aStudent of BS Political Science. UST Bannu. ^bAssistant professor, Department of Pak Studies and Political Science UST bannu. ^cPhD Scholar, Soochow University of China. ^dStudent of BS Political Science, UST Bannu.

***Email:** misbiustb@gamil.com

Abstract: Social media is indeed a great invention of the 21st century with both positive and negative aspects. It has enabled people to communicate and connect easily, shrinking the world to a global village. However, its influence on political outcomes and public opinion, along with amplifying extremist views, raises concerns. This study mainly dealt with the question that how social media such as Facebook, X (formerly twitter), affects the voting behavior of students in District Bannu, Pakistan. Using a quantitative approach, the study surveyed 104 students from various educational institutions in the district. Grounded in Media Ecology theory, the research investigates the relationship between social media and local political orientations. The findings suggest that while social media is an important source of political awareness and engagement for students, its direct impact on their voting behavior is more complex than expected.

Keywords: Social media, voting behavior, public opinion, Facebook, X, Bannu

1. Introduction

The role of social media in shaping public opinion and political behavior has become a subject of increasing interest and concern in recent years (Shamilishvili & Sabashvil, 2023). Social media can be defined as online platforms that facilitate creating, sharing, and exchanging user-generated content, fostering virtual communities, and enabling real-time interactions among users (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Social media refers to digital communication tools and platforms allowing individuals, organizations, and communities to connect, share information, and engage in two-way online communication (Kietzmann et al., 2011). These definitions help clearly understand what social media encompasses in the digital age. The influence of digital platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, has permeated various aspects of our lives, including our engagement in political activities (Caldeira, 2021). According to the 2020 Digital Wearesocial Turkey report, the top social networking sites are youtube, Instagram, whatsapp, Facebook, and Twitter. Today, social media has evolved into a livelier, fluid, and youth-oriented platform to enable effective communication across international boundaries. Facebook is the most popular social media platform among the participants, with Instagram following closely as the second most used (Sharma& Parma, 2016).



(<https://igwebby.com/smo/>)

The rise of social media and social networking platforms has significantly altered how young voters acquire and stay informed about political matters. One demographic that has shown a notable shift in voting behavior due to social media exposure is the student population (Bode et al.,2014). In Pakistan individual who are 18 years of age are above and hold citizenship of Pakistan are eligible to vote in the general election (Karim Haider & Imran Khan, 2020).In term of voting Students in Pakistan, just like in many other countries, are becoming a crucial voting population segment (Ahmad et al.,2019).In Pakistan, the students vote have a great significance, that cannot be overstated. (Memon et al.,2018). Students bring fresh perspectives, energy, and potential for change to the political landscape. However, it is essential to understand how their political views and voting decisions are shaped by the content they encounter on social media (Kushin& Yamamoto, 2013). Bannu, a city in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan.Whichis a home to a diverse population of approximately 1,167,892 people, with a gender distribution of around 51% male and 49% female. Over the past 19 years, the region has witnessed a notable population surge of about 72% (KPEZMC, 2020). This district accommodates numerous students enrolled in various educational institutions. Notably, Bannu District exhibits an overall literacy rate of 55%, with a male literacy rate of 81% and a female literacy rate of 28%.These students are exposed to the local political dynamics and are part of the larger online ecosystem, which plays a pivotal role in shaping their perceptions. Despite the growing influence of social media on political engagement globally, there is a lack of research specifically focused on its impact on student's voting behavior in District Bannu, Pakistan. While existing studies have explored how social media shapes political beliefs and ideas, little is known about its effect on actual voter participation in this region.

1.2 Implication of the Project

This research investigates how platforms like Facebook and Twitter influence students' political behavior in a specific geographical context, focusing on Bannu District. It emphasizes the role of young voters and the importance of understanding political engagement in the digital age. The findings aim to guide policymakers in creating initiatives for informed political participation. The study uses quantitative methods and Media Ecology Theory to explore media's impact on political participation and provides a framework for future research on social media's long-term effects on voting behavior.

2. Literature Review

The literature review of this study based on several proxy of social media and their impact on student voting behavior. It is divided into several sections, starting with examining what social media is, followed by an analysis

of well known social media networking sites like Facebook and Twitter. Media Ecology Theory, which serves as a fundamental and helpful lens to understanding the influence of social media on student voting behavior, forms the theoretical basis for this review.

2.1 Social Media

Saeed Ahmad (2020) observed that with the access of internet educated youth use social media for political expression in Pakistan. The study suggest that social media contributes to a new political culture despite challenges like low education levels and underdeveloped infrastructure, among the literate Pakistani youth. Naseer et al. (2020) stated that in Pakistan for garnering support political entities, leaders, and activists are super active on social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter. Shahab et al. (2023) observe that social media platform in Pakistan, notably Facebook and Twitter, are super important for discussing political issues, leading to increased political participation and awareness, especially among youth. However, Titin et al. (2023) caution against potential negative associations between attention to conflicts on social media and democratic involvement. Students, as per their perspective, express concerns about social media as a source of political news, highlighting the absence of strict legal regulations and the proliferation of terms like "hoax" and "fake news".

2.2 Social Networking Sites

Social media platforms enable individuals to express interests, convey opinions, and promote ideas or products. Among the array of social networking sites frequented and joined by numerous users, Facebook stands out as one of the most accessible and extensively utilized platforms. It serves as a conduit for political candidates to disseminate information, engage in communication, and sway users toward their ideas, agendas, viewpoints, and, crucially, to secure their votes in return. (Pinky Salvador et al., 2017). Social media platforms offer a rational space for developing one's voice and fostering political participation. (Zareen et al., 2014).

2.3 Facebook And X

Facebook, launched in 2004, is a comprehensive social networking platform where users share personal information and engage in political discussions. Notably, a trend emerges where political content is actively shared. Twitter, a micro-blogging platform since 2006, plays a crucial role in political discourse, with politicians using it to connect, run campaigns, and express views within a 140-character limit. In Pakistan, mainstream political parties leverage social media teams on Facebook to enhance their image and counter rival propaganda. With 6,898,720 users, Facebook holds political influence, constituting 32.86% of Pakistan's online population, with a significant user base among 18-24-year-olds (Zareen et al., 2014). In Pakistan, many young people use Facebook more than other social networks like X to get information about politics. A recent study said Pakistan has the second-highest number of young people globally, after Yemen. This has had a significant effect on how politics works in Pakistan. Since 2008, political parties in Pakistan have been using social media a lot, which has changed how politics happens there. Most survey people said they get involved in politics through social media, especially on Facebook (Ahmad et al., 2019). The existing literature on the impact of social media's on political discourse in Pakistan lacks a focused exploration of its specific impact on student voting behavior in the Bannu district. There is still a gap in understanding how these interactions change into actual voting decisions among students despite recognizing that Facebook and Twitter are becoming dominant platform in political discussions among youth. The literature review emphasizes the transformative role that social media in fostering political awareness. Still, it does not thoroughly explore how social media directly influence students voting behavior, especially in the specific socio political environment in Bannu. Therefore, further research is required in order to fully understand the dynamics of political engagement among students and complex influence of social media platforms like Facebook in shaping their voting preferences in Bannu.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

Media Ecology theory developed by Marshall McLuhan serve as a theoretical foundation for the research work on "The Influence of Social Media on Student Voting Behavior: A Case Study of Bannu District" involves analyzing the relationship in the local environment between media, technology, and communication. Investigate how social media platforms serve as the medium influencing students' perceptions, understanding, and values related to political engagement. Consider the concept that "the medium is the message," as coined by Marshall McLuhan. Assess the content of political messages on social media and how the platform shapes and influences them. Draw

parallels between McLuhan's idea that media technologies mark distinct periods of societal change and the historical development of social media usage in Bannu District. Analyze whether shifts in social media usage coincide with changes in student voting behavior, aligning with McLuhan's belief that media influences the progression of society. Applying media ecology theory to the research work can help provide a nuanced understanding of how social media, as a medium, influences student-voting behavior in the specific context of Bannu District. This approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of the dynamic interplay between technology, communication, and the local environment in shaping political attitudes and behaviors among students.

3. Research Methodology

This portion of the study highlights the research design, sampling technique, sample size, and population. Along with the instrument used to analyze the data and the method by which the data was collected.

3.1 Research Design

Quantitative research methods were utilized in the social sciences domain. A primary data source was employed for data collection, i.e., a questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale.

3.2 Population

The population for this study consists of students from various institutions in District Bannu. Specifically, these students are enrolled in Bachelor of Science (BS).

3.3 Sampling

A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed among the students in seven educational institutions/degree colleges in Bannu. In particular, students of political science were targeted for data collection. The respondents were randomly selected. First, they were briefed about the study nature and purpose. Table 1 clarifies the respondents and their departments/colleges. A random selection method was employed to choose a sample size of students from each institution for this research.

3.4 Data Collection

The data for this study were collected using a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised nine closed-ended questions designed to assess the influence of social media on students' voting behavior. Each question had five options, reflecting the coherence and relativity of the respective inquiries. Questions were adapted from existing papers.

Table1: Institution-wise distribution of the respondent

S.NO	Department/College	Frequency	Percentage
1	FG College	14	13.5
2	GDC Ghoriwala	3	2.9
3	GDC No 2 Bannu	12	11.5
4	GGDC manadanBannu	5	4.8
5	GPGC Bannu	17	16.3
6	DPS, UST Bannu	47	45.2
7	Women Campus	5	4.8
	Total	104	100%

3.5 Instrument

To ensure the respondents' precise ratings and understanding, the researcher used a questionnaire, which is a tool for collecting primary data. The collected data were analyzed using the software SPSS.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis aims to describe the respondents' data. This method allows summarizing and presenting the main characteristics of the variables related to student voting behavior in Bannu, Pakistan. Through descriptive analysis, we can calculate measures such as frequencies, percentages, and central tendencies to gain a comprehensive understanding of the data. The results of the descriptive analysis provided valuable insights into the patterns, trends, and distributions of the variables, contributing to a deeper understanding of the influence of social media on student voting behavior in our study.

Table 2: Education Level

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	3	2.9	2.9	2.9
BS	95	91.3	91.3	94.2
MS/mphil	5	4.8	4.8	99.0
Phd/Post-Doc	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
Total	104	100.0	100.0	

The chart shows the distribution of majors among 104 people. At 83.7%, the majority are in Political Science, with 11.5% in English, 2.9% in Sociology, and only 1% in Physics and Material Science. Political Science is the most popular field, while English, Sociology, Physics, and Material Science have fewer participants in the group.

Table 3: Discipline

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	1.0	1.0	1.0
English	12	11.5	11.5	12.5
Physics and Material Science	1	1.0	1.0	13.5
Political Science	87	83.7	83.7	97.1
Sociology	3	2.9	2.9	100.0
Total	104	100.0	100.0	

The table gives details about how the participants are spread out among different schools, with a total of 104 people. Most of them, about 45.2%, are from U.S.T. Bannu, followed by 16.3% in GPGC Bannu, and 13.5% in F.G. College. GDC No 2 Bannu and GDC Ghoriwala make up 11.5% and 2.9% of the participants, while GGDC MandanBannu and Women Campus each make up 4.8%. This breakdown shows a mix of colleges in the data, with UST Bannu being the most represented institution..

Table 4: Institute/College

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	1.0	1.0	1.0
FG College	14	13.5	13.5	14.4
GDC Ghoriwala	3	2.9	2.9	17.3
GDC No 2 Bannu	12	11.5	11.5	28.8
GGDC MandanBannu	5	4.8	4.8	33.7
GPGC Bannu	17	16.3	16.3	50.0
UST Bannu	47	45.2	45.2	95.2
Women Campus	5	4.8	4.8	100.0
Total	104	100.0	100.0	

The table illustrates the gender breakdown among 104 respondents. The majority, making up 67.3% of the total, identify as male, whereas 31.7% identify as female. This suggests a more significant number of males compared to females in the dataset.

Table 5: Gende

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	1.0	1.0	1.0
Female	33	31.7	31.7	32.7
Male	70	67.3	67.3	100.0
Total	104	100.0	100.0	

The table shows that out of 104 respondents, 67.3% are male respondents, while around 31.7% are females. This indicates that men were more than women in the group of respondents.

4.2 Question-wise Analysis

Q1) I take part in political discourses on social media.

Table: 6

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	5	Mo4.8	4.8	4.8
Agree	55	52.9	52.9	57.7
Disagree	3	2.9	2.9	60.6
Neutral	20	19.2	19.2	79.8
Strongly agree	18	17.3	17.3	97.1
Strongly Disagree	3	2.9	2.9	100.0
Total	104	100.0	100.0	

The table provides insights into responses to the question among 104 respondents. Among them, 52.9% agree with the statement, while 17.3% strongly agree. Conversely, 2.9% disagree, and another 2.9% strongly disagree. Additionally, 19.2% of respondents express a neutral stance on the statement. This suggests a considerable portion of respondents acknowledge some degree of political involvement, with a majority agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement, despite a notable presence of neutral responses.

Q2) I watch political debates on social media.

Table: 7

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	4	3.8	3.8	3.8
Agree	55	52.9	52.9	56.7
Disagree	7	6.7	6.7	63.5
Neutral	17	16.3	16.3	79.8
Strongly agree	17	16.3	16.3	96.2

Strongly Disagree	4	3.8	3.8	100.0
Total	104	100.0	100.0	

The data table lays out responses to the statement "I watch political debates on social media" from a group of 104 respondents. It shows that 52.9% agree and 16.3% strongly agree, which together make up a significant portion who actively engage in observing political debates on social media platforms. On the flip side, only 6.7% disagree and 3.8% strongly disagree, indicating a minority who do not participate in watching such debates via social media. Additionally, 16.3% remain neutral, possibly showing uncertainty or a lack of strong engagement with political debates on social media. Overall, the data suggests that a notable proportion of respondents actively observe political debates on social media, with a smaller minority expressing disagreement.

Q3) I see political content on Facebook from the pages of political parties

Table: 8

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	4	3.8	3.8	3.8
Agree	49	47.1	47.1	51.0
Disagree	12	11.5	11.5	62.5
Neutral	18	17.3	17.3	79.8
Strongly agree	14	13.5	13.5	93.3
Strongly Disagree	7	6.7	6.7	100.0
Total	104	100.0	100.0	

The data table sums up responses to the statement "I see political content on Facebook from the pages of political parties" from a group of 104 respondents. It shows that 47.1% agree and 13.5% strongly agree, collectively indicating a significant portion who come across political content from political party pages on both platforms. On the other hand, 11.5% disagree and 6.7% strongly disagree, pointing out a minority who do not come across political content from these sources. Additionally, 17.3% remain neutral, possibly reflecting uncertainty or a lack of strong observation regarding political party content on these platforms. Overall, the data suggests that a notable proportion of respondents do encounter political material from political party pages on Facebook with a smaller minority expressing disagreement.

Q4: I see political content on twitter from the pages of political parties

Table: 9

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	5	4.8	4.8	4.8

Agree	40	38.5	38.5	43.3
Disagree	18	17.3	17.3	60.6
Neutral	12	11.5	11.5	72.1
Strongly agree	22	21.2	21.2	93.3
Strongly Disagree	7	6.7	6.7	100.0
Total	104	100.0	100.0	

The data shows that 38.5% of respondents agree with the presence of political content from party pages on Twitter, while 17.3% disagree. 11.5% remain neutral, and 21.2% strongly agree, indicating a strong inclination towards acknowledging the content. However, 6.7% strongly disagree, indicating a firm stance against this observation.

Q5: I value sponsored political messages on social media more than friend's contents.

Table: 10

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	3	2.9	2.9	2.9
Agree	36	34.6	34.6	37.5
Disagree	22	21.2	21.2	58.7
Neutral	23	22.1	22.1	80.8
Strongly agree	9	8.7	8.7	89.4
Strongly Disagree	11	10.6	10.6	100.0

Total	104	100.0	100.0
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The data shows that 34.6% of the total respondents value sponsored political messages more than friends' content, while 21.2% disagree. The remaining 22.1% remain neutral. 8.7% strongly agree, while 10.6% strongly disagree. The data reveals a diverse range of opinions on the topic.

Q6) I get political information from social media

Table: 11

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	3	2.9	2.9	2.9
Agree	42	40.4	40.4	43.3
Disagree	13	12.5	12.5	55.8
Neutral	19	18.3	18.3	74.0
Strongly agree	17	16.3	16.3	90.4
Strongly Disagree	10	9.6	9.6	100.0
Total	104	100.0	100.0	

The data shows that 40.4% of respondents receive political information from social media, while 12.5% disagree. 18.3% remain neutral, with 16.3% strongly agreeing and 9.6% strongly disagreeing. The data indicates varying degrees of reliance on social media as a source of political information.

Q7) posts and messages related to politics on social media influence my voting behavior.

Table: 12

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	4	3.8	3.8	3.8
Agree	44	42.3	42.3	46.2
Disagree	15	14.4	14.4	60.6
Neutral	22	21.2	21.2	81.7
Strongly agree	9	8.7	8.7	90.4
Strongly Disagree	10	9.6	9.6	100.0
Total	104	100.0	100.0	

The data shows that 42.3% of respondents believe political posts and messages on social media influence their voting behavior, while 14.4% disagree. The remaining 21.2% remain neutral. 8.7% strongly agree, while 9.6% strongly disagree, indicating a strong inclination towards or against the influence of political messages on voting behavior.

Q8) How much time do you spend on Facebook during a typical day?

Table: 13

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	4	3.8	3.8	3.8
1-2 Hours	48	46.2	46.2	50.0
3-4Hours	18	17.3	17.3	67.3
5-6 Hours	4	3.8	3.8	71.2
More than 6 Hours	6	5.8	5.8	76.9
No time	24	23.1	23.1	100.0
Total	104	100.0	100.0	

The data shows that 46.2% of respondents spend 1-2 hours on Facebook daily, 17.3% spend 3-4 hours, 3.8% spend 5-6 hours, and 5.8% spend more than 6 hours, with 23.1% having no time for Facebook.

Q9) How much time do you spend on twitter during a typical day

Table: 14

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	5	4.8	4.8	4.8
1-2 Hours	40	38.5	38.5	43.3
3-4Hours	10	9.6	9.6	52.9
5-6 Hours	2	1.9	1.9	54.8
More than 6 Hours	2	1.9	1.9	56.7
No time	45	43.3	43.3	100.0
Total	104	100.0	100.0	

The frequency table presents responses to the question "How much time do you spend on Twitter during a typical day" from a sample of 104 respondents. It indicates that 38.5% spend 1-2 hours on Twitter daily, while 9.6% spend 3-4 hours, and only 1.9% each spend 5-6 hours or more than 6 hours on the platform. Additionally, 43.3% responded with "No time" spent on Twitter. Overall, the data suggests varying levels of daily Twitter usage among respondents, with a significant portion reporting not spending any time on the platform

5. Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Discussion

The rise of social media has significantly reshaped how political communication occurs, especially among students. This discussion explores how platforms like Facebook and Twitter influence students' voting behavior. Data reveals that many students are politically active, interested in political matters, and recognize the importance of voting. A large number of respondents highlight social media as a crucial tool for political awareness and engagement, spending significant time on these platforms where political content is abundant. Focusing on district Bannu in Pakistan, the study sheds light on how social media affects students' voting preferences in a specific regional context. The findings fill a gap in understanding how social media shapes political behavior in this region. Frequency tables show that a notable portion of respondents encounter political messages and news on social media, with many actively seeking political information online. However, the impact of this political content on voting behavior varies, as not all students report being influenced to the same degree.

In a similar study in Kayseri Province, Aslan, Karakoç, and Bekiroğlu (2021) found that social media significantly shapes political attitudes and voting behavior. While a majority of the population in that study acknowledged the role of social media in shaping political opinions and encouraging democratic participation, some did not fully agree with these conclusions. This variation in perspectives mirrors the findings in Bannu, reflecting the different ways individuals engage with social media in politics. Another relevant study by Nicholas M. Njgomir examined how platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube impact millennials' political behavior. It revealed that although millennials are active on social media, fewer are involved in formal political activities. This aligns with the current study, suggesting that while exposure to political content on social media is high, it doesn't always translate to active political participation.

Institutional and demographic factors also influence students' social media habits, shaping their exposure to political content and affecting their voting behavior. Using the Media Ecology Theory as a framework, this

research delves into the complex relationship between technology, communication, and voting behavior. It highlights how various media technologies shape perceptions and actions in specific socio-cultural environments, offering valuable insights for future studies on how social media influences political attitudes and behaviors in students from Bannu.

5.2 Conclusion

The study's conclusions show the important influence of social media on students' voting behavior in District Bannu, Pakistan, but also point out that more research is necessary to fully comprehend the numerous ways in which social media influences student voting preferences. This research provides important insights into the dynamic relationships between technology, communication, and local government by focusing on a specific regional context with a diverse population. With many actively engaging with political content online, this study fills the gap regarding the direct influence of social media on shaping student's political behavior. However, a significant percentage of respondents either show no change or remains unaffected, suggesting that the direct influence on voting behavior is complex. The study contributes to the larger discussion on the impact of social media on political engagement among youth in specific regional contexts by addressing key findings, implications, theoretical frameworks and direction for future research. It advances our understanding of how social media influences student voting behavior. In the age of digital technology, it provides valuable viewpoints for policymaker, politician, educator seeking to engage with younger voter. In order to fully understand the basic mechanisms by which social media affects students voting behavior, further research is required taking into account peer pressure platforms algorithms and the larger socio political environment. We can learn more about this complex relationship through longitudinal studies that monitor changes in the usage pattern of social media and how they affect voting behavior over time

5.3 Recommendation

Based on the finding and preceding discussion in the context of social media and voting behavior, the current study makes the following important recommendations.

- 1) policymakers should introduce digital literacy course, in order to mainstream students understanding about the use of social media
- 2) In order to safeguard students against false information and propaganda, rules governing political advertising should also be implemented.
- 3) Platform ought to promote constructive civic engagement online, educating young people about politics and encouraging their involvement.
- 4) Finally, students should appropriately use their voting rights, participate in polite conversation and verify the accuracy of political information.

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