



Digital Democracy and Youth E-Participation in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Article History:

Received:	Jul	21, 2024
Revised:	Aug	12, 2025
Accepted:	Sep	19, 2025
Available Online:	Sep	30, 2025

Keywords: Political, E-Participation, Communication, Pakistan, social media

Funding:

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

The present study analyzed and identified youth e-participation in the most advanced digital democratic worldview. The research used telephonic interview technique to collect data from the universe considering respondents' background and political e-participation. Qualitative research design was used in the present study to understand the underlying phenomenon clearly. Moreover, 10 interviews with one pilot study were conducted in Pakistan. To meet research objectives, the researcher used a purposive sampling technique to ensure the validity of the study. For the theoretical proposition, Andrew Chadwick's digital media, political communication, and e-democracy were used. The present study explored that, in today's era, social media has empowered youth in Pakistan to participate in e-politics and share their concerns and satisfaction. It is observed that there is a distinction between urban and rural political e-participation; urban youth are more likely to participate in politics than rural youth. On the other hand, it is also explored that the traditional political landscape is changing into an e-political landscape due to participants feeling more rational, logical, and systematic than traditional ones. They said that e-participation is establishing political identity and shaping public opinion more rationally than in the past. The present study highlighted e-participation in the Pakistani context.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.61503/cissmp.v4i3.330>

Citation: Ali, A. (2025). Digital democracy and youth e-participation in Pakistan. *Contemporary Issues in Social Sciences and Management Practices*, 4(3), 226–239.

1.0 Introduction

Digital democracy is not just about making services more efficient; it is about empowering people to shape policies that impact their lives. Rebuilding trust between civilians and the state should become the state's top priority, especially when the political divide in Pakistan is as narrow as ever. The potential to reduce polarization and boost civic engagement is an exciting prospect offered by digital democracy, as it provides a variety of participation tools and a democratic interface design. Instead, such platforms should help citizens create a shared space where they can interact positively across ideological and geographic barriers. Politicians often tap into the country's greatest assets, the youth, especially during election seasons. Young people actively participate in rallies, canvass in the heat, mobilize voters, and cast their ballots.

Digital democracy offers a new solution to this marginalization and an upgrade to democracy, especially in Pakistan, where 64 percent of the population is under 30. By incorporating technologies like AI and blockchain, known as civic tech, we can connect citizens with their governments, enabling cooperation and contribution to society and their representatives. However, children and youth lack a platform to petition for new laws, co-innovate, debate, express their views, or actively participate in law-making processes. Sadly, youth involvement in our democracy seems limited to voting or attending rallies and is quickly dismissed once that enthusiasm wanes. Young people lack channels to contribute, deliberate, and engage in policy-making that affects them. They should have the right to access government information at all levels without difficulty. This goes beyond just voting and involves fully engaging citizens in law-making decisions that their representatives undertake once elected.

A preliminary definition of e-participation gives an image of a partnership-based relationship where citizens have a direct input in the determination of the process and content of policymaking. The same words behind it. (OECD, 2003). The process of e-participation was defined by Macintosh (2006) as the utilisation of information and communication technologies that expand and enhance the scope of political participation by enabling citizens to connect among themselves and to their elected representatives. United Nations perceive e-participation as a subset of e-government; therefore, they define it as follows: the process involves using ICTs to engage citizens in the policy and cascade-making endeavors as well as the development and provision of services to transform it into a participatory, inclusive, and deliberative process (United Nations, 2020b).

On the other hand, Sabo and colleagues, (2008) argued that e-participation process, referring to an activity that is social and mediated by information and communication technologies, and requiring interaction between citizens, the public administration, and politicians. The meaning of e-participation has been changing with the growing technology as time goes by, because it has a tendency to undergo significant change. Based on the above definitions, we can easily agree that scholars have highlighted the central role played by citizens in it. Just like the demand side of digital government e-participation programs (United Nations, 2020a), According to the United Nations(2020a), the successes and failures of digital government or e-government depend on the activities of citizens in e-participation, as the citizens may take part in policymaking and political

agendas of the government with the help of the digital government, as well as use the services of the government. Moreover, e-participation processes may result in greater accountability to government, increased responsiveness to the needs of the citizens and enhanced policies and legislative actions (Peixoto & Fox, 2016). Top-bottom involvement in the government by citizens assumes an essential augmentation of top-bottom initiating communications in the government websites (Van Waart et al., 2016).

Apart from that, the digital government of countries in the world has not been concerned with enhancing e-participation by citizens, such as those of China (CNNIC, 2023). It is believed that due to e-participation, the interaction between citizens and the government would be enhanced, yet outcomes so far have been dissatisfactory (United Nations, 2020b). Citizens' e-participation remains low, which poses a great threat to e-participation initiatives (Islam, 2008). The level and the quality of participation of the citizens were not at the expected level, and thus, the digital platform failed to deliver the expected outcomes, giving it limited success. According to the critics, these e-participation initiatives are completely government-centred and such initiatives are ineffective in attaining their aims (Alarabiat et al., 2021).

In this context, the concept of, e-participation intention (EPI) has received scholarly attention from scholars to understand how to foster greater participation. It is important to note that social media and digital government platforms are not the same. The Study of the digital government platform in China should be a priority, given that this has emerged as an important method of political participation of citizens in China. (Naranjo-Zolotov et al., 2019). The rapid advancement of digital technology entirely transforms the way the government serves its people and manages services offered to the people. The current practice of providing better governance is highly reliant on the digital platform for providing a better system of governance. Digital governance also helps to improve the functioning of administration in the country, as well as opens up the systems to all people and builds greater trust of the citizens in government (Bannister & Connolly, 2014).

Different countries are now applying digital resources to develop new modes of involvement of their citizens in the delivery of public services. Nonetheless, their strategies work effectively in developed countries and not in developing countries. On the one hand, the developed countries have an advanced system of technology and a high level of communication across the country with a fully developed internet connection and a mature level in the digital abilities of their citizens. These are the conditions that enable them to implement an advanced system of e-governance where citizens have the opportunity to participate in the provision of services, as they can get easy access to such services. Estonia is ahead of the digital governance curve and allows citizens to cast their vote and use digital IDs through such initiatives as e-residency (Margetts & Dunleavy, 2013). Digital governance aims at improving communities where people have less access to resources in developing countries. World Bank, a research Study of 2020, points out that mobile banking initiatives and online healthcare systems enable the solution of socio-economic disparities in regions with limited standard infrastructure. The functioning of formal political process and political democracy is largely reliant on efficient communications and acceptable

transmission of decision-making on political matters among citizens, politicians and other stakeholders since they are the individuals who can be under the influence of common political determination (Ali ZS, 2010).

The true nature of democracy is a free and fair electoral process, separation of powers, protection of basic human rights and participation of citizens in all the steps of decision-making. The creation of a democratic environment establishes the spirit of debate, which leads to development, peace and harmony in the physical form (UNESCO, 2013). Democracy has its acceptable norms the world over, and there are universal regimes of equality regardless of race, creed and culture. This is the highest Universal right of people with the minimum conditions being transparency, freedom of expression, responsiveness and equality (UNESCO, 1997). The new digital technology, particularly the internet, greatly defines democracy in Politics and civil society. They are regarded as a challenge to the political scientists to embrace traditional concepts and redefine the known manifestations of the behaviours and attitudes. The internet opens new ways of online participation and new types of participation (Anduiza, Cantijoch 2009).

The existence of digital literacy does not directly change the political process, but speeds up the process of existing political trends. ICTs, in this regard, present new opportunities for engaging young citizens according to their ability to use new and convenient, non-costly media. Citizens can now conveniently access politicians and communicate with one another easily, and get a wide scope of information in order to make wise choices on various matters. ICTs, the internet and digital media have altered the ways of political participation (Collin P, 2008) and the advent of modern technologies opens new windows to take part in politics that one cannot even imagine (Abbas & Nawaz, 2014). The online and the expansion of the electronic infrastructure have offered the potential to interact, publish and educate on a vast scale. Since the birth of ICTs, it is apparent that it has offered the essential and fundamental change in the available infrastructure. The young generation can now get the opportunity to enjoy a fantastic advantage in the usage of digital technologies that earlier generations have never had (ITU, 2008).

The political participation of the citizens can affect the selection and action process of political representation, since it is advisable that it is a fluid concept. We can also say in these words that the representation discerns the opinion of the masses when they make any decision during the political procedure. (Chatora, 2012). Normative notion that makes political participation among young people broad can be characterized as the act of participating in the formulation of opinion and action, which allows bringing positive change to society (Abbas Z, Nawaz, 2014). Procedures that make it easy to access public services make citizens feel comfortable knowing how to trust and relate to the processes of administration. The worst issues that impact developing countries involve the attempt to apply digital governance systems. Financial Openings, Availability or lack of proper digital skills, and social disparity are setbacks to the development of e-governance programs (Heeks, 2002).

In the developing world, people find it challenging to access internet facilities in rural areas. The inaccessible due to online access cannot be established by deprived individuals (UNESCO, 2021) because they do not have money or adequate schooling. Most developing

countries have strived to overcome these great obstacles, even though they exist. The Aadhaar system in India provides digital services to enhance access to government benefits for its citizens and demonstrates the issue of eliminating bureaucratic issues between the populace and the government in terms of digital governance. Digital governance has a strong impact on the participation of citizens in governing activities and public services. The developed countries allow their citizens to be involved in policymaking through online debates, e-petitions, and contributing to the budget. Such programs provide the citizens with an opportunity to have a direct impact on decrees made by the rulers, and this gives them greater stake in the public administration (Chadwick,2011).

In this study, a qualitative model is developed to examine how access to social media platforms impacts patterns of political engagement among urban and rural populations and how online political discourses reshape traditional power structures in Pakistan. Political engagement influences the development of political identity among youth in Pakistan. It addresses the entire research gap in the empirical study of e-participation and digital democracy. It also assists academics and policymakers by providing insights into how it relates to citizens' e-participation. More informed steps can therefore be taken to enhance citizens' e-participation in digital government platforms. The remainder of the article is organized as follows: Section 1 offers a comprehensive introduction and literature review. Section 2 covers the theoretical framework and research design. Section 3 presents the study's findings, while Section 4 provides an in-depth discussion of these results. Finally, Section 5 concludes the study.

2.0 Literature Review

The concept of political participation, according to Andrew Chadwick, mainly focuses on how citizens can engage in politics through digital media and technology. In her work, particularly in "Internet Politics: States, Citizens, and New Communication Technologies" (2006), she explores the opportunities and challenges that the internet and social media platforms present for political participation, mobilization, and democracy. One of Chadwick's key findings is what is known as dual screening, where both media are used simultaneously during political events like debates, such as when TV, radio, and social media are all engaged. Their research shows that active, real-time interaction via social media during political discussions and debates (known as lean-forward practices) is strongly linked to higher levels of political participation. In contrast, more passive consumption (or lean-back practices) is less effective. This demonstrates that digital interactivity enhances citizens' political involvement through discussion and live participation.

Chadwick also highlights the hybrid nature of modern political communication, where traditional and digital media coexist, leading to changes in how parties, campaigns, and citizens communicate and organize. Her work underscores the potential of digital tools to mobilize people, while also acknowledging existing barriers or disparities in online participation. The research emphasizes that digital media have become transformative in facilitating political engagement. Activities like commenting and participating in online political discussions are associated with a higher level of democratic involvement. The hybrid media system, which combines old and new media, has significantly impacted modern political mobilization and participation.

Digital media has also changed participation, whereby Chadwick claims that new forms of engaging people in politics via the internet and social media have emerged. Individuals are now capable of discussing, planning, and communicating political ideas via the internet, not necessarily through conventional practices such as voting or rallies. Another important aspect is the participation; Chadwick found in his research that the more a person is active in social media about politics, the more involved in politics the person is (i.e., that commenting, sharing, or debating it during livestreams enhances political interest). It is not the same as merely watching or reading politics online. He also presents the so-called hybrid media system when old media (Television, Newspapers) and new media (social media, Blogs) cooperate, which has an impact on the way individuals acquire knowledge about politics and become active political actors.

Whereas digital tools may make more people engaged in the process, not all of them are equally accessible or able to take part online. Chadwick thinks that digital media and the proactive use of the same can help increase political participation, although the level depends on the way people use the tools.

3.0 Methodology

This research used a qualitative approach to explore digital democracy and online political participation in Pakistan. This method, which allows for a thorough understanding, was considered suitable for examining the lived experiences of youth within Pakistan's multicultural and multinational context. The study is based on nominalist ontology and interpretative, anti-positivist epistemology, indicating that social reality is constructed through cultural and social interactions. An exploratory research design was chosen due to the novelty of the topic and the goal of observing individuals in their natural environments. The universe of the study was Pakistan. The young people aged 15 to 29 were selected as the focus because of their engagement in political e-participation. A non-probability purposive sampling method was used to select participants, with the sample size determined by saturation, when no new insights emerged from the interviews. Data collection involved an unstructured interview guide, enabling researcher to explore various aspects of digital democracy and political online participation. Telephonic interview method was conducted, providing detailed insights into participants' social circumstances. Thematic analysis was used to examine the data, helping identify and evaluate recurring themes. The process included data familiarization, coding, theme development, and final synthesis. Ethical considerations were strictly followed to ensure confidentiality and cultural respect. Field experiences highlighted challenges in building rapport with respondents, due to local security concerns and cultural norms. The study faced limitations related to its limited geographic and demographic scope and reliance on qualitative methods, which limit the broader applicability of the findings. Despite these challenges, the research offered valuable insights into digital democracy and online political participation in Pakistan.

4.0 Findings and Results

The data collection technique was a telephonic interview technique. Moreover, in the present study, the researcher collected data from 10 respondents with a pilot study to understand the validity and reliability of the data and to know the constraints of the discussion. According to the

nature of research and its relevance, the respondents are selected from the 4 provinces of Pakistan, Balochistan, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Punjab in order to collect data in detail about the present study. The researcher has used Thematic analysis to make themes according to the topic, keeping in mind the research questions, research objectives, and theoretical framework. The themes are derived from the researcher's manual expertise and the legal landscape of the research area. The primary focus was on key indicators and topic implications. The themes were also made using the experience respondents' expertise and knowledge. Themes consisted of the rural and urban imbalance of e-participation.

There is no denying the fact that Pakistan's population is divided into rural and urban areas, and mostly the society is rural. To understand the political landscape of rural and urban political e-participation, in this regard, one respondent said,

Social media access has significantly reshaped political participation across Pakistan, though unevenly between urban and rural classes. Urban populations benefit from better internet infrastructure, digital literacy, and exposure to diverse political content, enabling more active engagement, such as participating in online campaigns, organising protests, or debating on Twitter/X. In contrast, rural populations often rely on platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp due to limited bandwidth and education. While political awareness is growing even in remote areas, rural engagement is often passive, driven by viral content rather than structured activism. Hence, while social media is a leveller in theory, in practice, the digital divide reinforces class-based participation gaps.

Pakistan is an underdeveloped country and is also considered a third-world nation. Most people live underprivileged lives, especially in rural areas, which are the most neglected. It is commonly observed in rural areas that people are not aware of their basic rights, and they are living day in and day out. They do not have any interest in political participation. On the other hand, lack of facilities is also a mammoth problem for them. Nevertheless, the case is not the same for urban areas. To understand the differences between rural and urban life, the researcher asked one of the respondents, as he had explained,

It is clear that social media usage differs between urban and rural areas. In rural regions, people mainly use social media for fun and leisure. They are unaware of political participation and political engagement via social media. They primarily use Facebook for videos and pictures, and TikTok to pass the time. They have no specific purpose; they use social media unconsciously and unintentionally. Conversely, residents of urban areas are more knowledgeable about social media and more active on these platforms. They occasionally engage in political debates, criticise the government for vague policies, and debate issues related to the state and its institutions.

In today's era, the globe has become a global street, as close as it has ever been, and it is all about

social media. E-political participation has become one of the most important aspects of social life; no one can imagine their life without social media. Today's political participation is open to everyone; there is no limitation on the participation of individuals. In this regard, as the respondent shared,

Social media has altered the political participation in Pakistan. There are evident differences between the city and the rural youth. Having access to enhanced internet connections and digital literacy, urban youth participate in online discussions, subscribe to political pages, organize demonstrations, etc. The rural young people are also comparable in their political awareness, but are shackled by the lack of appropriate infrastructure to engage them in active engagement on any activity, and rather, they get to be passive in watching or sharing content. Although urban youth usually develop a politically aware online presence by following the more mainstream or counter products, youth in rural areas tend to be more reserved, as limitations and norms in the communities do not support the creation of such an assumption. The disconnect is mainly in access and self-expression, and not political awareness. The impact of social media on political engagement depends on contextual factors such as access, education, and socio-political culture.

It is commonly accepted that urban areas are associated with facilities and prosperity; along with that, urban areas are first and foremost areas for any government to bring developments on both infrastructure and infrastructure. On the other hand, rural areas are mostly neglected. While interviewing respondents, one of them expressed,

-In urban areas, due to easy access to social media platforms, social media has become a powerful tool for political engineering, online political campaigns, carrying out awareness sessions, mobilizing the general public, and constructing public opinion. Apart from this, social media platforms result in social movements where people participate in social actions and hold the incumbent government accountable. In a matter of minutes, news is spread among members on social media platforms like Facebook or Twitter, where members are brought together in public spaces for mobilization.

Apart from that, social media has become a platform where individuals share their experiences freely, without gender bias. It is becoming popular in Pakistan, after the feminist movements, females are more open when it comes to domestic violence, harassment, or other personal or professional issues. Females share what they experience through social media. While interviewing respondents, one respondent shared,

Social media has also resulted in political activism in rural communities. Due to extended internet services, people in rural areas are now politically active for their fundamental rights. These platforms have also become a voice for the oppressed, especially women, where we found frequent cases of harassment of

women or gender -based violence in rural areas. Further, social media has also been a source of awareness in rural communities. In recent years, voter turnout has been evident in rural areas. Such changes are the result of social media usage.

There is no denying the fact that politics is a dynamic institution, and it has passed plenty of transitions due to the Renaissance, industrialization, revolutions, and changing nature of society. Political participation and political views go hand in hand, and both are supplementary and complementary. In today's era, the globe is just like street people's tertiary relationships have dominated the primary and secondary ones. Online platforms are accessible to everyone without any distinction of race, nation, or ethnicity. Political e-participation enabled every individual to share, write, or raise their voice against any barbarism. Pakistan is considered a disturbed state, and since its inception, it has been playing political tactics. In this regard as one of the respondents shared,

Online platforms provide youth with unfiltered access to political debates, documentaries, activism, and perspectives beyond traditional sources like family, religious leaders, or state-run media. This exposure encourages critical thinking, allowing young people to challenge dominant narratives, be it on military involvement in politics, ethnic marginalization, or gender rights. Movements such as the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) or Baloch rights campaigns have gained traction among youth via digital platforms, reshaping loyalties from personality-based politics to cause-based activism. In short, online discourse empowers youth to develop more nuanced and progressive political stances.

It is a hard fact that, online political participation has brought paradigm shifts in the globe especially, regions with low stability and accountability, as well as conflict. Pakistan is facing political instability and governance has created words, but action is missing. People became exhausted from traditional lip servicing politics and now looking for new form of politics where no background, race, ethnicity or class affect participation. Criticizing a government or their introduced policies are the basic right of citizens, if people are not heard but can share their concerns through e-politics. While interviewing a respondent, he shared,

Online political participation is bringing a paradigm shift in Pakistan's political institutions; people are becoming more politically conscious about reality and can perform cost-benefit analyses. In today's era, youth see the traditional political system as outdated and ineffective. Youth are in search of a valid reality, and it is clear that the traditional political system is more than just words. E-participation is shaping individuals' political opinions and replacing traditional ideas with a more rational and valid political paradigm. Youth is inclined towards truth and realities to trace out. And online politics assures a robust learning and reshaping of old-fashioned perceptions, which are of no productive use as per the demands of the world order.

The political system in Pakistan is exclusive, which prevents the middle class or marginalized individuals from considering participation or thinking about the traditional political landscape. As one observes, only a limited number of parties have created their political hegemony and determined the future of millions of people; these are viewed theoretically, but the claims remain the same while faces change over time. For a political party, youth serve as fuel or capital that can be used to meet their interests or achieve their goals. Generally, youth, especially educated youth, show little interest in traditional politics but are engaged in e-political participation. However, the government presents impressive discourses to attract youth, but it seems superficial. While collecting data, as one respondent expressed,

The online political discourses try to reshape the traditional view of youth in Pakistan in accordance with current lobbies of their interests. The youth is encouraged by the political talks they participate in and freely criticise. But the youth think differently according to their loyalties with different political narratives, and obviously support them. Online political discourse has started reshaping the traditional political views among youth in Pakistan. Earlier, the political debate was centered around dynastic politics and was void of criticism. With the rise of online political discourse, critical thinking has started taking place among youth. The youth widely criticize the traditional policies of political parties. Additionally, the rise of the middle class has also been witnessed in urban politics. Students are nowadays politically active and aware of their rights. The country has witnessed the rise of mass politics in the form of PTM and BYC. Further, the engagement of youth in elections has also been increased. The above Changes are the result of online political discourse in the country.

It is very interesting to note that it is a natural fact that human socialization, and especially political socialization, starts from home and from time to time, by political engagement or political understanding, changes the political socialization from bottom to top or vice versa. It does not matter whether you are interested in political institutions or not, but believe that politics is interested in those living in human society. With the help of Human inventions and technological revolution, the political worldview has shifted to the e-world. It is necessary to highlight that when individuals come to use social media, they automatically start political resocialization. While interviewing, as one of the respondents said,

Most individuals in Pakistan experience early political socialization through family, tribe, ethnicity, religious schooling, or local community elders. These influences often promote a specific worldview shaped by regional history or conservative values. The lack of civic education in schools also means that political understanding remains narrow, emotionally charged, or based on allegiance to personalities rather than policies. Social media engagement gradually transforms this, introducing

youth to pluralistic, rights-based political frameworks and dissenting voices they wouldn't otherwise encounter.

Whereas in this regard, while interviewing respondents one shared,

It is interesting to share that before engaging in e-participation, my political views were not rational; I believed that seeing is believing was my political guiding principle. Since I began participating in political e-engagement, people have come to know me and agree with my political narratives. In earlier times, it was not easy for a common person to share their political ideas and concerns easily, but today it is possible thanks to social media. People can easily tag politicians and make them aware of their duties and responsibilities. Whether someone cares or not, e-participation has boosted individuals' confidence. The use of media has completely created a State of utter confession. Because of different opinions to differentiate, and there is no valid platform to inquire about the truth-based performances. Yet seems reliable to make our analysis.

As a matter of fact, e-participation is more dominant than other means of communication when it comes to influence and socialization. It has replaced various institutions, and regarding this, one respondent confidently shared.

Before engaging with e-political participation, I was socialized by the information received from mainstream media. My family's political ideology influenced my political views. My political views were centered around ethnic politics. And I was unaware of my fundamental and political rights. However, after engaging with e-political participation, I am able to broaden my political views. Now, my political thoughts are mostly concerned with world political views. I have become aware of my political rights, and further, through social media, have been able to raise my voice on a larger scale, which enables me to hold my government accountable and be an active citizen in the country's affairs.

From the above discussion, it is clear that e-participants are more confident interacting on the internet. The young people perceived their political socialization as inadequate, as it was influenced by respect for the older generation and the fear of politics, considered dirty or dangerous in situations of dictatorship. Moreover, Digital activism affected this, turning up their voices and allowing them to embrace a definite political identity. Appreciations in the form of likes, shares, and comments boosted their egotistical sense of worth, and the online political figure became more vocal than the offline social figure.

5.0 Discussion and Conclusion

In this research, the researcher tried to study and address the digital governance and political e-participation of youth in Pakistan. During data collection, it was observed that the youth are active and are e-political participants. The research aimed to determine and analyse how youth is analyzing digital governance and e-participation in Pakistan and to understand their attitude towards digital participation and their self-esteem. The study focused on the consequences of the topic's key indicators while examining the sociocultural and legal aspects of the studied area's background. Moreover, to understand the results of the study, in this part, the study's findings are discussed. The discussion is organized following the themes that emerged from respondents' interviews while considering research questions, objectives, and theoretical framework in mind.

In this regard, the propositions from the theoretical framework are used. The principles of Chadwick's digital e-participation theory were used as a framework to develop research questions for data collection and themes for data analysis. The theory's propositions focus on the relevance of various factors such as social media, active and passive participation, and hybrid media.

Respondents expressed that social media is an indispensable part of society, and it has made political participation easier than other means. Every individual is independent and engages with political debates and can criticize the significant policies introduced by the government in Pakistan. It is also mentioned by respondents that there is a clear difference between urban and rural political landscape, urban areas are engaged in e-participation compared to rural areas. It is observed that the traditional political worldview is shifted to e-participation, where rational, logic, and systematic analysis occur, and every individual is supposed to get comeuppance. The respondents express that marginalized communities, ethnicities, races, or genders can e-participate and share their concerns or agonies. The middle class is more rational than other classes in Pakistan, according to respondents. The e-participation acknowledges and defends the rights of persons, including their ability to express their political identification and equal access to express and digital governance. The respondents highlighted the challenges that people encounter when trying to exercise these rights. Because law enforcement and the general public lack information and compassion, discrimination and harassment against marginalized and vulnerable individuals are common. In this research, the researcher realized a gap between the urban and rural areas' e-participation and the government and state institutions. Moreover, it has been noticed that there is a large population in Pakistan that still does not know about e-participation and digital governance. Education is a big agent in differentiating people into two distinct groups because uneducated people use social media for the sake of pleasure and to spend their leisure time while using Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, or Snapchat. However, educated people are more likely to use Twitter, following national and international magazines or journals, and frequently debating or discussing national and international issues through e-participation.

Conclusion

This paper explores how social media influences the political participation of young people in Pakistan, with a focus on the urban-rural divide. The findings show that social media platforms are now considered essential for political involvement, empowering individuals, especially minorities, to express concerns and engage more openly in political discussions than traditional tools allow. More educated urban youth actively participate in digital platforms through rational and systematic political debates. In contrast, rural populations lag due to limited access, education, and knowledge gaps. The study also emphasizes the role of online political communication in transforming traditional notions of power by promoting diverse identities and inclusion in politics. However, issues such as discrimination, harassment, and lack of institutional support persist, limiting the full potential of digital governance and e-participation. The level of education also plays a key role, as it influences the quality and nature of interactions with online political content, with educated youth tending to engage more critically. Overall, the analysis offers insights into the emergence of an uneven and growing landscape of digital political participation in Pakistan,

shaped by social media as both a tool for empowerment and a reflection of social inequality. Addressing these gaps through increased awareness, education, and institutional support is essential for developing a more inclusive and effective digital democracy.

Asad Ali: Problem Identification and Theoretical Framework, Data Analysis and Drafting
Conflict of Interests/Disclosures

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest in this article's research, authorship, and publication.

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