The Role of Facebook in Political Socialization and Political Participation Among Women in Pakistan

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Abstract. Gender gaps in political participation are universal in democracies around the world. Women constitute half of the world's population (49.6%). In South Asia, Pakistan has the largest gender gap and discrimination against women in all areas of life. This topic has largely been studied in relevance to youth generally, but studies on women political participation lack behind academically in underdeveloped countries. This article will be taking a conceptual approach to examine the relationship between political socialization and political participation with the role of Facebook usage among women in Pakistan. As Facebook is the most common social media platform used by women in Pakistan for various matters including political awareness. In this connection, this study will find out how Facebook usage is associated with political socialization and political participation of women in Pakistan. As it has been observed that in elections, women voter turnout is lower than men in Pakistan. This study will be quantitative in nature, questionnaire technique will be adopted to collect data. The population of the study will be women organizations in Karachi, Pakistan. The findings of the study will provide important implication to researchers, policymakers, political parties, and media to what extent women are politically socialized and how the political participation of women can be improved in future. World today is a global market and the most integral tool to spread information is media, therefore, design of the study will be to analyse the relationship between political socialization and participation with Facebook usage among women in Pakistan.

Keywords: Political Socialization · Facebook · Women · Political Participation

1 Introduction

To achieve gender equality, sustainable development, democracy, and peace, it is essential to involve women in all kinds of decision-making process including the active participation of women in political matters. Women are still underrepresented in decision-making process around the globe. By the data presented by UN WOMEN in September 2021, from 24 countries, there are only 26 women serving as head of state or government. Only 21% of women holds the rank of ministers. Gender balance in political participation (PP) and sharing of power between men and women in decision-making process

is one of the globally agreed target set in Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995). Most of the countries in world have not achieved gender balance in PP yet, and few have met 50% of ambitious targets for gender parity [1–3].

Many researchers have highlighted the importance of political socialization and considered it substantial for real democracy as it is further a key in prosperity and progress of any country. Political socialization performs a fundamental role in the formation of the PP, particularly in voting behaviour. The lack of political socialization is the reason of existence of political illiteracy among women in Pakistan [4–6].

Dahl [7] emphasized that political socialization is a process of learning about political systems and people of all ages go through this process. The knowledge acquired by socialization develops a sense of ownership among people and helps them make decisions and participate in the political process. Scholars claimed that social media offers an opportunity and space to people where they can receive news and information about politics but also share their opinions about it. With the invention of computers and mobile phones, social communication became a leading feature of social networking sites. This accessibility of social media resulted in promoting democracy and creating political awareness among masses [8]. In today's modern era, the use of social media for political communication has become one of the efficient forms of communication. It is said that social media is one of the most penetrating platforms emerged in twenty-first century [9]. The social networking sites offer a platform to people where they can discuss political, social, and religious matters [10] which improve and expedite communication within societies. Through social media people consume news content which influences the behaviours and attitudes of people towards societal and political matters [11] and political values exhibited in advertisements [12].

According to the data shared by Statista 2022, there are 2.93 billion active Facebook users worldwide, making it the most common social media network around the globe. For the purpose of the study, only Facebook will be used as according to the data Facebook is the most frequently used social media network in Pakistan. In the beginning of the year 2022, penetration of internet in Pakistan stayed at 36.5% of the total population, i.e., 82.90 million internet users followed by Facebook with 43.55 million users [3]. As per the same source, there were 26.2% Facebook users in Pakistan in May 2022. Out of this 77% are men and 22.9% of users are women.

For gender equality and sustainable democracy, participation of women politically (as candidate and voter) is an essential prerequisite. It facilitates direct engagement of women in public decision making which is an ensuring mean in creating a sense of accountability among women [3]. Several political socialization agents such as family, peer groups, educational institute, and media affects the PP of women. It is claimed that women in underdeveloped countries more dependent on male members heading the house or clan to vote [6]. Women constitute half of the population of Pakistan [14]. Many legislations have been made to empower women economically and politically. After all those developments still PP of women in Pakistan is very low [15]. Keeping in view the existing gap, the focus of this paper is to find out role of Facebook in political socialization and political participation by focusing on women in Pakistan. As studied in the literature the gender gap in PP is an important and critical issue faced by the country. To bridge this gap in the prevailing literature, this study sought to investigate how and to what

extent usage of Facebook enhances political socialization among Pakistani women and whether Facebook usage is associated with political participation of Pakistani women.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Political Socialization

The term Political Socialization was coined by Hyman (1959) and conceptualized it as the "process of understanding societal patterns which relates the importance of youth in society, facilitated through different agents of society". Through the process of political socialization, people are trained about the political culture of their country [16]. It is a process which develops particular political behaviours, attitudes, norms and opinions which are essential to become a good citizen in their society. Basically, socialization is a one-way process by which people understand and gain knowledge about political matters by interacting with adults and exposure to media.

The agents of political socialization comprise of family, educational institutes, peer groups and mass media. For instance, family members who are actively participating in political matters largely influence and encourage their young kids to do the same. People learn from their peer groups by interacting with them face to face or using any Facebook group. Political socialization can take place anywhere and at any stage of life. As with changing experiences people accept, reject, alter, or ignore political messages [17]. The role of communicative family environment, peer groups discussion and media are the influential tools for political socialization and participation of youth [18]. For this study, political socialization is described as the process by which people acquire the attitudes, behaviours, norms, values, and beliefs towards the political system of the country where they reside.

Learning and socialization are ongoing processes. One cannot predict at what age the process of socialization starts or ends. Though many scholars have stated that primary education in childhood has its impact on this process, but the ideas, beliefs, and attitudes of people change by the time [19]. This includes primary and secondary factors of political socialization like family, peer groups, educational institutes, religious scholars, and mass media. Political socialization has an enormous influence on the political stability of any country. As it is the process which helps in developing political behaviours, attitudes, norms, and values among people of any country. It provides a better understanding of political change and political system. Therefore, it is said that the process of socialization can occur at any time in life. Researcher agrees on the point that the primary agent of socialization influences the thought process of any individual, but they consider secondary agents as responsible factor for bringing the change and modifying the political thoughts, ideas, attitudes, behaviours, and traits of people which they had learned in their childhood [7, 20].

2.2 Political Participation

Political participation is characterized as the involvement of people of a country in activities which are responsible and have influence in political outcomes like selecting

a candidate, structure of government and making of policies [21]. It has various shapes like voting, campaigning, attending political events and rallies, joining political parties, protesting for or against the government [22]. In this study, PP is referred to as both offline and online participations. The offline PP involves activities such as taking part in and attending political rallies, campaigning for a particular political candidate, and voting. Moreover, online political participation includes people's engagement in activities like being part of an online petition, consuming information and political knowledge using Facebook, and posting and sharing candidate's messages on Facebook [22].

Furthermore, the Internet has empowered people to perform online political activities like commenting on the post of politicians, supporting, and sharing campaign ads and website on social networking sites, sending messages to government authorities, criticizing, and commenting on candidates' policies and performance, and sharing their political views online [23]. Several political socialization agents such as family, peer groups, educational institute, and media affects the PP of women. The gender gap in politics is persistent, boys from childhood are provided with political knowledge and it is taught to girls that politics is a masculine matter [24]. Women in underdeveloped countries like Pakistan are more dependent on male members of the family to make political decisions specially voting [25, 26]. Many NGO's and government organizations are working for women empowerment specifically in the field of economic stability and politics. With all those developments and efforts, the PP of women in Pakistan is still very low [26]. According to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), in 2018 election, the voter count of women was 11 million lesser than men. Only 45.7% of registered women came out to vote [27].

Furthermore, Hamid [1] studied the voting behaviour of women in Pakistan and claimed that there is a vast difference in political awareness of women and men. Male members of society are relatively more politically sound than women. And concluded that women are usually dependent on male members of family to take decision about political matters, on the other hand men are independent in making their decision about voting. Many scholars observed that social media usage allows people to communicate and express their ideas and thoughts more freely with larger groups of people. This online PP improves the offline PP of public as well [28]. It is also observed that people usually communicate online with those who are part of their real lives. People are more comfortable in discussing their views online and offline with the same group [29].

2.3 Political Socialization and Political Participation

Democracy is a form of government which is by the people and for the people. In a democratic government, the public has the right to choose their leaders for themselves. The process of selecting a candidate as head of state is usually done by elections. Political socialization as discussed earlier includes the awareness and knowledge of citizens about their political system. It is observed from the studied literature that the more people are aware about the political system of their country will increase the PP of people. For an improved PP, the process of political socialization is important as it provides people the information about their rights. In this way people are more aware and responsible towards selecting a candidate for their state. As the future of the country depends on that crucial decision taken by the public [30].

Moreover, Davidson & Pieper [31] argued about the association of religious places in creating PP among people in USA. They found out that people who are more inclined towards religious groups participate actively in the electoral process than people who are less inclined or unassociated with religious groups. As nonreligious people lack social connection among communities. Religious groups encourage people to take part in political rallies and voting processes. As agents of political socialization, family plays a significant role in PP. As parent's PP, interest in political system, discussion about political matters helps children to build up thoughts about political system and participation. The scholar argued about the role of higher education in PP and found out that trajectories of higher education help in improving PP among youth [32].

Similarly, Memon [33] in her study claimed that peer groups as an agent of political socialization, is more significant for developing political behaviour among youth. She further stated that information consumed using traditional media like newspaper, TV and online medium and interpersonal communication has significant and positive impact on PP of Pakistani youth.

2.4   Facebook Usage for Political Socialization & Political Participation

In the first quarter of 2022, Facebook had 2.93 billion active users around the globe [34]. For the purpose of the study, only Facebook will be used as according to the data Facebook is the most frequently used social media network in Pakistan also. Studies have shown that social networking sites offers a space for public to share political news, information, and opinion. This way those youngsters who have adequate knowledge about political matters use social media to actively participate in building up new political culture in Pakistan [35]. Pakistan has 82.90 million internet users in the beginning of year 2022, with 57, 506,800 Facebook users in Pakistan [36].

Many scholars agreed that social media has become a new, digital public sphere [36–38]. The term public sphere was first used by Jürgen Habermas (1962) and characterized as a place where citizens come together to discuss political matters and debate about the issues being faced by society. It facilitates the two-way communication process, as social media not only provides information but a place for the public to comment and share their views about any issue. Social media serves as significant sources of collecting information for individuals. It provides people an opportunity to gather information rapidly and a chance to post their own opinions about any political and social matter from their country or worldwide [39]. Jennings & Russell [40] provided a detailed study on the influence of Facebook on political views and behaviours of people. They claimed that people use social media platforms to gather information about any matter but also, they got to build various perspectives by communicating with their social networks. This influences the attitudes and behaviours of people towards any specific issue related to society, culture, and politics. Ahmad et al. [41] claimed that a large number of people, especially youth utilize social media networks to gather political knowledge and information. Social media has given them a space and opportunity to collect political news and share their views. By the invention of online PP individuals can freely express their ideas, thoughts and point of views related to any political party, candidate, and government. It has provided the public with a platform to communicate with their leaders and authorities in an effective way.
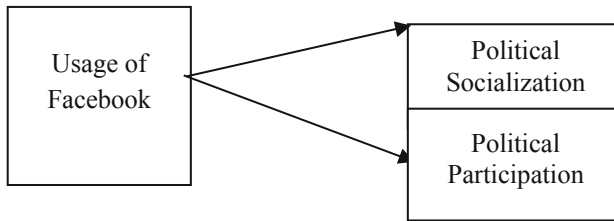
Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework

Social networking sites (SNSs) are being used as a tool for political communication globally. It has provided a platform to people where they can exchange their political views, conduct protest on any issue, spread out political messages more frequently on mass level and serves as a bridge to discuss about social and political matters outside and within the societies [42]. Scholar from Cambodia indicated that online Facebook PP is a strong predictor of offline political behaviour among youth. Researcher further notified that online PP on Facebook has different modes, such as the active participation differs from one form of online activity to another. The study also determines the factors which are associated with intensive online PP. Which includes sociodemographic, psychological, and Facebook-related behavioural factors such as socioeconomic status, age, political efficacy, and habits of online news consumption [43].

From the perspectives of many scholars, Facebook has a strong impact on building up people's views about political matters. Globally, politicians have used this social networking site for the purpose of disseminating their political views among masses. It has been observed that politicians with active social media sites are more popular and trustworthy among people, especially among youth [24, 44]. Informational use of Facebook is also a major use of mass media described by many scholars. The most frequent findings were that people use this medium to seek information, express their opinion about any political candidate or party. In the political contexts, these social media behaviours are essential to form a sustainable and functional democracy [45–48]. Toksöz [31] argues that there is a significant relationship between the use of social media as a tool for receiving political news and PP. Also, the factors of political socialization including family, peer groups, school and mass media have influential impact on PP of people. Keeping in view the studied literature, followings are the propositions (Fig. 1)

Proposition 1: Facebook usage is positively associated with political socialization among women in Pakistan.
Proposition 2: Facebook usage is positively associated with political participation of women in Pakistan.

3 Methodology

For the purpose of this study, a quantitative approach will be adopted, in which survey questionnaire will be administered. As survey method is appropriate to reach a large segment of the target audience [49]. Quantitative method is considered suitable to control

biasness, and the findings can be generalized and replicated [50]. The population of the study will be female staff workers of women organizations in Karachi, Pakistan. As these organizations have close relationship with community members and are involved in improving women empowerment in all spheres. The respondents will be selected using stratified random sampling technique. This includes a process of stratification of organization, following a random selection of respondents from each stratum [51].

4 Conclusion

The widespread role of social media has effects on people's lives. With the spread of technological advancements, it has become easier to spread messages to the mass public. It has influenced people's cultural and political views. As per the report of World Economic Forum on Global Gender Gap 2021, only 26.1% women hold the parliamentary positions around the globe, wherein Asia has 3rd lowest rank with 19.7% women representation and in Pakistan women only holds 10.7% positions among ministries [52]. This gender gap in PP is a crucial issue to be further discussed in detail. From the studied literature it has been observed that the relationship of Facebook with political socialization and PP among women in Pakistan needs to be adequately examined. This study will elaborate the proposed relationship between Facebook usage and political socialization and PP among women in context of Pakistan. Many scholars argue that social media stimulates online and offline PP in general public. In this study, it is predicted that Facebook usage and online political news consumption enhances political socialization and PP among women. In addition, the findings will suggest useful methods to improve PP of women in Pakistan using digital tools of communication.

Which will further provide a way out to concerned authorities, policymakers, political parties to better understand the issue and significant solutions to eradicate this long prevailing gender gap in political participation in Pakistan.

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