

## **The role of social media on the voting behavior of middle-aged and above educators of Bahawalpur during the general elections of 2018**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Social media sites were greatly used by political parties and the masses in the general elections of 2018 in Pakistan. The influence of social media on the voting behavior of youth has been researched extensively. The objective of this study is to observe how social media has influenced the voting behavior and political participation of middle-aged and elder educators of Bahawalpur. Qualitative research has been conducted with the help of a structured questionnaire, and descriptive analysis is used for analysis. The sample size is 25 based on convenience sampling. The findings reveal that Facebook and YouTube are the most used platforms by middle-aged educators. The results of this research show that the voting behavior of the middle-aged educators of Bahawalpur has been influenced by the usage of social media sites.*

**Keywords:** *Voting Behavior, Political Participation, Social Media, General Elections of 2018, Political Communication.*

### **Introduction**

With the technological advancement in the last two decades, the usage of the internet and more specifically, social networking sites has influenced almost all walks of life. Fortunately, the impact of social networking sites has not been confined to developed countries. In countries like Pakistan, a quarter of the population is using the internet and social media like Facebook and Twitter, which is a great development because it has changed the social dynamics of Pakistani society. All over the world, the new role of social media has emerged as a catalyst for political awareness and participation. Luckily, Pakistan has been relishing this new role of social networking sites. The paramount evidence of this development in Pakistani society can be seen in the role of social media in the general elections of 2018. The usage of social media sites during elections in Pakistan was seen 2013 for the first time. However, circumstances changed a lot between the elections of 2013 to 2018.

In the general elections of 2013, mainly a young population of the country was using social media sites to participate politically. In addition to this, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) was using social media for its campaign. Pakistan Muslim League

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Nawaz (PMLN) and Mutahida Qomi Movement (MQM) were also addressing their voters through social media. However, PTI ran a great campaign on social media because its followers were young, and they were avid users of these sites. With the time, the usage of the internet and social media surged in Pakistan. The two imperative developments observed in the general elections of 2018 were: first, all the major political parties used social media as a main tool for their political campaigns, either to address voters, sadly to defame opponents, promulgate their manifesto or policies, highlight their achievements, and instruct fellow candidates. Secondly, middle-aged, or above started using social media for their political awareness and participation. Resultantly, social media came out as a game changer during the general elections of 2018 in Pakistan. The role of social media sites on the politics of Pakistan and especially young voters is undeniable and widely researched. However, the influence of social media on the voting behavior of middle-aged and above educators in Bahawalpur is unexplored. This study has significant in this context that it will allow understanding the role of media in the lives of middle-aged educators in Bahawalpur, a demographically and politically important city in South Punjab. The research question of this study is that do social media sites influence the voting behavior of middle-aged educators of Bahawalpur. The significance of this research is that it is going to study an unexplored demographic group that has great influence. The limitation of this study is that the sample size is small.

### Literature Review

#### **Introduction to social media, history, influence, and importance:**

Social media is an instrument which is used to share ideas and information. The examples of social media are Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and LinkedIn that are used to facilitate communication. Users share their ideas, photos, thoughts, and videos through them. In addition to this, social media is a platform to get information, share views, and have discussions. Social media is a paramount tool for freedom of expression. Research has found that there is a positive connection between online political expression and political participation. It means if People are free to express their political views, they will be more eager to participate in politics. A state cannot claim to be democratic without political awareness of its masses because it allows people to examine the political realities and make voting decisions accordingly. The sources of political awareness are as follows: information shared by family and friends, political campaigns, and educational institutions. In addition to these, Newspapers and Television channels are important players in creating political awareness. However, with technological advancement and enhanced usage of mobile, social media has emerged as a new source of political awareness. Social media is a more convenient mode of communication because people get access to the profiles of well-known politicians and political parties and can voice their opinion more confidently. Social media proved to be a substitute for electronic and print media because it enables getting an immediate response instead of one-way communication. Almost 850 million people use Facebook, and 23% of them check Facebook five times a day. The most significant impact of social media so far has been its use for political activities and causes. Across the world, politicians and political activists have been using social media to reach many people (Ghani, 2020). It is believed that Barack Hussein Obama set the trend of using social media

during election campaign 2008. He was the first one who used social media, more specifically, Twitter to promote his political agenda. South Korean Politicians also widely use social media to propagate their political activities. In Australian politics, the users of social media had positive results during elections than the non-users of social media. During the Norwegian elections of 2013, politicians who were using both traditional and social media were more effective than those who were using just one medium. Therefore, across the globe common trends have been seen that the popularity of a politician and chances of winning increase by the usage of social media (Khan & Shami, 2019).

Social media is very significant because it has evolved and changed the pattern of thinking and behavior of people. It has made world a global village, and everyone is associated. As social media has made it easy for people to raise their voice and opinion freely and take initiative. Resultantly, participation and engagement of people in social issues have increased greatly. Before social media, the government, and traditional media, which include print and electronic media, were responsible for providing information to the public. It is very easy for people to generate a movement and present their views with the help of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and blogs (Ghani, 2020). Social media sites like Facebook and Twitter have an enhanced level of interactivity but have increased fakeness and bluntness as well. That's why some people have gone back to print media and news channels for reliable news. The newspaper is known as the oldest and reliable tool of communication. It has played a significant role in opinion-building. The socioeconomic status of voters influences their voting decision. Electoral malpractice is a normal practice in elections. There are two categories of voters, first who make decisions by watching a thirty-second advertisement on television, and other category makes rational decisions and considers the ideology of the candidate while deciding. However, it is believed that the cognitive ability of voters is very much bounded and limited. People can avert the risk; they follow what is prevalent in the society. They coined a new concept of "cross pressure" in voting behavior. They interpreted cross pressure as a countervailing information that persuades voters to alter their voting attitudes, and this conflictual information is provided by dissimilar social groups. Voting behavior is the behavior of an individual while participating in the electoral process. Behavior can either supporting any candidate, go against any candidate, or refuse to cast a vote. The voting behavior can be judged by the quality of life of voters and their trust in the electoral process. Voting behavior is influenced by numerous factors including, income, age, ethnicity, religion, and affiliations (Rule, 2014). In countries like Pakistan, the voting behavior of voters is influenced by enormous number of factors, however, the most important one is belonging to a specific group, which is called *baradari*. The meaning of *baradari* is brotherhood, and it is derived from the Persian word *baradar*. In the subcontinent, social classes are built based on *baradari*. *Baradari* system has been important than ethnicity, religion, and another sociopolitical setting. Political alliances and parties are developed based on *baradaris* instead of religion and political ideologies. In Hafizabad, PTI became a strong party in the 2013 elections not because of its voting bank, but the Bhatti group joined PTI (Haider & Ali, 2020). There are three major actors in political communication these are, media actors, political actors, and public (Khan & Shami, 2019). The voting decision is influenced by two factors. These are micro and macro factors. Micro factors include the thinking and cognitive ability of an individual. However, macro includes the big structures used by candidates to

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run their campaigns. In Pakistan, there had been a struggle of political power between two dynastic political parties from 1990 -2018, except from 1999 to 2007, but in the 2018 general elections, a new political party was elected, and this is due to a change in voting patterns. The candidates' strategies and tactics also influence voting behavior (Javed & Sajid, 2020).

### **Role of social media in Pakistan:**

With time, the role of social media in Pakistan has been tremendous. It is believed that social networking sites can bring a social revolution in Pakistan. Undoubtedly, there are incidents happened in the past which strengthen this notion. Frustration is one of the critical factors behind revolt and social disruption because people feel deprived of their political and economic rights. Across the world, there are examples of how social media played a role in triggering the revolts. Pakistan has experienced revolts, which show how the will of the people can change the political scenario, namely, the masses went against Ayub Khan, and a mutiny in Bangladesh. The paramount factor behind revolution has been frustration, which develops underneath the surface of the social structure. A movement can only be successful if it is based on an idea and led by a leader. Muhammad Al Dashan- the Egyptian blogger-presided over a social media summit in Karachi. He shared his story of how he played a leading role in the recent Egyptian revolution through social media. He further suggested that social media can bring a drastic change in Pakistan as well. The number of users of Facebook and Twitter has increased tremendously over a period. With the introduction of new packages of 3G and 4G, the usage of the internet has increased greatly. In 2013, internet usage was just 7%, and in 2016 it increased to 17.8%. There were 34.3 million users of the internet in Pakistan in 2016. The top four social networking sites in Pakistan are Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Twitter. Social Media is a set of websites and applications. According to the statistics up till 28 February 2020, 17% of the population of Pakistan uses social media, which is almost 37 million. Number of users are increasing tremendously. From April 2019 to January 2020, 2.4 million users increased. However, 99% of the population is mobile users (Ahmed et.al, 2021).

In Pakistan, social media is used as a tool of communication in five ways. First, social media rectifies and finds out the stories that are normally neglected by traditional media. Secondly, social media proves to be a great platform to project protests, campaigns, and social movements. Thirdly, social media provides an opportunity to run charitable activities, e.g., donations. Fourthly, social media has been proven as a platform to support social causes and issues. Lastly, all political parties and the ISPR have started using social media as a mode of communication. In 2018, an article published in the Daily News mentions a social media revolution in Pakistan. In the **Zainab Murder Case**, social media put a lot of pressure. Hashtag *#JusticeforZainab* became a top trend, and finally culprit was sentenced to death. Social networking sites are known for raising their voice against stereotypes. In the Shahzaib murder case, the accuser was arrested under pressure from social media. In 2020, an innocent family was killed in Sahiwal by counter terrorism department. Like previous cases, under the pressure of social media government ordered an inquiry twice. Motorway Gang rape case: This case ignited the social media and people raised concerned about safety of women. Resultantly,

concerned authorities had to act (Ahmed et.al, 2021). In Pakistan, social media helped highlight the issues that were taboo to be discussed (Khan & Shami, 2019).

It has been seen that the social media of Pakistan and its users have the potential to their raise voice and fight for the truth. Courtesy to social media, People have started realizing their rights and the corruption of political parties. Imran adopted the slogan of “Change”. People followed him and believed that they had found a true leader. His election campaign had been very strong on social media (Ahmed et.al, 2021).

### **Impact of social media on Youth in Pakistan:**

Access to information is easier for people due to the fast development of social networking sites. Therefore, for youth, social media has become one of the paramount sources of political information, which shapes their political interests and participation. The difference between traditional electronic media and social media is their global reach, high speed, opportunity for interaction and feedback, though the basic features of both are the same. The information provided through social media is user-centered, interactive, visually attractive, easy to use, and brief; that’s why the young generation prefers it over print and electronic media. Social media is a platform for political debate without any restrictions. Intellectuals have shown concern over the indifferent approach of youth towards political issues because they do not trust politicians and institutions. Moreover, they don’t have interest in politics because they do not use conventional sources of information like newspapers, TV, and radio. However, change has been seen with the usage of Facebook and Twitter. Youth are likely to participate in political issues on social networking sites. It is expected that the political participation of youngsters will further increase. Some scholars believe that the traditional political participation of youth has decreased because now they perform an “alternative type of participation” which includes online activities. A lot of fields have been impacted by social media, but politics has been one of the major areas. Politicians are using networking sites to run their political campaigns, create political awareness, and mobilize protests. Microblogging over social media provides an opportunity for politicians to closely monitor public opinion. It is feasible to influence many audiences. However, as politicians remain very concerned about their public image, they do not get involved in direct discussion in public. Resultantly, they fail to build direct relations with their voters, which undermines the scope of social media. So, social media becomes a source to disseminate the information instead of stirring up the discussion. Despite this, even in some countries, it is believed that it is a must for a politician or political campaign to be active on social media sites to be successful. Earlier, it was problematic to reach out mass audience due to budget constraints or censorship. Most perfect example is the Arab Spring, in which social media was used to launch protests against the government. Therefore, social media has a significant role in creating political awareness as well as plotting political movements and protests because of the viral nature of these sites, it is easy to circulate material and reach out masses in no time. Usage of social media is known as a feature of civic and political engagement in the contemporary world. A survey conducted by Pew Research Center’s Internet & American life project stated that in the USA, 60% of adults use social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, and 39% of them have carried out any type of political activity through social media. It is further stated in that survey that young people are more prone to such activities as compared to people who are fifty or above. According to this survey, young

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people have a greater inclination to express their political views, follow political activities, and support any political party through social media sites. In the same survey, it is mentioned that almost 35% users of the social networking sites have encouraged people to cast their vote through social media, 34% users have used social media sites to share their opinion on any crucial sociopolitical issue, 31% of them have inspired people to participate in any political activity, and 20% of the users claimed that they are using these sites to follow different political personalities (Ghani, 2020).

The role of social media has evolved as a platform to facilitate political debate and dialogue. Due to the restrictive nature of conventional media, the focus of political campaigns has been shifted to social networking sites. Political leaders and candidates have been using these sites to interact with their voters, share their political point of view with them, and influence them. In Pakistan, social media has emerged as a platform to express their views on politics, corruption, exploitation, political dynasties, injustice, power crisis, and leadership crisis. For Pakistanis, it is a new experience to use social media for political issues. The landscape of political communication has been transformed in Pakistan. In the last decade, with the technological advancement and political consciousness, particularly among youth, the political leadership of Pakistan has started using social media for their political agendas. Political parties are using social media to share their achievements, policies, and manifestos. It is expected that, the feudal style patronage political system is going to be replaced with participative democracy and better governance (Butt & Awang, 2107). General elections of 2013 witnessed a paradigm shift in the political campaign of Pakistan. Major political parties, more specifically (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf), and (Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz) PMLN, used social media, especially Facebook, to spread their political agenda and encourage youth to participate in elections (Ghani, 2020).

### **Role of social media in the general elections of 2018:**

In Pakistan, political parties used social media accounts to run campaigns and address their voters. Due to the proliferation of the internet, social media has a significant influence on political communication in developed as well as developing countries. The role of the internet, more specifically social media, is pivotal in political participation. Earlier, political parties used to use their websites to provide information about their manifesto, policies, and achievements. However, with the advent of new trends in media and networking sites, the model of communication has been modified. Social networking sites empower politicians to share their personalized views and reshape the perception and opinions of the common man. The politicians need to adopt strategic political communication to ensure their visibility on social media and create favorable image among the public, thus becoming active in political public relations, which is considered a significant offshoot of strategic political communication. In the 2018 elections of Pakistan, millions of people used social media tools and the internet. In the past, politicians used to do door-to-door political campaigns. In the elections of 2018, political parties did campaign on both platforms. They went door to door, and a huge campaign was run on social media as well. The three major political parties of Pakistan, namely, PMLN, PTI, and PPP, used Facebook and Twitter to run their campaigns, and voters also responded to them. In the 2018 elections, Facebook and

Twitter changed the political views of people, and these social media sites were paramount for political communication. Illiterate people are more prone to trust the fake news on social networking sites and make their political views and act upon them. In developing countries like Pakistan, social media is a dynamic instrument to be used by politicians and activists. Governance issues got space and highlights on social media. As the social issues are highlighted on social media and concerned authorities have acted as a response, the trust of people in the power of social networking sites has increased. Therefore, political parties that are more active on social media sites got more votes and better results in elections. About a quarter of the population uses social media, which greatly rose during elections. The election of 2018 was the first time two democratic governments completed their term. Social media greatly facilitated the political socialization at the very basic level. The foremost political development of the elections of 2018 was participation of the youth. During the 2018 elections, the electoral commission and different political actors discouraged the misuse of social media tools. Although all major parties and a large portion of the population were using social media sites, but sides effects and negative usage of these tools were ignored. The privacy of people is being violated. Social media is playing a significant role in providing information related to political events encouraging users then they participate in offline political activities. During elections, students actively used social media to get information, build their opinion, and share their opinion. In Pakistan, political parties have been using social media since 2008, which brought change in politics. In Pakistan, social networking sites brought people together against any oppression, and social issues, and more importantly, it has minimized the communication gap between the ruler and the ruled. Social networking sites are not just assisting in identifying problems, but also used by officials to develop agendas and policies, which is not possible to be done by traditional media. In the elections of 2018, social media played an imperative role; party leaders like Imran Khan led their campaigns over social media. Hate speech was rampant then, which affected uneducated voters who were vulnerable to believing in fake news. In the 2018 elections, Facebook and Twitter played their role to change voting behavior, becoming essential for political communication (Muzaffar, 2020).

### **Research Objective:**

To explicate the influence of social networking sites on the voting behavior of middle-aged and above educators of Bahawalpur during the general elections of 2018, and to suggest how the role of social media can further be improved.

### **Research Questions?**

- Did the social media sites affect the voting behavior of middle-aged and above educators?
- Why did social media influence the political loyalties?
- Why middle-aged and above educators more prone to be manipulated by social media?
- How can social media have an impact on voting behavior?
- How can the role of social media on voting behavior be further improved?

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### **Variables:**

In the given research, the dependent variable is the voting behavior, and the independent variable is social media. It is believed that voting behavior can be changed with the use of social media. While social media is an independent variable that is not going to be affected by the voting behavior or political participation and awareness.

### **Hypothesis:**

The hypothesis is that educators of middle age and above are influenced by social media. Their voting behavior changes with the usage of social media because they are susceptible to political posts on social media. In one line, a hypothesis can be, "that more usage of social media causes more change in voting behavior".

The Alternative explanations are:

- There is no link between voting behavior and the usage of social media.
- There is no link between age and voting behavior of people.

There is a correlation between voting behavior and demographics. Correlation is a statistical method to measure the relationship between the variables. It is used to describe the simple relationship that is supposed to change at a constant rate. It means that as people age, their voting behavior changes. Similarly, ethnicity, religion, education, and income have a direct impact on voting behavior. Therefore, in this hypothesis, it is suggested that people of middle age and above are influenced by social media. Their voting behavior gets manipulated by frequent usage of social media. In this scenario, the two basic variables are demographics and voting behavior, but social media is added as an independent variable that is believed to have a direct relationship with both voting behavior and demographics.

### **Research Methodology**

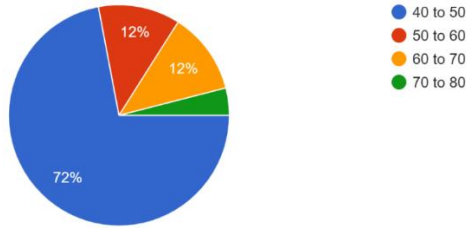
This research is an examination of the role of social media on the voting behavior of middle-aged and above educators. The purpose of the study is to determine that did social media played its role in developing voting behavior and how is it going to have impact in the future. In this study, qualitative methodology is used. This research is conducted in Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan. Respondents are chosen on convenience sampling. A structured questionnaire is filled out by the educators of middle age and above from Bahawalpur. It has been clarified to the respondents that the purpose of the study is completely academic, and their identity and personal information will not be disclosed to anyone. The questions in the questionnaire are categorized into two groups. The first group of questions is about demographic information like age, job grade, education, and which social media sites they are using. The second group of questions is more specific because it is about how social networking sites have influenced their voting behavior and how much they believe in the posts.



## **Data Analysis**

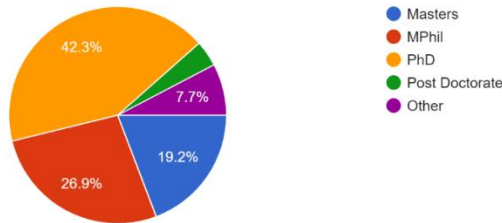
The survey started with demographic questions about the respondents, and later it was about their political participation, voting behavior, and usage of social media. The age group of respondents was divided between 40 to 50 years, 50 to 60 years, 60 to 70 years, and 70 to 80 years. Most respondents were in-between 40 to 50 years old.

What is your age?  
25 responses



The next question was about the education of the respondents. The education is divided into four main groups, and these are Master's, MPhil, PhD, and Post Doctorate. Responses show that 42.3% of the respondents were PhD doctors, 26.9% were MPhil, 19.2% had a master's degree, and 3.8% had Post Doctorate certificate. However, 7.7% of respondents clicked others. That means they have a bachelor's degree, and they are educators at schools. This shows the diversification of the respondents of this survey.

what is your education?  
26 responses

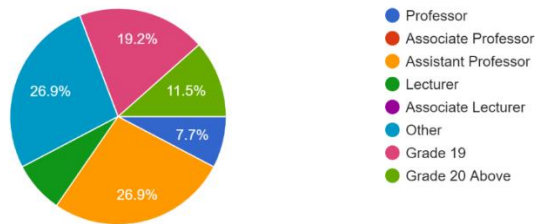


In the next question, respondents were asked to tell their position or job. Which is like, are they professors, Assistant Professors, Associate Professors, and Lecturers. Or their job grade was asked like 20<sup>th</sup> grade and above, or 19<sup>th</sup> grade. Results show that 11.5% of respondents were above grade 20, which means that they are at the Associate or Professor level. 7.7% of respondents said they are professors. There were 26.9% of respondents who were Assistant Professors. 19.2% of respondents were of 19 grades, and 7.7% were lecturers. Though 26.9% of the respondents chose others. That means most probably they were schoolteachers or visiting faculty members.

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What is your position?

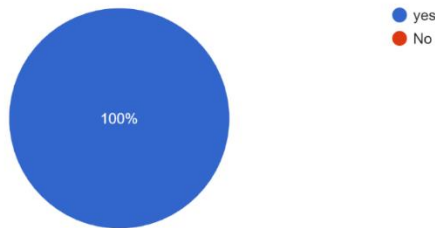
26 responses



After basic demographic questions, queries about the usage of social media were asked. First, it was asked whether are they using any social media sites. As it was assumed that they do not fall into the youth group, most probably all of them will not be using social networking sites, or they will not be comfortable using them. To our surprise, 100 percent of them are using social media.

Do you have social media Account?

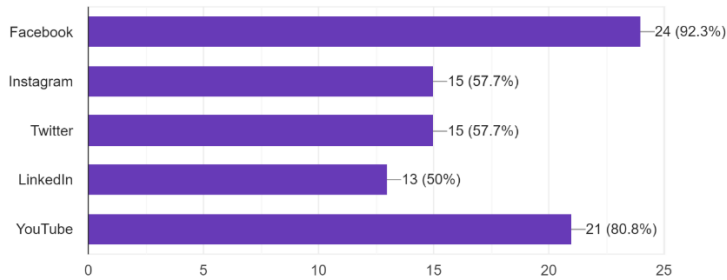
26 responses



After asking about the usage of social media, it was asked which specific social media sites they are using? The options given were Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube. Results show that 92.3 % of the participants of the survey use Facebook. 80.8% clicked YouTube. 57.7% of respondents use both Instagram and Twitter. Although 50 percent of the respondents use LinkedIn. Therefore, the results show that more than 80% of the respondents use Facebook and YouTube.

Which social networking sites are you using?

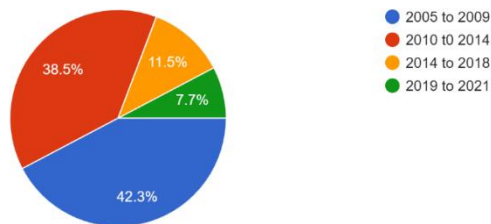
26 responses



The next question is about when they started using social media. The reason behind asking this question is that it is assumed that young people were the ones who started using social media sites. The people of middle age and above were latecomers. As they took so long to use it, they are not at ease using these sites. So, the timeline given was like year 2005 to 2009, 2010 to 2014, 2014 to 2018, and 2019 to 2021. Responses show that 42.3% of the respondents started using social media sites between 2005 to 2009, which is surprising. However, this goes well with our survey because almost 72% of our respondents are between the ages of 40 to 50 years. So, almost 15 years back, they were almost at the ages of 25 to 35 years. From 2010 to 2014, 38.5% of the participants started using social media. 11.5% of the respondents started using social networking sites in-between 2014 to 2018. However, 7.7% of the participants started using social media from 2019 to 2021.

When did you start using social networking sites?

26 responses

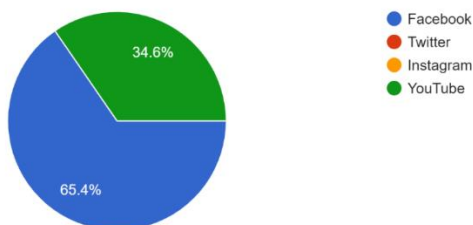


This question is about the first social media site that they used. As our previous responses show that Facebook and YouTube have been the famous social media sites among educators in Bahawalpur. Responses to this question further reinforce this. 65.4% of the respondents said that Facebook was the first social media site they started using.

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Which was the very first social media site you used?

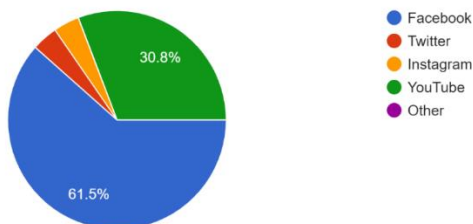
26 responses



The next two questions are interlinked. The first question is which social media site you use more frequently. The options given were Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. Participants of the survey said that they use Facebook more frequently. Statistics show that 61.5% of the respondents use Facebook more frequently than any other social media site. 30.8% of the respondents said that they use YouTube. Thus, Facebook is one of the most frequently used social media sites.

Which social media site you use more frequently?

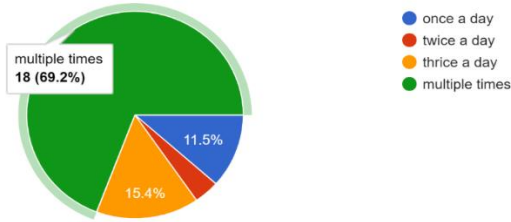
26 responses



The second question is how often respondents visit their favorite social media. 69.2% of the respondents say that they use their favorite site multiple times a day. 15.4% of respondents said that they open their favorite networking site thrice a day. 3.8% of respondents said that they open twice a day, and 11.5% responded that they open their favorite site once a day. Therefore, it can be said that 61.5% of the participants of the survey open Facebook several times a day.

How often do you use your favorite social media site?

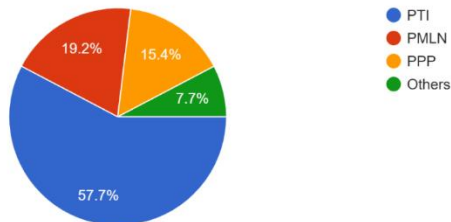
26 responses



In the third set of questions, the political inclinations and interests of the respondents were asked. The first question was about the political party they support. The options given were Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI), Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan People's Party (PPP), and others. Three major political parties were mentioned. The results of the survey show that 57.7% of the respondents support PTI, and 19.2% of the respondents are in favor of PMLN. 15.4% of the educators said they support PPP. However, 7.7% of the respondents clicked others, which means they are favoring any religion or a small regional political party.

Which Political Party do you support?

26 responses

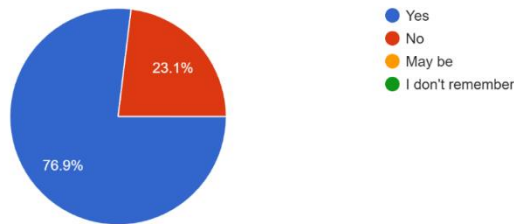


The next question was about their political participation. It was asked that did they cast a vote in the general elections of 2018. 76.9% of the respondents said that they cast their vote in the general elections of 2018. However, 23.1% of the participants said that they did not cast their vote. Casting a vote is one of the paramount parts of political participation. If someone is joining political parties or attending campaigns but not casting a vote, it makes their political participation doubtful.

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Did you cast vote in general elections of 2018?

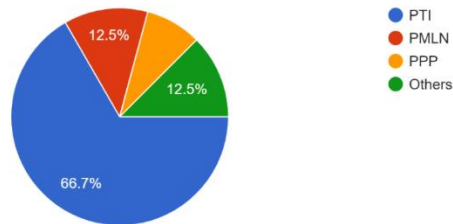
26 responses



This question is about which political party they cast their vote for in the general elections of the 2018. The options given were PTI, PMLN, and PPP. 66.7% of the respondents said that they cast their vote for PTI. 12.5% of the participants voted for PMLN. 8.3% of the respondents cast their vote for PPP. 12.5% of the voters chose other regional and religious political parties to cast their vote.

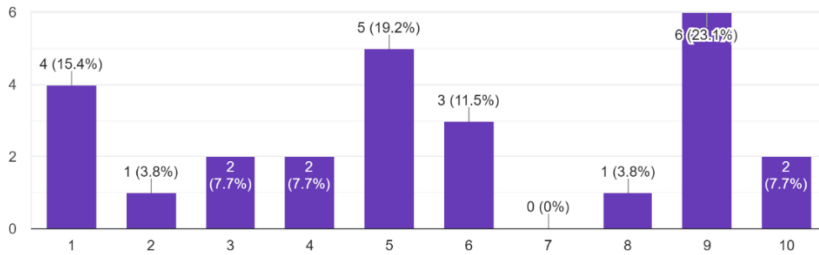
Which political party did you vote for in 2018 elections?

24 responses



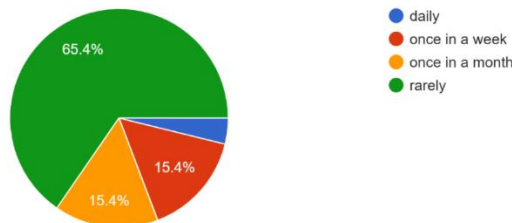
The upcoming set of questions is about their views on how social media and their political participation are related. The first question in this category of questions was, how much you believe in the political news you read on the social networking sites. The options were given in the range from 1 to 10. 1 means they do not believe in the political news on social media, and 10 illustrates that they completely believe in what they hear on social media. It can be said that according to the responses of survey, 34.6% of the respondents do not easily believe in the news shared on the social media, 19.2 percent of the respondents remain dubious, sometimes they believe but sometimes they do not, and 46.1% of the respondents are more inclined in believing in the political headlines or news shared on the social media.

How much you believe in the political news you read on the social networking sites?  
26 responses



The next question is how often respondents comment on political posts. In the era of social media, posting and commenting on political posts is considered political participation. This shows the engagement and trust in political posts on social media, which ultimately influence voting behavior. The results of the survey show that 65.4 % of the respondents said that they rarely comment on the political posts. 15.4% said that they comment on a political post once a month. 15.4% said they comment on political posts on social media once a week. Only 3.8% of the respondents said that they comment daily on any of the political posts on social media. People who daily comment on any of social media posts are the avid users as well as open towards their political views and loyalties.

How often you comment on the political post?  
26 responses

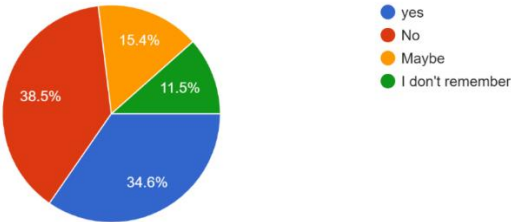


The question asked was that did you eagerly used social media sites during the elections of 2018. The results show that 100% of the participants of the survey were using social media sites during elections however, 34.6% were using it eagerly remaining were not active and participative in the political posts during elections.

# The role of social media on the voting behavior of middle-aged and above educators of Bahawalpur during the general elections of 2018

Did you eagerly use social media sites during elections of 2018?

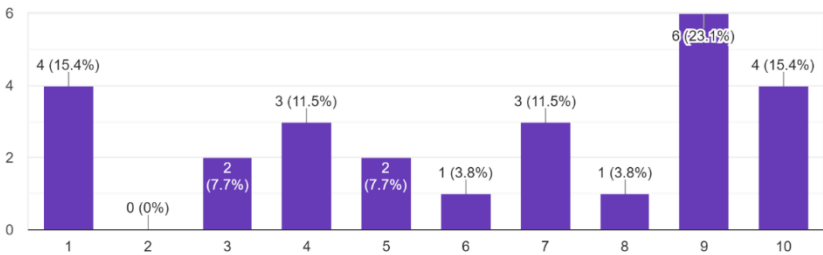
26 responses



The next question asked was do you agree that social media sites like Facebook are helping you to get political news. As if they agree that they get news from social media and they believe in that, illustrates that they are a step closer to political participation through social media. Responses given were from 1 to 10. 1 explains that they disagree with the statement, and 10 explains that they fully agree with the statement. Collectively, it can be said that 57.6% of the participants somehow agree that they get political updates from social media. On the contrary, 34.6% of the respondents disagree that social media is a source of political news for them.

Do you agree that social media sites like Facebook are helping you to get political news?

26 responses

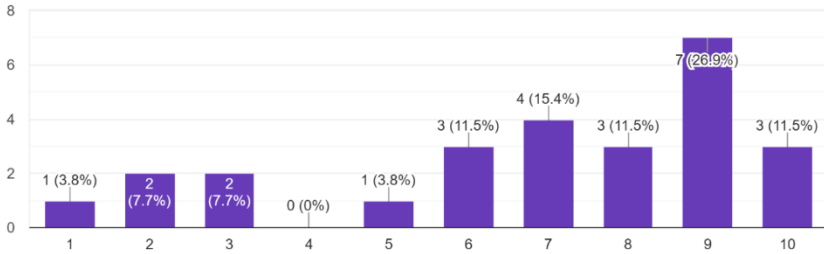


The next question asked was do you agree that social media sites are playing their role in your political participation and awareness. The options given were from 1 to 10. 1 means do not agree and 10 means fully agree. 19.2% of the participants of the survey disagree that social media is playing a paramount role in their political participation and awareness. However, 26.9% and 11.5% agree and fully agree, respectively, that social media is the impetus in their political awareness and participation.



Do you agree that social media sites are playing their role in your political awareness and participation?

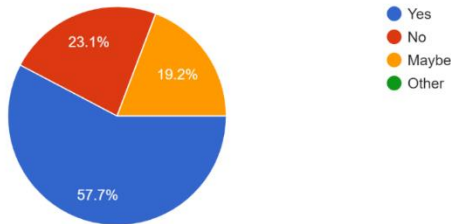
26 responses



Then participants of the survey were asked do they follow the leaders of major political parties on social media accounts. The options given were yes, no, may be, and other. As expected, 57.7% of the respondents said that they follow political leaders on social media. 23.1% said that they do not follow any political leader from any leading political party on social networking sites. However, 19.2% of the respondents opted maybe.

Do you follow leaders of major political parties of Pakistan on social media sites?

26 responses

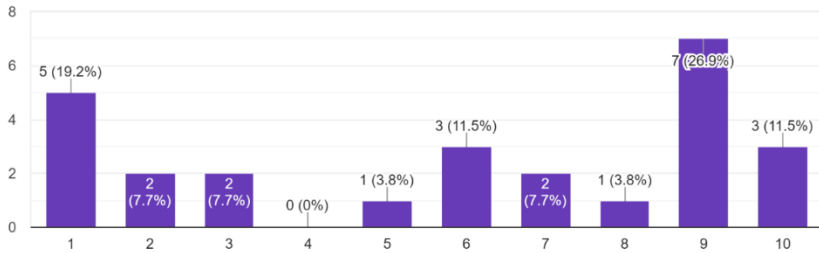


This question was, Do you agree that social media sites influenced your voting behavior in the general elections in 2018. The options given were from 1 to 10. 1 state does not agree, and 10 states fully agree. 26.9% and 11.5% clicked 9 and 10, which shows that they agree or fully agree respectively, that social media had a great impact on their voting behavior during the general elections of 2018. While 19.2% disagree that social media sites have influenced their voting behavior.

## The role of social media on the voting behavior of middle-aged and above educators of Bahawalpur during the general elections of 2018

Do you agree that social media sites influence your voting behavior in 2018 elections?

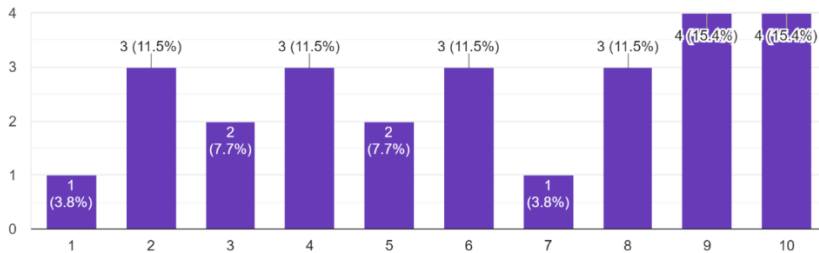
26 responses



A question is asked to find out their future perspective. It is being asked that do they agree that social media is going to influence your voting behavior ever? The options given were 1 to 10. 1 means disagree, and 10 means fully agree. The responses received were very mixed. 3.8% of the people clicked 1, which means they believe that social media is never going to influence their voting behavior. 7.7% clicked 5, which means they are not sure whether either social media can have any impact on their voting behavior or not. Both 9 and 10 are opted by 15.4% of the people.

Do you agree that social media sites can influence your voting behavior ever?

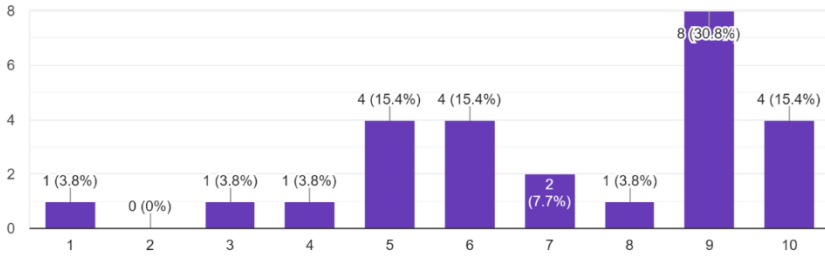
26 responses



Social media has become a source of empowerment. People are free to deliver their agendas and issues to the mass audience across the globe. It has been seen that issues raised at social media site are heard and action is taken by the concerned authority. This trend or power of social media has multiplied its importance as well as need. Even if someone is not avidly using any social media site cannot deny the power and outreach of social media. Consequently, a question was asked that: Do you agree that social media sites have empowered you? 3.8% of the respondents opted for 1. That means the respondents disagreed that social media has empowered them. 30.8% opted 9, and 15.4% opted 10.

Do you agree that social media sites have empowered you?

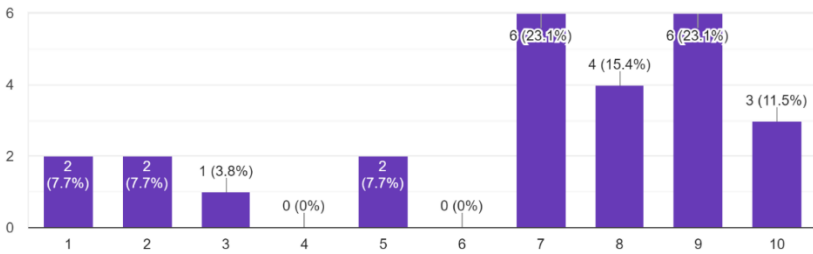
26 responses



This question is that due you agree social media sites are best platforms to express your political views. The options given were from 1 to 10. 1 shows disagree and 10 shows fully agree. Responses of the participants show that 1 and 2 were clicked by 7.7% respectively. 23.1% went for 9, 11.5% opted for 10.

Do you agree that social networking sites are best platform to express your political views?

26 responses

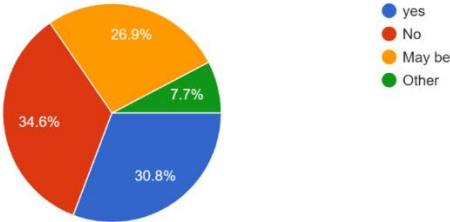


One of the main drawbacks of the social media sites is that false news can be spread to defame political opponents or celebrities. That is the reason people are reluctant to use or trust these sites fully. Based on this idea, a question was asked that will you change your loyalty towards any political party based on their scandals on social media? The options given were yes, no, maybe, and other. The results show that 30.85 % of the respondents said that they will trust a scandal on social media and will change their political loyalties. 34.6% of the participants replied that they will not believe the news on social media and will remain loyal to their political party. However, 26.9% of the respondents opted maybe.

# The role of social media on the voting behavior of middle-aged and above educators of Bahawalpur during the general elections of 2018

Will you change your loyalty towards any political party based on their scandals on social media?

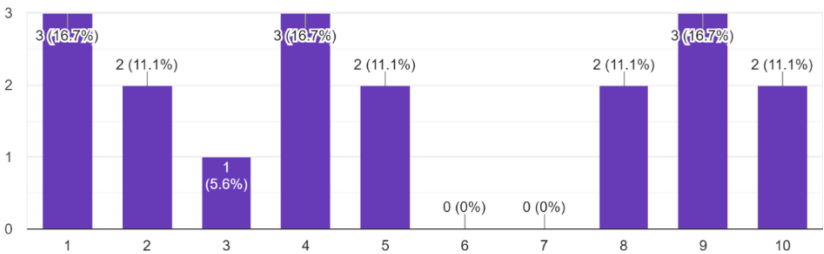
26 responses



Carrying on the same question, respondents were asked whether have social media has ever changed their political loyalties. The options given were 1 to 10. 1 show disagree and 10 shows fully agree. 16.7% clicked 1. 16.7% opted 9, and 11.1% opted 10.

Do you agree that social media sites have ever changed your political loyalties?

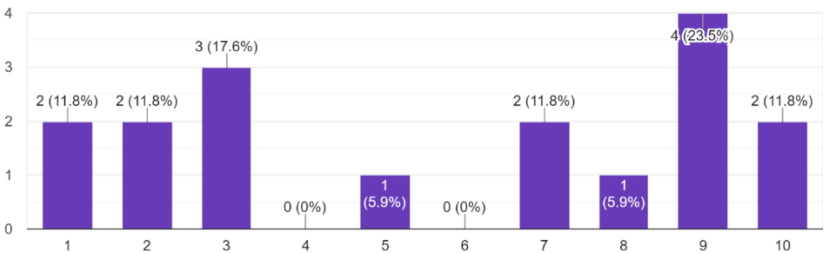
18 responses



The question was asked Do you agree that you are more prone to be manipulated by social media than youngsters. The responses show that 11.8% clicked 1, 23.5% opted 9, and 11.8% chose 10.

Do you agree that you are more prone to be manipulated by social media than any youngster?

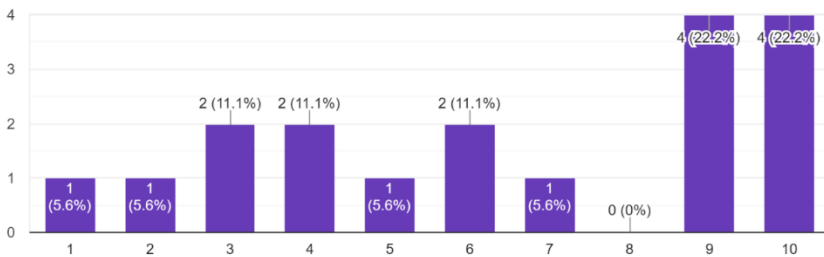
17 responses



In the last question, respondents were asked Do they agree that social media will

ever influence their voting behavior. In this question, future perspective is asked, in the earlier question of voting behavior, the experience of the 2018 elections was asked. The options given were 1 to 10. 1 means disagree, and 10 means fully agree. The responses of the participants of the research show that 22.2% of the respondents opted for 9 and 10, respectively. 5.6% of the respondents disagreed that social media would influence their voting behavior. To conclude, according to the responses, more than half of the respondents agree that social media is going to impact their voting behavior in the future.

Do you agree that social media will influence your voting behavior in future?  
18 responses



## Findings

To wind up a conclusion of responses, the focus will be on the influence of social media on the political participation and voting behavior of the respondents. The responses show that all participants in the survey are using social media sites. It can be said that the most used social networking sites by the middle-aged or above educators of Bahawalpur are Facebook at the top and then YouTube. Facebook and YouTube were the sites they used for the first time. Facebook is also the site that is used more frequently. Most of the respondents said that they use their favorite social media site multiple times, which is either Facebook or YouTube. 76.9% of the respondents said that they cast their vote in the general elections of 2018, and 66.7% of them admitted that they cast a vote for Pakistan Tehreek-I-Insaaf PTI. 46.1% of the responses show that middle-aged and above educators of Bahawalpur believe in the political news they see on social media sites, while 34.6% said they do not believe in the political news which are shared on social media. Later, their frequency of commenting on the political posts was asked, and 65.4% of the participants said that they rarely comment on any political post. Then, participants were asked how eagerly they used social media during the general elections in 2018. 34.6% of the respondents clicked yes that they eagerly used social media during 2018 elections. 57.6% of the respondents somewhat agree that they use social media sites to get political news. In addition to this, 76.8 percent of the participants agree that social media sites are playing their role in their political participation and awareness. In the most important questions, 61.4% of respondents of the survey agreed to some extent that social media sites influenced their voting behavior during 2018 elections. Then it was asked that the respondents agree that their voting behavior will be influenced by social media sites in the future. Collectively, 57.6% of respondents were inclined to agree that social media sites are going to change their political

## The role of social media on the voting behavior of middle-aged and above educators of Bahawalpur during the general elections of 2018

behavior. 46.2% of the participants of the survey agreed that social media has empowered them politically. In addition to this, 73.1% of the participants were inclined that social media is a right platform to express political views. More than 30% of the respondents agree that posts on social media sites played their role in changing their political loyalties. On the other side, 61.1% of the participants of the survey almost agreed that they can be easily manipulated by the posts of social media. To sum up, according to survey responses, 61.4% of the respondents were inclined to agree that social media influenced their voting behavior in the general election of 2018, and 61.1% agreed that social media is going to impact their voting behavior in the future as well.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this survey are that a limited number of respondents were chosen, and convenient sampling was adopted. In addition to this, focus had been the university teachers of the Bahawalpur. Research would have been broadened if school or college teachers were also participants. By chance, most of the participants lie in the age bracket of 40 to 50 years. If the age range of the teachers was broader, then results may have been affected. As a result, the scope of this research is myopic, though it is giving a clear idea that social media has influenced and is going to influence the voting behavior of middle-aged and above educators of Bahawalpur.

### **Recommendations**

According to the research conducted and data collected through survey these recommendations are made to further enhance the role of social media on the voting behavior of the educators.

1. First, the importance of the social media is undeniable. It is an ideal, approachable, and easy medium to convey any political message to mass audiences. Therefore, it should be encouraged to be used by the educators.
2. Political parties need to use these networking sites so they can get best out of it. After all, it is not just going to be beneficial for them. It has outreach effect on all spheres of the life.
3. The main drawback of the social media is lack of authenticity. Many people avoid it is because they do not trust it fully. However, in the case of political news, there can be any third-party agency which can first verify the news before letting people post it.
4. Further research is recommended to make comparison of the role of social media in voting behavior and political participation in rural, urban, and semi-urban areas.

### **Conclusion**

This research has been conducted to analyze the role of social media on the political participation and voting behavior in the middle-aged and above educators in Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan during the general elections of 2018. The results of this study show that most of the middle-aged educators from Bahawalpur use Facebook and YouTube. In addition to this, the usage of social media has not just increased their political awareness, but their voting behavior has also changed. These findings suggest that social media is going to be a parallel space to Newspaper

and Television for political participation and voting behavior. Therefore, political parties are going to rely more on social media for their political communication. Despite the contribution of this study, the fundamental limitation is the small sample size. For future research, the comparison between the role of social media in rural and urban areas can be studied with bigger sample size. To conclude, this study is going to contribute to the understanding of digital politics in Pakistan by focusing on the role of social media in the voting behavior and political participation other than more studied youth demographic.

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