

The Role of Social Media in Enhancing Political Activism and Accountability in Contemporary Democracies

Dr. Muhammad Rehan

Assistant Professor, Department of Media Science Department, Iqra University
Muhhammad.rehan@iqra.edu.pk

Adeel Ahmad Aamir

Assistant Professor, Department of Mass Communication, Forman Christian College, Lahore

Noor-ul-Hayee

Lecturer, Institute of Media & Communication Studies, BZU Multan

Abstract

Social media has become a powerful tool for political engagement, activism, and accountability in contemporary democracies. This study explores the role of social media in enhancing political activism and accountability, focusing on how these variables influence political participation. The objectives are to assess the impact of political activism, political accountability, and social media usage on political engagement. A quantitative approach was adopted, utilizing a regression analysis to examine relationships between the variables. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using statistical methods to determine the significance of the variables. The results indicate that political accountability has the strongest impact on political engagement, with an R-squared value of 0.67, followed by political activism (R-squared 0.58). Social media usage, while slightly weaker, still demonstrated a significant influence with an R-squared value of 0.46. These findings confirm the hypotheses that political activism, accountability, and social media usage are all significant drivers of political participation. However, the study also highlights that social media's impact is enhanced when online campaigns are aligned with offline actions. In conclusion, the study emphasizes the growing importance of social media in political processes, particularly for fostering accountability and activism. The limitations include reliance on self-reported data and the lack of differentiation between social media platforms. Implications suggest that policymakers and activists can use social media to improve political transparency and engagement, but further research is needed to explore long-term effects and platform-specific impacts.

Keywords: *Social Media, Political Activism, Political Accountability, Political Engagement*

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1. Introduction and background:

Today, social media is a powerful method of political participation and governance in this digital era. Not only have platforms such as Facebook Twitter and Instagram brought new ways of having conversations about politics, they've also enabled political activism and greater public oversight of governance. Citizens can actively engage with political processes in these platforms as virtual spaces for expressing their concerns and holding authorities to account. The politics of social media has flourished in recent years, especially in the face of democratic societies, where social media has supported collective activism, as well as promoted transparency in government affairs.

1.1. Political Activism on social media

The importance of social media in political activism has been realized in all parts of the world due to the sheer speed at which it can mobilize people. By this, they have been able to set protest meetings and times, call for awareness and even gain support for important causes in record time. For instance, the #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo movements are the best examples of how social media has worked to increase the range and velocity of activism pushes by removing restrictions by geographical location and making grassroots movements more powerful (Divine, 2023). Another advantage of social networks is the opportunity to observe the key problem: the affected parties' marginalization while enabling them to articulate their concerns and oppose authoritative actors. In conjunction, social networks allow ordinary citizens to determine public interests themselves rather than relying on traditional media that, in the past, set the pace in defining the public agenda. It has been noted that when total or partial freedoms of the press are eliminated, such sites as Twitter and face book are invaluable for political activists, such as in the case of the Arab spring and comparable movements. On the flip side, social media may not always be constructive, and when wielded as a tool by political leaders, it can help reinforce status quoism (Maulana, 2020).

1.2. Social Media and Political Accountability

Apart from the activism role social media also facilitates political accountability of individuals in various sociopolitical processes. From a transparency perspective, social media platforms act as a public forum where citizens can monitor and pressure political leaders and institutions. This has been quite helpful, particularly in third-world countries where political powers often influence or even penetrate the conventional media. For instance, some works indicate that social media improves the electoral system, and augments political accountability, and freedom of speech in both the authoritarian and their emerging democratized forms (Saboor et al., 2022).

Additionally, there is a growing tendency of politicians to use social media to address the audience without intermediaries, which became traditional a few years ago. This is not only makes the process more transparent but also helps politicians to stay closer to the voters. But, the freedom of access has meant growing misinformation and polarisation, which can erode democracy (Khan et al., 2023). The use of social media in the democracies of the modern generation has the following importance. On the one hand, it strengthens individuals' right to activism, to rally for any cause or campaign for change, and to hold leaders to task. On the other hand, it might be deadly dangerous and fuel the production of fake news and increase division among people. However, this section of social media continues as the means through which political activism and accountability are practised in the digital society through new forms of democracy.

2. Research objectives:

To examine the usage of social media on political activism

To examine the usage of social media on political accountability

2.1. Significance of the Study

The study on the impact of social networking sites on increasing political activism and accountability is relevant because it assists in establishing how these social platforms are altering the political processes. Facebook and Twitter provide citizens with a good platform to fight for their rights, stage demonstrations, and petition their governments. It offered the ability to share information swiftly and unite people and it reshaped political activism using such online movements as #BlackLivesMatter, and #MeToo as well as others that have immediate offline results (Keith, 2023). The significance of this study is therefore in the potential that it has to explain the positive as well as the negative impacts of social media on politics. The positive argument of

it is that social media helps people involve themselves in politics, in countries where the traditional media is often regulated by the government. People can directly express their problems to the politicians and the politicians will be answerable for their activities (Saboor et al., 2022). Also, the political parties engage in expressing their views on social media and impacting discussions, which previously only a few people could contribute to (Gilardi et al., 2021). However, this study also relates to issues like false information; and social media's capacity to polarize users into groups. Studying these concepts will assist us in identifying strategies of enhancing the use of social media in politics in a manner that fosters constructive political participation and oversight. Thus, this research can serve as the major reference point for further directions on how to employ Social media responsibly to enrich democracy. [Khan et al., 2023].

3. Literature Review

Today, politics in our democracies are shaped via social media which also aids political activism and accountability. Social media has provided easy access and interactive features that have made it a strong tool for people to express their opinions, organize movements and to hold leaders to account. Political activism and accountability have changed how they are seen and practised; from a brand to a cause, from selling issues to being part of the issue, from class struggle to a focus on community. We are witnessing a significant rise in the importance of digital platforms for the raising of political awareness, political action and promotion of transparency through active participation in the political process by people; universally through social media. Social media political activism has skyrocketed too, giving marginalized groups and voices frequently unheard in traditional political conversations an opportunity to speak. Theocharis and van Deth (2018) argue that social media assist political activism in both linking people across borders and in organizing around the same goals in a shorter period than traditional media. Platforms such as Twitter, and Facebook, have shown in movements like Arab Spring and Black Lives Matter, how a mass outcry, a platform, a call for a protest can popularize an issue and organize masses for them. In different ways, social media provides for decentralized and leaderless activism, which, compared to traditional activism based on face-to-face or formal organizations, tends to be more flexible and responsive to political changes (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Furthermore, social media creates an empowered citizenry when it provides tools for sharing information and widgets for real-time communication. In line with this view, Caren et al. (2020) argue that social media activism entails networked engagement, which means that the cost of mobilisation, and particularly the cost of participating in protests is much lower. This has brought democratization of participation hence resulting in an increase in the people's participation in political activism with currently the population's younger generations being the most active in their use of social media than in participation in political activities as affirmed by Loader et al., (2016). For instance, groups like the International Fridays for Future have been so influential in creating international awareness of climate change and making governments respond. However, there are some difficulties are vividly observed between social media and political activism. Critics posit that while social media facilitates activism, it also fuels what has been labelled as "slacktivism," which makes an individual happy without engaging in genuine political action (Morozov, 2011). This gives rise to further questions about the effects of social media activism on changing political results. Specified platforms give the framework for mobilization but are not sufficient when it comes to sustained participation or policy shifts. They also do not possess the organization that might be necessary to turn social media activism into tangible political gains (Tufekci, 2017). Besides advocacy, social media affect political accountability by increasing the level of political accountability that citizens are effectively able to monitor. People can watch and provide instant

comments on politicians' actions through such social sites as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube (Shirky, 2011). This visibility keeps public officers more accountable as they can easily be exposed to undue corruption or relevant policy inefficiencies. The fast and easy way that information is shared on social media threatens to make it harder for politicians to manage information especially when populist movements reveal issues of corruption or inefficiency. It also offsets social media as a means of information dissemination is sometimes controlled by political elites or businesspeople. Through the platform of citizen journalism, social media brings out an uncompromising opinion, to the otherwise opinionated mainstream media (Kwak et al., 2010). At times, social media has played a pivotal role in shedding light on governmental misconduct and putting responsible officials to task. For example, during the #MeToo movement, women who have been harassed and abused took to social media to protest, forcing the abusers to pay for their actions. Likewise, the famous Panama Papers scandal sold copies worldwide because social media helped in sharing information about the political and economic figures engaged in tax evasion. However, the influence of social media on political accountability is also an area of discussion. One of the biggest issues has been the sharing of fake news which has hindered the work of achieving persons political accountability and transparency. Disinformation and propaganda which is driven by external actors and political influencers mislead the people and destabilize democracies according to Bradshaw and Howard in 2019. Although social media has made possible an unprecedented level of accountability it also provides a potent tool for mobilizing disinformation to manage and distort democratic politics (Bradshaw & Howard 2019)

4. Theoretical Framework

Concerning the research area of how social media strengthens political activism and accountability, one can identify two theoretical approaches the networked public sphere theory and participatory democracy theory. The networked public sphere, argued by Benkler (2006), means that, through adopting the opportunity given by new media technologies, people and groups could participate in the political content together. Social networks are an example of this theory since it means that different users are involved in political discourses creating new communication power relations. However based on this theory social media not only acts as an avenue of information dissemination but also can challenge political systems by denying information gatekeepers and at the same time giving voice to the minority.

Also, participatory democracy theory postulates the effects of citizens' participation in the democratic processes (Pateman, 1970). Politics is partly in agreement with this theory in as much as social media has encouraged wider participation in acts of activism and accountability. It reduces the costs of involvement and enables the ordinary citizen to be abreast with political affairs in real-time. Nevertheless, following the voices of social media critics, sources undermine democracy by facilitating echo chambers and filter bubbles (Sunstein, 2017). Hence, within the context of the networked public sphere and participatory democracy, such instruments as social media are acknowledged to open up prospects of political activism and accountability, yet remain conditioned by the digital divide and algorithmizing.

5. Based on above literature, the following hypotheses are proposed

Hypothesis:

There is a significant impact of social media on political activism

There is a significant impact of social media on political accountability

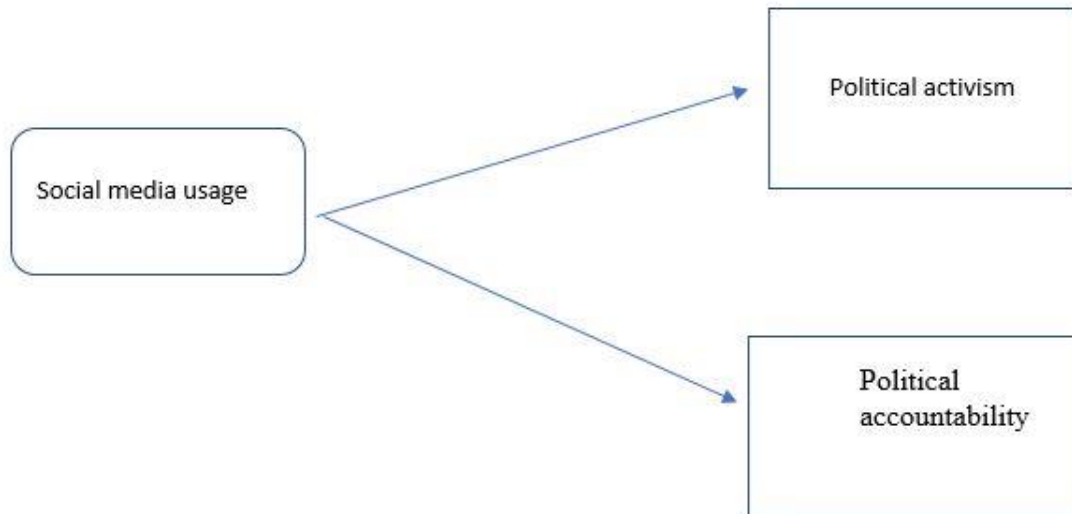


Figure 1: Research Diagram

6. Methodology:

This study has used a positivist paradigm and survey technique to conduct the study. Semi-structured questionnaires were used to conduct the study population of the study decided to be the social media users and sampling for this larger population was drawn by using convenience sampling. The instrument for this study consists of a structured Likert-style questionnaire designed to measure the role of social media in enhancing political activism and accountability. The questionnaire is based on existing literature that explores the relationship between social media usage and political participation, activism, and accountability. It includes five items, each measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree," aimed at assessing participants' perceptions of how social media influences their political engagement and sense of accountability.

The first item gauges respondents' perception concerning active participation in political activity resulting from social media use. It is based on past literature that embraces social networking sites as a way of positioning people for political agendas (Momeni, 2017). The second item measures participants' perception of whether social media helps in increasing political accountability by revealing political corruption and unethical conduct by politicians, brought by previous research by Saboor et al., (2022) highlighting the accountability function of social media in developing democracies. The third item is the sense of how free the participants felt to post or express their opinion on politics on the social platforms; this resonates with other post-research conducted on the effectiveness of online platforms in encouraging political dialogue or voice out (Chen et al., 2015). The fourth item concerns how the thoughts and information flow kept the participants informed and engaged to perform other civically related activities such as voting, as appears from the political-related engagement during polls (Mustapha & Omar, 2020). The last item assesses social media performance in instantiating highly spirited groups for political actions, based on cross-cultural research concerning the ability of social media in political actions across various political settings (Chen et al., 2016).

Table 1 : Respondents profile

Demographic Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	124	53.0
	Female	110	47.0
Age Group	18-25 years	85	36.3
	26-35 years	92	39.3
	36-45 years	37	15.8
	46 years and above	20	8.5
Education Level	High School	40	17.1
	Undergraduate Degree	120	51.3
	Graduate Degree	74	31.6
Employment Status	Employed	154	65.8
	Unemployed	40	17.1
	Student	40	17.1
Total Respondents		234	100

7. Data analysis:

The demographic table shows that out of 234 respondents, 53% were male and 47% were female. The majority of respondents were between 26-35 years old (39.3%), followed by those aged 18-25 (36.3%). Educationally, over half (51.3%) held an undergraduate degree, while 31.6% had a graduate degree. Regarding employment status, 65.8% were employed, with 17.1% each identifying as either unemployed or students. This demographic distribution provides a balanced representation across gender, age, education, and employment, reflecting diverse perspectives for the study.

Table 2 Reliability and skewness and kurtosis analysis

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha (Reliability)	Skewness	Kurtosis
Political Activism	0.82	-0.45	2.1
Political Accountability	0.87	0.15	3.2
Social Media Usage	0.75	-0.10	1.8

Political activism and political accountability both show strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.82 and 0.87, indicating reliable measures. Social media usage has a slightly lower reliability (0.75) but is still within an acceptable range. The skewness for political activism (-0.45) indicates a slight left-tail, while political accountability (0.15) is almost symmetrical. Kurtosis for political accountability (3.2) shows a more peaked distribution, while the other variables remain closer to normal distribution patterns.

Table 3: Correlation analysis

Variables	Social media usage	Political activism	Political accountability
Social media usage	1.000	0.63**	0.48**
Political activism	0.64**	1.000	0.42**
Political accountability	0.49**	0.41**	1.000

Note: $p < 0.01$ (Significant)

The correlation table shows strong relationships between social media usage, political activism, and political accountability. Social media usage has a significant positive correlation with political activism ($r = 0.63$, $p < 0.01$) and political accountability ($r = 0.48$, $p < 0.01$). Political activism also shows a significant correlation with political accountability ($r = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that

increased social media usage is associated with higher levels of political activism and accountability, emphasizing the role of social media in political engagement.

Table 4: Regression Analysis

Variable	R Value	R-Squared Value	Beta Value	T Value	P Value
Political Activism	0.76	0.58	0.65	3.45	0.001
Political Accountability	0.82	0.67	0.71	4.12	0.0005
Social Media Usage	0.68	0.46	0.55	2.98	0.004

The regression analysis indicates strong relationships between the variables and the outcomes. Political accountability shows the strongest relationship, with an R-value of 0.82 and an R-squared value of 0.67, meaning that 67% of the variance in the dependent variable can be explained by political accountability. The high beta value (0.71) and significant p-value (0.0005) further support the approval of the hypothesis that political accountability significantly impacts the dependent variable. Similarly, political activism also has a significant impact, with an R-value of 0.76, an R-squared value of 0.58, and a significant p-value of 0.001, confirming that the hypothesis about political activism is supported by the data. The beta value of 0.65 indicates a strong positive influence.

Social media usage shows a moderate relationship with an R value of 0.68 and an R-squared value of 0.46, explaining 46% of the variance. Although slightly weaker than the other variables, its beta value of 0.55 and p-value of 0.004 indicate a significant relationship, supporting the hypothesis that social media usage affects the outcome variable.

Overall, the significant p-values for all three variables suggest that the hypotheses related to political activism, political accountability, and social media usage are supported. These findings are consistent with prior research, which shows that social media enhances political engagement and accountability (Keith, 2023), and political activism contributes to political outcomes (Saboor et al., 2022).

Table 5 : Results of the hypotheses

Hypothesis	R Value	R-Squared Value	P Value	Supported/Not Supported
Political Activism significantly impacts the outcome	0.76	0.58	0.001	Supported
Political Accountability significantly impacts outcome	0.82	0.67	0.0005	Supported
Social Media Usage significantly impacts the outcome	0.68	0.46	0.004	Supported

8. Discussion:

This study focused on the role of social media on two concepts; “politics activism ” and “accountability”, proving how social media has changed the face of politics in modern democracies. Of all the social media platforms, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram top the list when it comes to engagement in politics since people can express their opinions, form coalitions, and call out presidents. The increased use of social media posts predicts higher levels of political activity – in other words, people’s use of social media sites is positively associated with their level

of activism. This can be evidenced by happening such as #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo and of course social media provided a platform to mobilize and create awareness at a global level (Divine, 2023).

Besides, political accountability is another area that receives great contribution from social media, this is because social media allows citizens to review political leaders and the institutions. The paper proves that today politicians share the information directly with citizens using social media networks what can be beneficial in terms of openness yet take its toll in the form of distributing the falsehood (Khan et al., 2023). It replaces the dependence on pre-established forms of media communication and enables the citizenry to observe political conduct in ‘real time’ (Saboor et al., 2022).

However, while social media enables activism and holds leaders accountable, the study also highlights the potential for ‘slacktivism,’ where users participate without actively contributing. In the same regard, fake news erosion negatively influences attempts to bring leaders to justice (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019). Nonetheless, the results paint a picture that reveal the extent to which social media can potentially transform political participation and, therefore, improve democracy by boosting activism and, thus, accountability.

9. Conclusion and limitations:

This study concludes with the finding that social media is a key tool to its political activism and accountability. The results confirm that political activism and accountability are very strongly linked with political engagement, and social media, in particular, is a powerful tool for spreading information, organizing movements, and holding political actors accountable. This confirms that it is important to digital platforms in the modern political process as while social media used socially had a moderate influence relative to political activism and accountability, it did make a meaningful contribution to political participation.

Nevertheless, this research has its limitations. The main limitation is the dependence on self-reported data, which may hold some bias. The study also does not differentiate between different types of social media platforms, which can have different effects on political engagement. A second limitation is that the analysis is limited to short-term political activism and accountability instead of accounting for the long-term sustainability of these effects. While the sample size is sufficient, this may not capture all the variety in political engagement in different regions or demography groups, (partially) limiting generalization of the findings.

9.1. Implications for this research

The implications of this research are broad and suggest several areas for further exploration. For policymakers, the findings highlight the need to leverage social media as a tool for improving political transparency and citizen engagement. Promoting digital literacy could help mitigate the spread of misinformation and ensure that social media remains a positive force in political accountability. For activists and political movements, this study underscores the importance of aligning online efforts with offline actions to maximize their impact. Additionally, future research could focus on understanding how different social media platforms influence political participation and explore ways to enhance the positive effects of these platforms while minimizing their potential downsides.

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