



YOUTH POLITICAL AWARENESS IN PAKISTAN: ANALYZING THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

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Abstract

Social media plays a big role in sharing political news and shaping opinions in today's digital world. Since many young people in Pakistan use social media, it raises questions about how it affects their political knowledge, voting behavior, and the risk of misinformation. This study explores how platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram influence the political awareness of Pakistani youth. A recent survey shows that over 60% of young Pakistanis have internet access, making social media a key source for gathering and sharing political information. Researchers collected data from 233 participants using Google Forms. The study examined different aspects of social media's impact, such as awareness levels, political involvement, and the trustworthiness of online content. Participants shared their views on how they observe and engage with political content on social media. Many rely on digital platforms for education, work, or entertainment. Regarding social media usage, 9% spend 1 to 2 hours daily, 7.7% spend 3 hours, and 3.4% spend 4 hours or more. Additionally, 45.5% of respondents reported using social media for political purposes, while 54.5% did not.

Key words: social media, Political Awareness, Influence, literacy

Introduction

Social media has become a powerful tool for influencing people, sharing information, and increasing political awareness among youth. In Pakistan, most of the population is under 30 years old, and platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram play a big role in shaping political opinions. These platforms give young people a space to express their thoughts, share opinions, and stay updated on current political events. This study focuses on how social media helps Pakistani youth understand politics, engage in discussions, and take part in the democratic process. It aims to explore the impact of social media in improving political awareness, exposing youth to political debates, and encouraging their participation in political activities.

Objectives:

The main goal of this research is to examine how social media affects the political awareness of Pakistani youth. The study will answer key questions like:

- How do Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram shape young people's political views and participation?
- What kind of political content do young people engage with on social media?
- How does social media impact political activities, both positively and negatively?
- What is the effect of fake news and algorithm-driven content on youth's political awareness?

Problem Statement:

Social media has changed how young people in Pakistan engage with politics. The Federal Election Commission notes that while platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram make political news and opinions more accessible, they also come with challenges like fake news and biased content. Since a large portion of Pakistan's population consists of youth who actively use social media, it is important to understand how these platforms influence their political thinking. However, there isn't enough research on this topic. This study will explore the role of social media in shaping political knowledge, interest, and involvement among Pakistani youth, along with its benefits and risks.

Research Questions:

1. How do Pakistani youth benefit from social media in developing political awareness?
2. What types of political content do young people in Pakistan see on social media, and how does it affect their political views?
3. What are the positive and negative effects of social media on youth's political activities and voting behavior in Pakistan?

Hypotheses:

- Social media helps improve political awareness by providing opportunities to access and discuss political information.
- Increased exposure to political content on social media leads to greater participation in political activities, but it also makes users more vulnerable to propaganda and shifts in political opinions.

Independent Variables:

- The level of political engagement on social media, such as reading political posts, liking, sharing, or commenting.
- The extent to which users interact with political content like news, discussions, and promotions.

Dependent Variables:

- Political knowledge, including awareness of political issues and current events.
- Political participation, such as voting, protesting, or expressing opinions about politics.
- Understanding of misinformation and its influence on shaping political beliefs.

Research Limitations:

Some challenges of this study include:

- Participants' personal biases and different perceptions of social media use.
- The study focuses only on Pakistani youth, so the results may not apply to other groups.
- Social media trends change quickly, meaning some findings may become outdated over time.
- Difficulty in tracking how social media algorithms contribute to spreading misinformation.

Literature Review

Social media has transformed how young people engage with politics by providing easy access to political information and opportunities for participation. Researchers worldwide have studied its impact, especially in developing countries. Howard and Hussain (2011) suggest that social media has created a space for political activism among youth. In Pakistan, where more than 60% of the population is young, social media plays a key role in shaping political awareness. Ali and colleagues highlight that platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram allow young Pakistanis to discuss politics, stay updated on political events, and question authority. Ahmad et al. (2020) also found that most Pakistani youth rely on social media for political news, considering it convenient and reliable. This has increased their

political awareness and participation. However, social media also presents challenges. Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) argue that misinformation and fake news can mislead users and create political confusion. In Pakistan, unregulated content spreads quickly, leading to political division. Mehmood et al. (2021) highlight that social media algorithms show users content that aligns with their existing beliefs, limiting exposure to different perspectives. This can reinforce biases and prevent meaningful political discussions. Despite these challenges, social media remains a powerful tool for political participation. Zaheer et al. (2021) state that social media has made political engagement accessible to young people, allowing them to take part in discussions, campaigns, and activism. Overall, research shows that social media has both positive and negative effects on political awareness. While it encourages engagement and learning, it can also spread misinformation and limit diverse viewpoints. This study aims to explore how Pakistani youth manage these challenges and how social media shapes their political engagement.

Theoretical Framework:

This research is based on two theories:

1. Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT): This theory suggests that people actively choose media to fulfill specific needs, such as gaining information or engaging in discussions. This study will use UGT to analyze how youth use Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram for political awareness and participation.
2. Agenda-Setting Theory: This theory explains how media influences public opinion by highlighting certain issues. The study will examine how trending topics and viral posts shape youth's political views and participation.

By applying these theories, the research aims to provide insights into how social media affects political awareness among Pakistani youth.

Methodology

Research Design:

This study uses a quantitative research approach to examine the relationship between social media use and political awareness. It explores how young people interact with political content and participate in political discussions.

Population:

The study focuses on social media users who actively engage with political content on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. These individuals frequently come across political posts, making them a relevant target group. Population of this study was active users of social media in Sialkot.

Sample Size:

A total of 233 participants were selected using non-probability convenience sampling, allowing easy access to respondents and quick data collection.

Data Collection:

Data was collected through an online survey using Google Forms. The questionnaire included six Yes/No questions, making it easy to standardize responses and analyze data.

Survey Questions:

The survey covered the following topics:

- Perceptions of political awareness due to social media.
- Opinions on regulating political content to reduce misinformation.
- Following political pages, groups, or accounts on social media.
- Dependence on social media for political news.
- Participation in political discussions online.
- General use of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Sampling Technique:

Participants were recruited via social media and personal networks. They were informed about the research objectives and gave consent before participating to ensure privacy and anonymity. Data was collected within a specific timeframe for analysis.

Data Analysis:

The collected data was analyzed using percentage-based calculations, showing the number of "Yes" and "No" responses for each question. The findings provided insights into participants' behaviors, opinions, and political engagement patterns on social media.

Results Presentation

Table 4.1: Crosstab of Respondents Age

		18-22	23-25	Total
Respondents	count	151	82	233
	% of Total population	64.8%	35.2%	100%

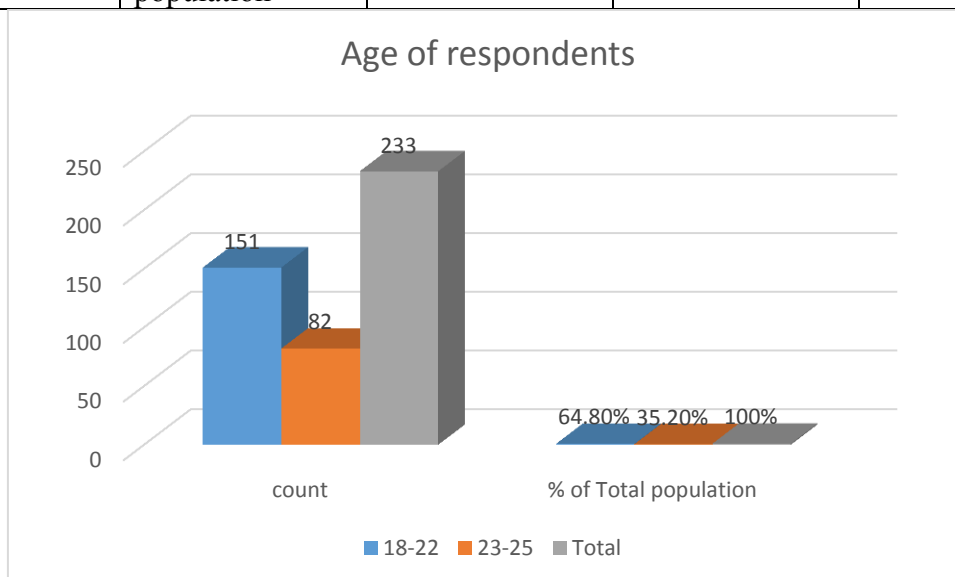


Table 4.1 shows the age of respondents. The overall data shows 64.5% respondents are in between 18-22 as compare to 35.2% of respondents between 23-25 age.

Table 4.2: Crosstab of Respondents Gender

		Male	Female	Total
Respondents	count	109	124	233
	% of Total population	46.8%	53.2%	100%

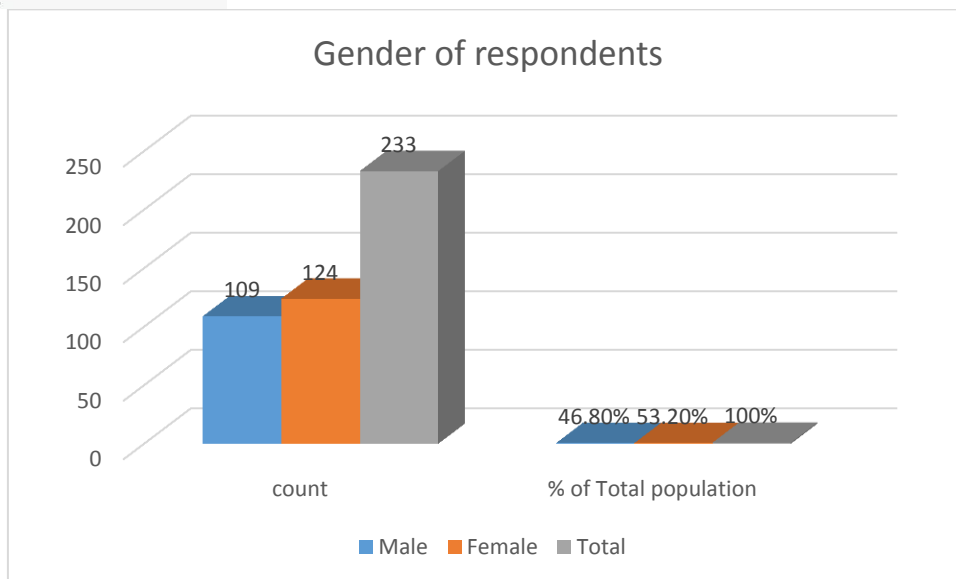


Table 4.2 shows the gender of respondents. The overall data shows 53.2% of respondents are female as compare to other respondents with 46.80% which are male.

Table 4.3: Crosstab of Respondents education

		BS	MS	PHD	others	Total
Respondents	count	87	100	32	14	233
	% of Total population	37.3%	42.9%	13.7%	6.0%	100%

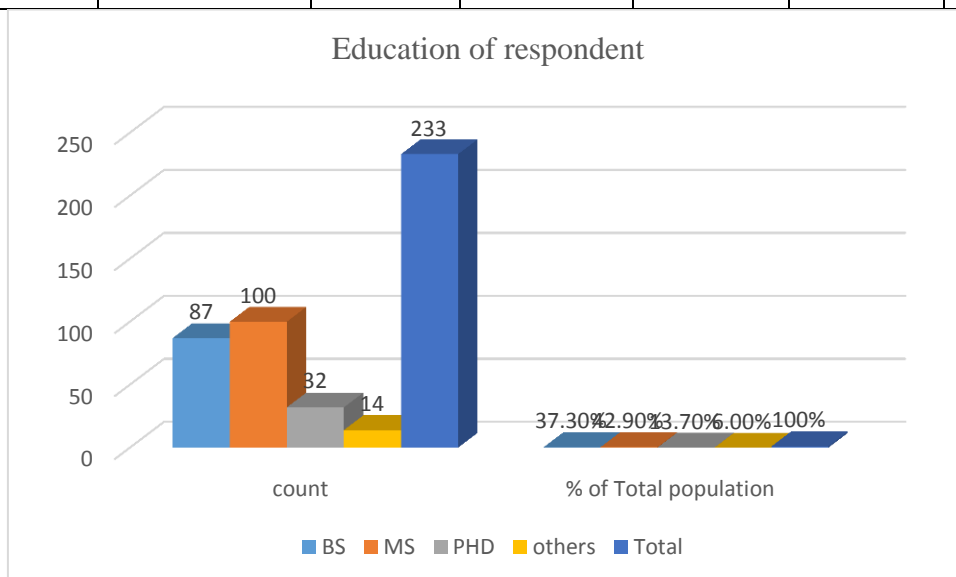


Table 4.3 shows crosstab of respondent's education. The overall data shows 42.9% of respondents are of MS as compare to other categories 37.3% of respondents are from BS, 13.7% of respondents are PhD scholars and 6.0% respondents are from other levels.

Table 4.4: Crosstab of usage of social media

		Upto 2 hours	Upto 3 hours	Upto 4 hours	More than 4 hours	Total
Respondents	count	21	18	8	186	233
	% of Total population	9.0%	7.7%	3.4%	79.8%	100%

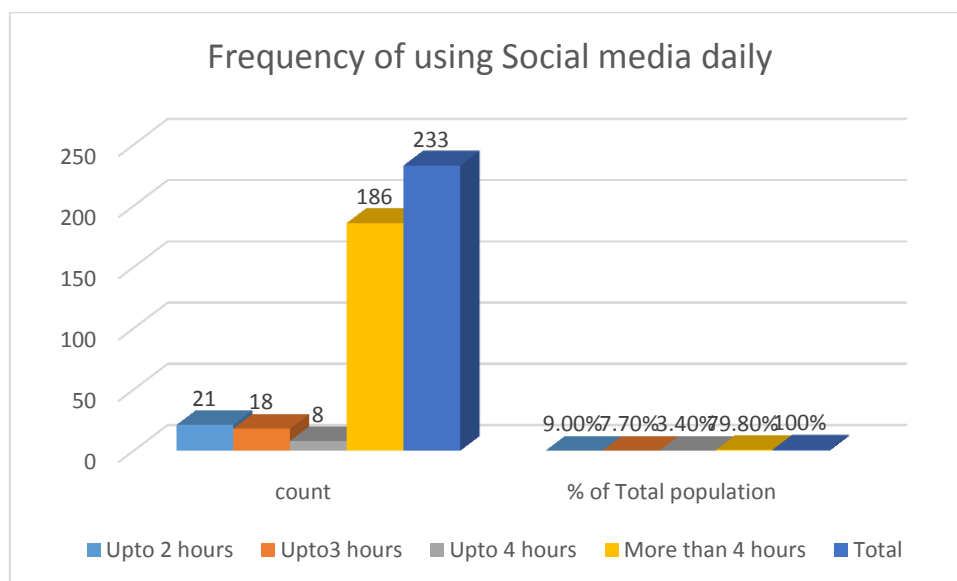


Table 4.4 shows the crosstab of usage of social media by respondents. The overall data shows 79.8% of respondents use more than 4 hours as compare to other categories, 9.0% of respondents use upto 2 hours, 7.7% of respondents uses up to 3 hours and 3.4% of respondents uses social media upto 4 hours.

Table 4.5: Crosstab of actively usage of social apps

		Yes	No	Total
Respondents	Count	127	106	233
	% of Total population	54.5%	45.5%	100%

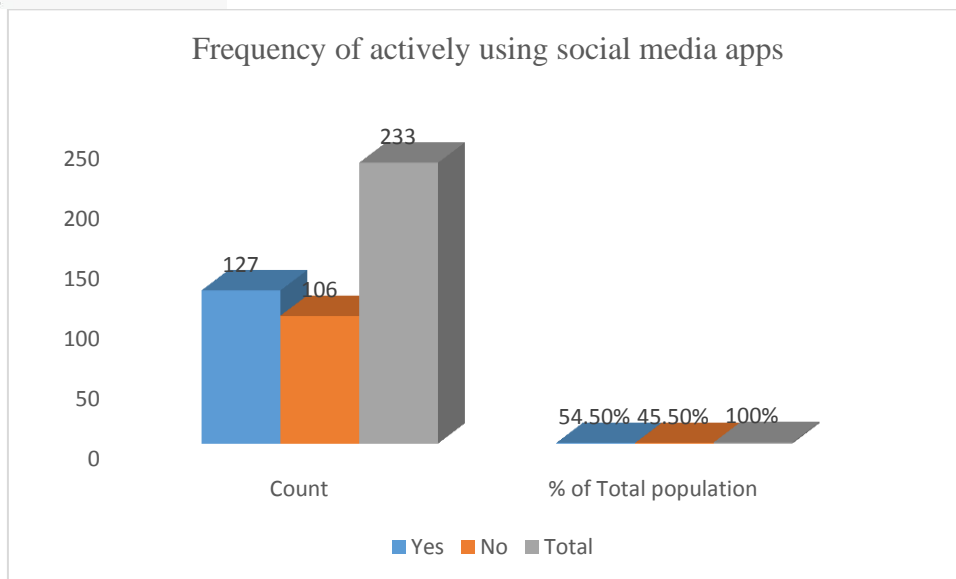


Table 4.5 shows the crosstab of usage of social media apps by respondents. The overall data shows 54.5% of respondents responded with yes as compare to 45.5% with no.

4.6: Crosstab of following political parties pages/accounts

	Yes	No	Total
respondents	144	89	232
% of total	61.8%	38.2%	100

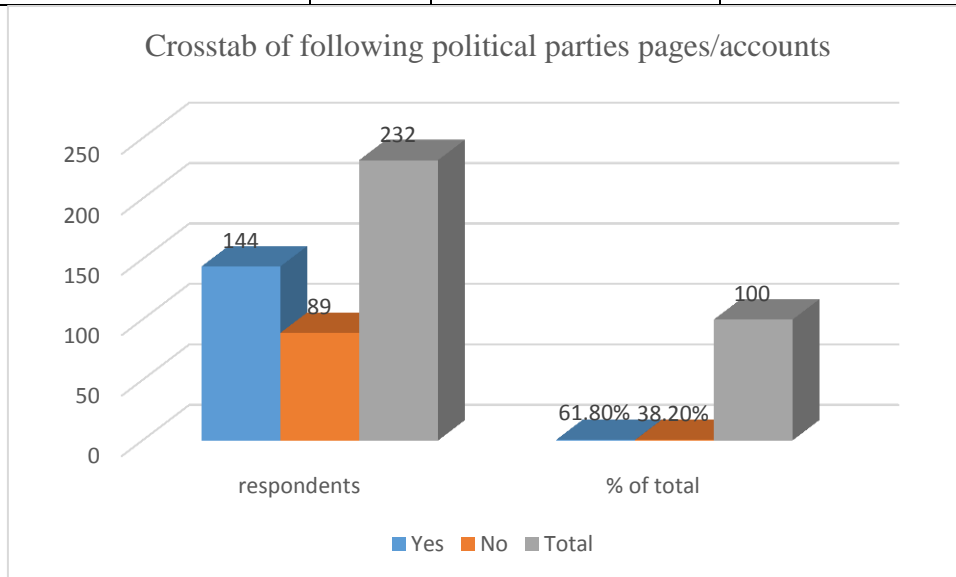


Table 4.6 shows crosstab of following political pages/accounts or groups on social media. The overall data shows 61.8% of respondents says yes as compare to 38.2% of respondents say no.

4.7 Crosstab of reliance on social media

	Yes	No	Total
respondents	149	84	233
% of total	63.9%	36.1%	100

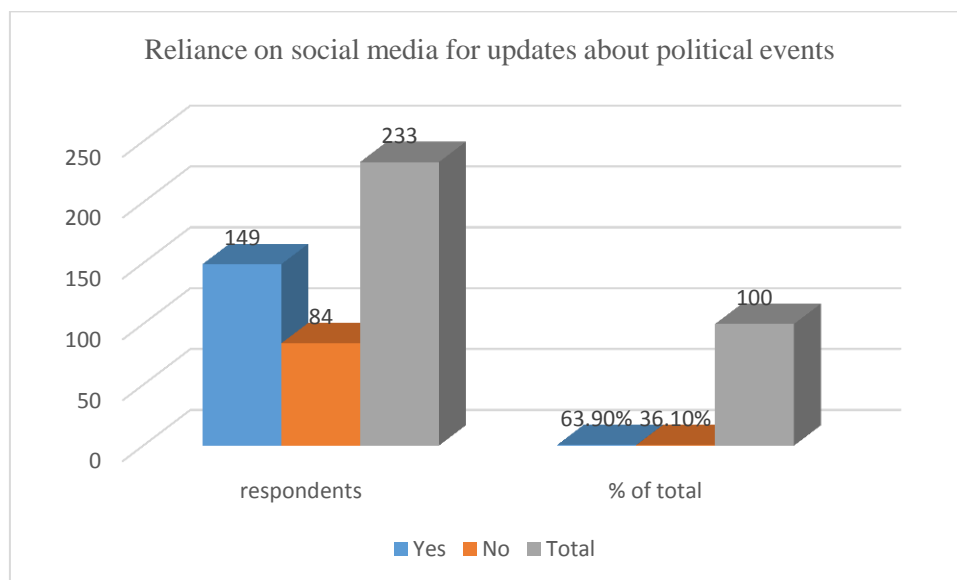


Table 4.7 shows crosstab of reliance for updates on social media about political events and news in Pakistan. The overall data shows 63.9% respondents choose yes as compare to 36.1% responded with no.

4.8: Crosstab of participation in political debates

	Yes	No	total
respondents	149	84	233
% of total	63.9%	36.1%	100

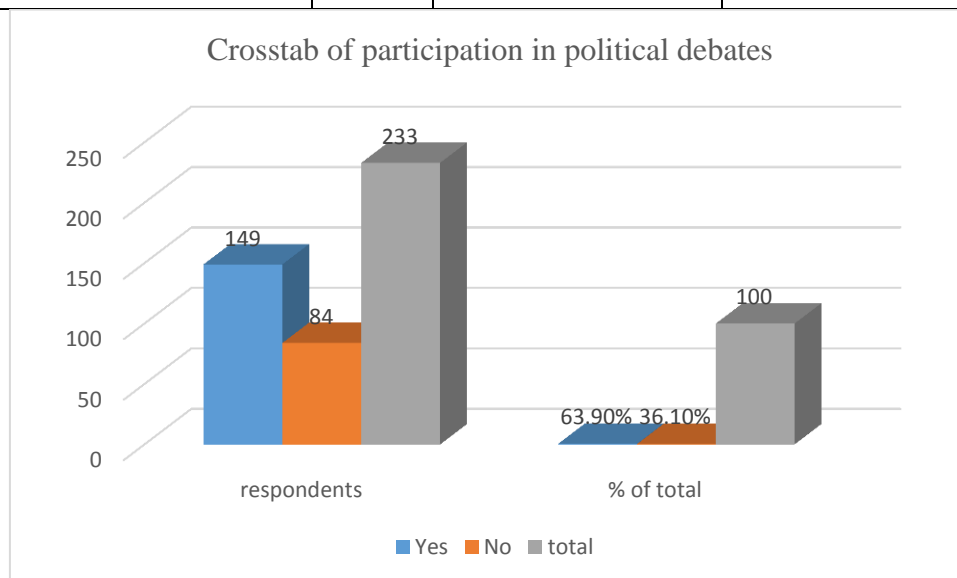


Table 4.8 shows the crosstab of participation in any political discussions or debates on social media. The overall data shows 63.9% of respondents choose yes as compare to 36.1% responded with no.

4.9 Crosstab of increase understanding of political issues

	Yes	No	total
respondents	134	99	233
% of total	57.5%	42.5%	100

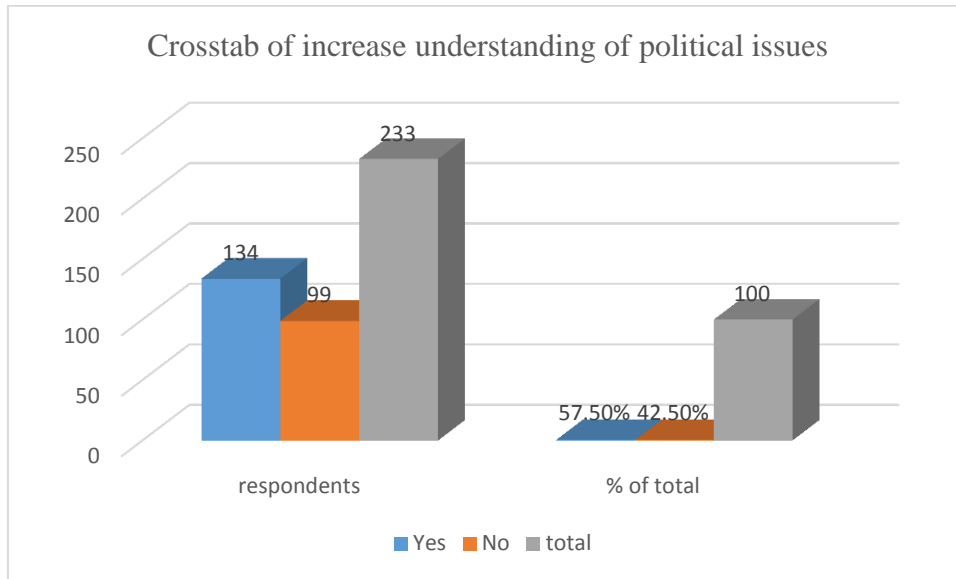


Table 4.9 of respondents shows crosstab of increase understanding of political issues through social media. The overall data shows 57.5% of respondents choose yes as compare to 42.5% responded no.

4.10: Crosstab of misinformation and fake news

	Yes	No	total
respondents	104	129	233
% of total	44.6%	55.4%	100

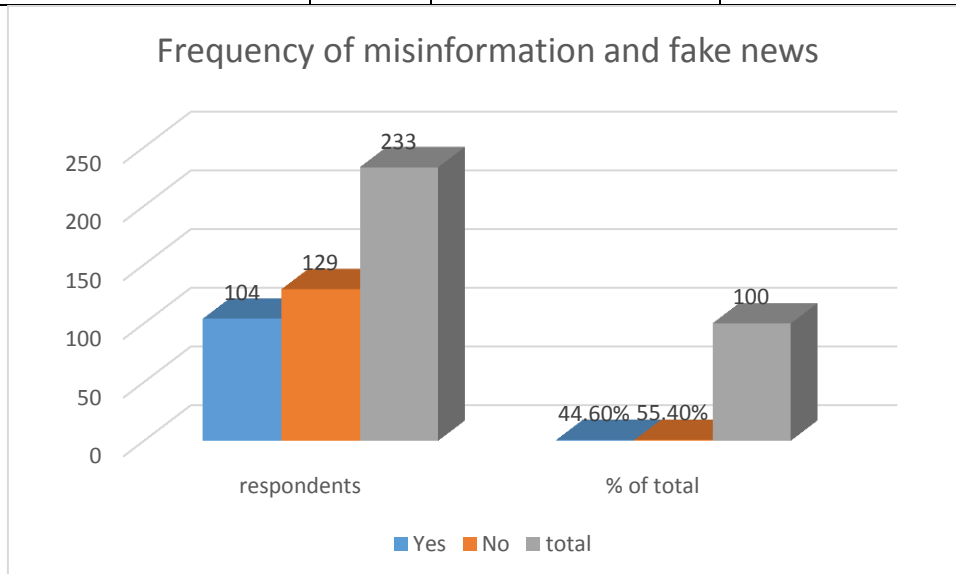


Table 4.10 shows facing of misinformation or fake news about politics on social media. The overall data shows 55.4% of respondents choose no as compare to 44.6% responded with yes.

4.11: Crosstab of social media influences

	Yes	No	total
respondents	99	134	233
% of total	42.5%	57.5%	100

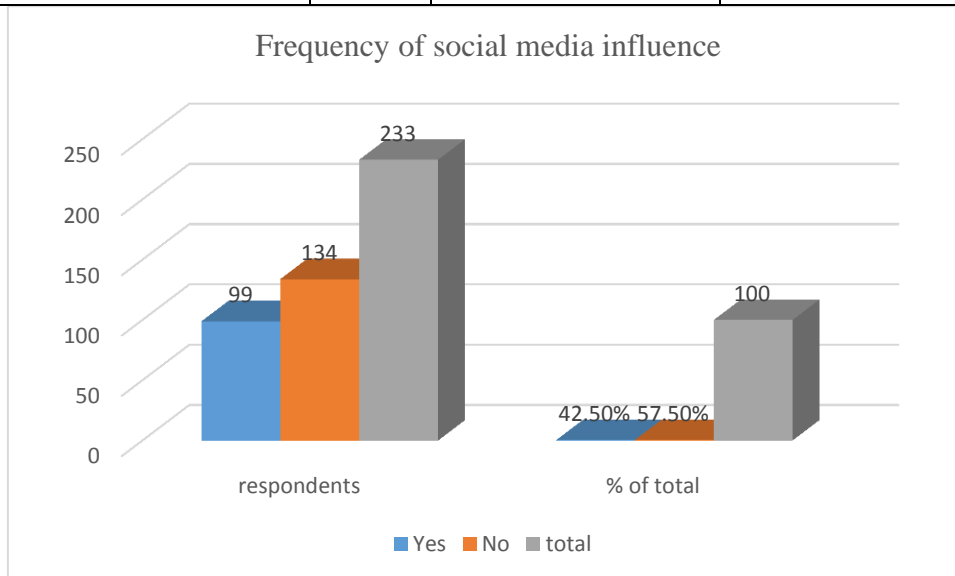


Table 4.11 shows crosstab of influence of social media on political opinions or views. The overall data shows 57.5% of respondents choose no as compare to 42.5% responded with yes.

4.12: Crosstab of Political awareness through social media content

	Yes	No	total
respondents	139	94	233
% of total	59.7%	40.3%	100

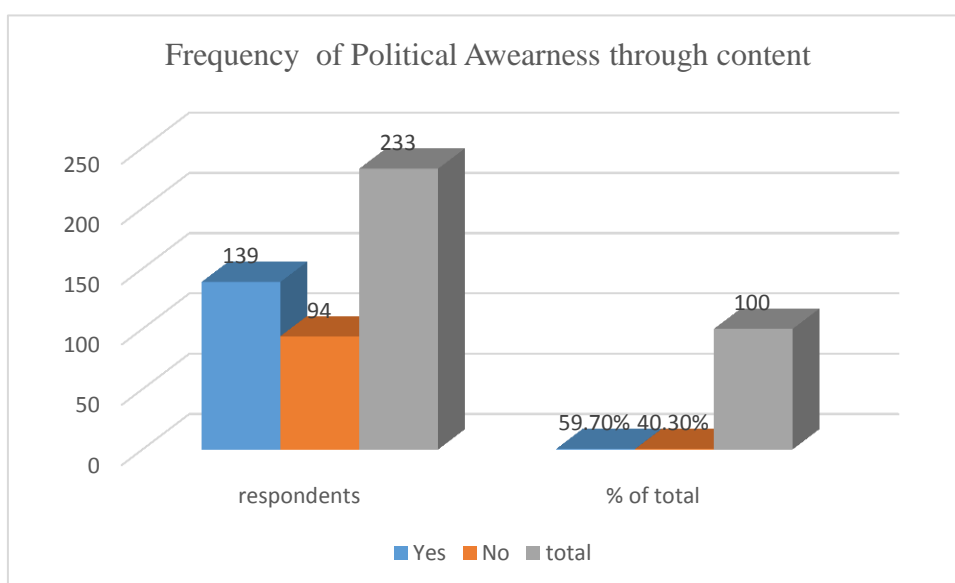
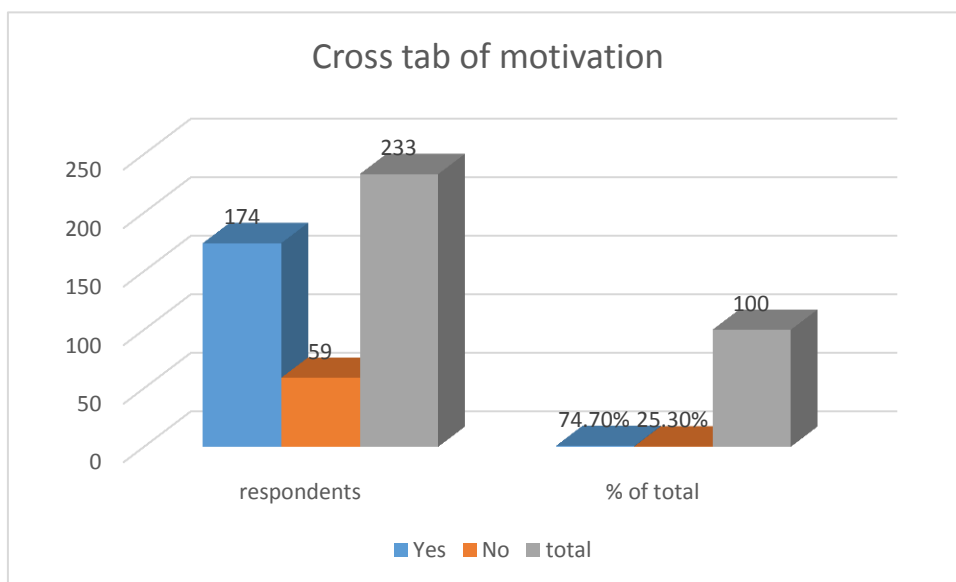


Table 4.12 shows political awareness due to consumed content on social media. The overall data shows 59.7% of respondent choose yes as compare to 40.3% responded no.

4.13: Cross tab of motivation

	Yes	No	total
respondents	174	59	233
% of total	74.7%	25.3%	100



4.13 shows crosstab of motivation by social media campaign. The overall data shows 74.7% of respondent choose yes as compare to 25.3% responded with no.

4.14: Crosstab of political awareness

	Yes	often	total
respondents	137	96	233
% of total	58.8	41.2%	100

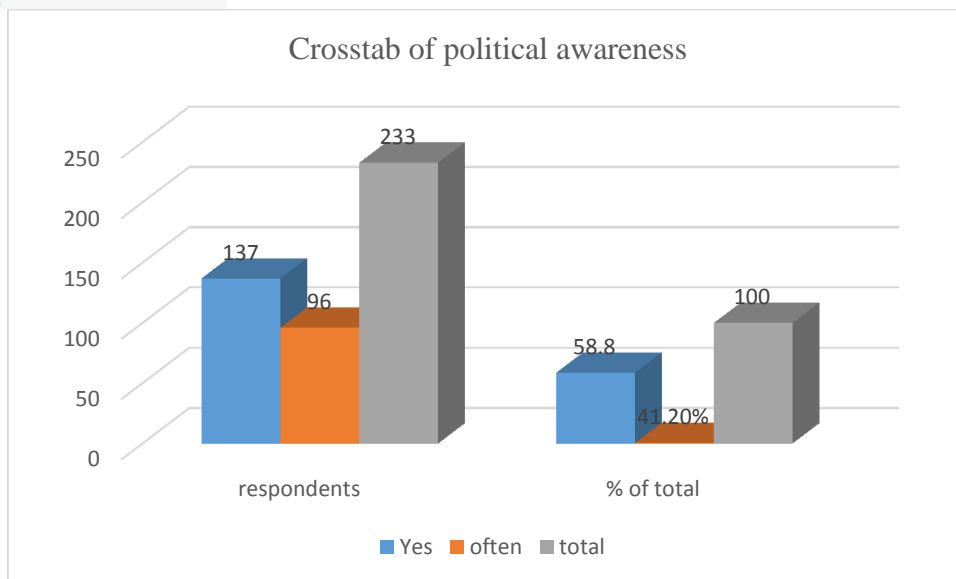


Table 4.14 shows crosstab of regulating of political content. The overall data shows 58.8% respondents choose yes as compare to 41.2% responded with no.

Conclusion & Discussion

The demographics and social media usage patterns of the respondents range from Tables 4.2 to 4.5. According to Table 4.3, respondents belonging to the majority (42.9%) are MS students, 37.3% BS, 13.7% PhD scholars, 6.0% educated to some other degree. With the results of this distribution, one may infer that most of the participants have partial an advanced educational background, which could possibly affect their participation in social media and digital platforms. Table 4.2 in terms of gender distribution (53.2% female and 46.8% male) indicates that the respondents are slightly over half female. This balance implies fair proportion of males or females to contribute for diversification of subjects on social media usage. The part table 4.4 lists the social media use trends among the respondents. Eighty-nine-point eight percent used SNS for more than four hours per day. There is a strong dependency towards the digital, maybe for purposes of academia, work or leisure. Only 9.0% use social media for 1 to 2 hours, 7.7% for 3 hours, 3.4% for 4 hours, and so forth, compared to the comparatively more common duration of 1 to 2 hours. As far as social media applications are concerned, 45.5% of the respondents confirmed the usage whereas 54.5% did not. In that context, it seems that the quantity might be large, but not all respondents are using social media apps actively or even prefer other platforms. In general, findings show that social media plays a pivotal role in MS students' and frequent users' daily lives.

Hypothesis:1 (True)

- The research data confirms the prediction because 56% of participants have set up accounts on political platforms.

Hypothesis:2 (True)

- Data demonstrates that the majority of 86.67% of respondents use social media platforms since this rate fully supports the hypothesis about their widespread use today.

Data illustrates that most of the research predictions were correct besides those which addressed actual social media participation as well as political news receivership through these platforms. There is evidence that social media shapes political awareness but user-level variations exist in terms of actions and dependency on political content.

Research investigated social media's effect on political awareness and participation and user actions through data collected from 233 participants using an online Google Form. Most of the survey participants expressed greater political consciousness after consuming content from social media (81.33%). Turning political misinformation into a platform responsibility is supported by 84 percent of those surveyed because of their worries about how accurate and trustworthy online content remains.

Of those surveyed half (56%) follow political accounts but less than a third (34.67%) actually engages in political discussions or debates. Research indicates social media functions strongly as a conduit for delivering political content yet fails to generate broad popular political involvement. The data shows an equal distribution between participants who obtain political updates through social media networks (45.33%) and those who do not use this method (54.67%).

Respondents actively engage with Facebook Twitter and Instagram platforms according to the results because 86.67% of participants use these platforms as demonstrated by the study which reveals the extensive social media influence on political conduct. The study reveals social media functions simultaneously as a platform for spreading political awareness yet demonstrates susceptibility to the spread of inaccurate information which calls for online content regulation alongside genuine political discourse promotion.

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