



RESEARCH PAPER

Disinformation and Political Polarization: A Qualitative Study on the Role of Social Media to Develop Political Biases in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to find the outcomes of disinformation being spread through social media and practices leading to youth following and trusting in such information blindly without any authentication. Pakistani society went through a socio-cultural and political change with the introduction of internet technology. Under the western concepts of human rights, the social media provides freedom of speech and freedom of thoughts. This study was qualitative in nature, including online content analysis, participant observation, in-depth interviews, and focused group discussions. Through purposive sampling, the youth of Quaid-I-Azam University and PMAS Arid Agriculture University, aged 20 to 30 year, was selected and 24 in-depth interviews were conducted. Social media has a positive impact for the growth of a balanced society, but in the context of Pakistan the use of social media is for developing political biases through disinformation brings forth a political polarization. Consequently, political biasness and intolerance are observed very common among youth. There is need to develop new policies to protect the youth from being exploited by social media or political parties.

KEYWORDS Disinformation, Political Polarization, Social Media, Youth, University, Political Affiliation

Introduction

World Wide Web (internet) has become more advanced and developed since its inception, and it also influence the politics and resultantly this online platform shifted it towards the proliferation of becoming deepen day by day. From the first and earliest computer network (BBS) Bulletin Board System, to our constant ability to stay connected with the current affairs through using social media platform via mobile phone, in today era internet provide a range of tools that shapes and influence politics. With the passage of time this progression has many long-lasting effects, for which researchers and social scientists immediately focus on it and started thinking and analysis of this emerging situation. The emergence of social media has completely transformed and reshaped the societal setup. Further, the capacity and potential of digital platforms to connect and unite people also expands and revolutionized the whole society, permitting their continuous collaboration or interaction and amplifying their voices to a wider audience. Moreover, it is widely recognized acknowledged that social media platform plays a vital and crucial role in disseminating information and the statements of political groups (Chadwick, 2013). Social media has become an important channel for communication that allows political parties and ordinary citizens to provide and disseminate information regarding their activities. These parties declare and narrate their position or stance on specific issues as well as to exchange information coming from various sources and reporting on issues that are relevant and currently interesting to their followers and likeminded people.(Calderaro, 2018).

According to (*Global Social Media Statistics, 2024*) there were approximately 5.17 billion social media users worldwide as of July 1, 2024, which represent 63.7% of the world's total population. Over the past 12 months, the number of people using social media has continued to grow with approximately 282 million new users have joined social media platforms since this time last year. These current figures signify to annual growth rate of 5.8%, with an average of 8.9 new users added per second on social media. Furthermore, the data also revealed that the typical social media user accesses or visits an average of 6.7 different social media platforms per month and spends an average of 2 hours 20 minutes daily on social media platforms. Considering that individuals sleep for 7 to 8 hours each day. These recent statistics indicate that individuals spend around 14% of their waking hours on using social media platforms. In addition to this, the world's population spends more than 12 billion hours on social media every day, which is close to 1.38 million years of human life.

If we took a glance of regional statistics, in the beginning of 2024 Pakistan had 111.0 million internet users with the rate of 45.7% meanwhile, in January 2024 Pakistan had 71.70 million social media users which accounted for 29.5% of the country's total population. At this point figures also shows that 54.38 million people aged from 18 and above used social media platforms in the beginning of 2024, which represent 38.9% of the country total population from 18 and above at that time (Kemp, 2024). Social media platforms are now recognized as an effective media tool for Pakistani people to share and exchange information, interact with other people and influence the general public opinion.

These advancements have also led certain drawbacks, notably a rise in political polarization especially within Pakistani youth. As time to time changes in social media technologies enable the people of our country to seek out the content based on their personal preferences such as likes and dislikes (Muzaffar, Yaseen, & Safdar, 2020). Therefore, they are only looking at the content that strengthen their viewpoints and looking forward to preventing or blocking those content that may challenge their ideologies and will. Hence, leading to the formation of echo chambers.

Literature Review

As we discussed earlier, we live in digital era where we all are connected and shared information with each other but there is a serious problem in this digital world which we faced and that is called misinformation. The term misinformation refers to false information which can be spread on different social media platform as factual news and is intended to mislead the individuals (American Psychological Association, 2023). The false information that spread on social media platforms can shape public opinion, changing political choices and strengthening polarization in society. Acquiring a full grasp of the means through which false information circulates across the intricate web of social interaction is essential for maintaining the validity of public discourse and strengthening the rule of law and democratic institutions. The digital revolution has caused a substantial paradigm change in the consumption and dissemination of information (Talabi et al., 2022). Social media, as an essential part of this revolutionary process that has fundamentally transformed the communication structure by enabling the rapid diffusion of ideas, viewpoints and news on unprecedented level. Nevertheless, the swift development of technological growth is being associated with various obstacles, particularly the rise and spread of disinformation on social media platforms is becoming a serious concern (Langraw & Zaman, 2023). Disinformation is the base of political polarization because the spread of false, deceptive and manipulative information has the potential to divide people in society at large. Disinformation pervades individual's cognition, influence their viewpoints and eventually shapes their existing knowledge and understanding (Yang & Tian, 2021).

In the case of Pakistan, where affiliation with politics are firmly embedded and often intertwined with religious, ethnic and class identifies, social media has further contributed existing differences. Platforms such as WhatsApp, YouTube, Twitter(X) and Facebook possess not only sites for political mobilization but also battlegrounds for misleading campaigns that create biases and polarize public sentiments.

Social media is a powerful tool that has played a key role in shaping the minds of its users in numerous ways whether it's for political, religious and business interest. (Muzaffar, Chohdhry & Afzal, 2019). Social media platforms serves as a part in creating political polarization in Pakistan, particularly in youth and we had seen this by focusing on certain events happened in past such as Zainab murder case, Afghan Refugees' issues, TLP protest and 9th May protest etc. All these events were burning and prominent issues on social media platforms where every Pakistani user expressed their views about the existing issue and argued over the facts as per their own knowledge and affiliation. The differences in their point of view and information they consume leading and generated a polarized youth particularly when these important events were exploited by diverse political parties both in opposition and ruling side.

Therefore, in light of above discussion, social media platforms in Pakistan can be considered a major contributing and effective factor in political polarization among Pakistani youth. Political polarization has been caused due to easy access of information and content available on social media as well as individuals' ability to interact with the content that align with their ideologies and beliefs (Maqsood et al., 2024). Further the role of social media algorithm in polarization is important as social media allows its users to read and examine selective content further the format of social media promotes sensationalism as well as dissemination of disinformation, which ultimately resulting increase in polarization among youth (Melki et al., 2021). Currently social media platforms have created filter bubble which serves to limits and blocking the diverse information and viewpoints, resulting less tolerance among individuals for different point of view. Social media has strong influence on Pakistani youth but the situation is still remained unclear that how much social media create political polarization among youth.

Hence, it is important to conduct extensive study to understand the role of social media in developing political biases and deepening polarization in Pakistani youth. The findings of this study will give us an idea that how social media platforms spread disinformation and shapes individuals' political views and create polarization in society. Addressing this phenomenon is important as it will help us to understand the challenges posed by social media platforms to social cohesion and democratic processes in the country.

Material and Methods

This qualitative study was conducted in two government sector universities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Quaid-I-Azam University was selected from Islamabad and Pir Mehar Ali Shah Arid Agriculture University from Rawalpindi through convenient sampling technique. The researchers had earlier contacts and rapport in both of the universities. The data was collected through informal discussions, in-depth interviews and focused group discussion. The observations were made on social media platforms to document the political views of the politically active youth of the selected universities. An unstructured interview guide was developed to conduct in-depth interviews. The purpose to develop unstructured interview guide was to ask questions more freely and to further probe in an ongoing discussion. There were conducted 24 in-depth interviews, 18 from Quaid-I-Azam University and 11 from Arid Agriculture University. Both of the universities have students from all parts of Pakistan, who have established student councils on the basis of Ethno-lingual identities. The students have strong affiliations with main stream political parties of Pakistan. The respondents were selected through purposive and convenient sampling.

A verbal consent was ensured from all of the respondents, and they were told about their rights and confidentiality of shared information. The student having some designation in student councils of both of the universities were included in the study as they had high level of political participation not only in student councils based on ethno-lingual identities but also in mainstream political parties of Pakistan. Thematic analysis technique was used for data analysis for which after familiarization with data codes were generated followed by development of themes. On each of the theme narratives were defined and names for generalization of research findings.

Table 1
Sampled Population

Sr. No.	Ethno-lingual Identity	University	No. of Respondents	Total
1	Punjabi	QAU	4	5
		PMAS	3	
2	Pashtoon	QAU	4	6
		PMAS	2	
3	Saraiki	QAU	3	5
		PMAS	5	
4	Sindhi	QAU	3	3
5	Baluchi	QAU	2	3
		PMAS	1	
6	Gilgiti	QAU	2	2
Total				24

Results and Discussion

The processed data brought diverse themes on the topic of the study. Most relevant themes were merged and generalized over politically active youth of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. The detailed description of each theme is presented below.

Use of Social Media Sites and Controlled Social Media

The respondents of this study were using multiple social media forums for getting political information and sharing of their thoughts. Each of the respondent was using more than one social media site. The most popular was WhatsApp and Facebook followed by Instagram, YouTube and X respectively. The usage of WhatsApp and Facebook was relatively more easy as compared to Instagram, YouTube and X. The respondents were of the opinion that on small amount of internet package they can extensively use WhatsApp and Facebook, whereas for using other social media sites they had to purchase open source internet.

The most recent step of the government to launch a firewall for controlled social media is not being appraised by the youth in Pakistan. Respondent number 15 belonged to Khyber Pakhtoon Khaw and the fan of Pakistan Tahreek-I-Insaf showed is aggressive behavior on the conduct of government and angrily said,

“As I think that Government is doing all wrong. If they think, they can control the voices of youth by doing control of everything than it is wrong. I can be a bounced back they are probably unaware of it.”

Aggression and anger was observed among all participants while asking the question on the effects of controlled social media. Almost all of the respondents were of the opinion that this is against the international charter of human rights and against the constitution of Pakistan, that gives the right to freedom of expression and freedom of thoughts. A respondent who was general secretary of one of the student council said that the government is itself responsible for intolerance among youth, as they do not tolerate the opinion of youth than how in society people will tolerate each other.

Expression of political thoughts on social media

Being politically active and engaged on social media can be divided into two forms. Firstly, respondents are afraid and stressed by unwanted criticism from various social media users, which is why they prefer to just react and share political content. Respondents are involved in political socialization but are not involved in debates on social media. On contrary few respondents who are expressing their thoughts via posting certain posts of their favorite politicians they followed without considering how others may respond to their post. What exactly is more essential to respondents is that they express their views on regarding issue or topic. Meanwhile, memes also play a huge role in expressing political thoughts as respondents share memes because they are afraid of cyber bullying and criticisms that's why they are utilizing memes to express their opinions in which they declare what they intend to convey without receiving any criticism or hate from others. According to respondents sharing memes, reacting to a post and posting something have little impact on politicians and their followers since they believe it is just a web-based joke. Further he said,

"I express my political views on social media in the form of by reacting on their post. Usually, I press like button and repost their views so that a large number of audience and user can read their thoughts."

Fake News, Trust and Political Polarization

The trend of spreading unauthenticated news is very common on social media in Pakistan. There are untrained media reporter who are very active on social media to share so called breaking news stories. Such reporters have diverse political affiliation. In addition to this, all main stream political parties of Pakistan have established their social media wings who are active to create suspense by sharing rumors. Some political workers of the political parties deliberately work on conspiracy theories to change the political narratives of their co-political followers. One of the respondent who was doing BS in Agriculture form PMASAAUR and was the Chairman of the student council, responded to the question on this theme and said,

"We know there is fake news on social media, but no one has the time to verify the source of news. . . . The political belonging has become very strong that the follower of a political party blindly follows the news and start sharing on their profiles."

It was a common practice among the respondent that they did not verified the news sources. There is a common behavior about believing the shared political information on social media and sharing it on many social media platforms. The respondent's social media accounts were full of many misleading statements of politicians that they had considered true. On the basis of such fake news a strong political polarization was found among the respondents. The respondents had taken a particular political positioning on local, national and international issues and were managing to develop arguments to prove their personal opinion and opinion of their political party. This situation gets more worst when it brings hate for the followers or workers of other political parties.

Social Media as tool to express Ethno-lingual Identities

Among the youth of selected government sector universities, social media was the strongest influencer of identity formation second to culture. In addition to political polarization, social media was polarizing youth on the basis of their ethno-lingual identities. There was a common trend of following the social media accounts and pages of student council of the selected universities. During focused group discussion it was documented that the ethno-lingual identities got more strong among after the joining of

university. A participant of FGD shed light on the role of social media and the culture of university to further develop sense of ethno-lingual identity as,

“Although I belong to a district of Saraiki Wasib (Area), but before reaching to QAU, I had no idea about my lingual identity (ethno-lingual identity). This was for the first time in my, it was revealed that I was not a Punjabi and belonged to a different language group. University culture added more into it by sharing Saraiki culture with me. But, the social media gave me knowledge that how our rights are being consumed by other parts of Punjab. . . I started following Saraiki intellectuals and political leaders, whom I did never know before reaching to this university.”

The field data reveals that in addition to political polarization, the youth was also being divided on the basis of their ethno-lingual identities. The leadership of student's councils and their followers had very robust ideas about other groups. The element of intolerance was commonly found in the behavior of participants. Although in the FGDs, there was participation of almost all of the student councils, but during individual informal discussions it was documented that they youth had negative thoughts about other lingual groups. At the time of joining of university, the students belonging to KP, Sindh and Baluchistan had more knowledge of current affairs and politics in Pakistan.

All of the respondents belonging to various student's councils had respective ethno-lingual identities. However, they also had different political affiliations with main stream political parties. Besides these political differences they were tightly bind in a network based on their ethno-lingual identities. In the culture of QAU, there are no political student unions, however the students do politics on the basis of their ethno-lingual identities, which in the culture of university set asides political differences.

Opposing NEWS, views and Intolerance

It was documented that the respondents of this study had liked or were following the social media accounts and pages of the likeminded social media activist, journalists, political parties, TV channels and newspapers. An opposing behavior to news and views of their opponents (in university) and comparative political parties on national level were not accepted wholeheartedly. During an in-depth interview, respondents number 4 (fan of PTI) stated that he has more trust on the new of ARY News Channel than all other main stream media channels. This is why he had liked and subscribed all social media accounts of ARY News. The acceptance of opposing views was mostly common among the targeted population of this study. While having face to face debate and discussion with the people of opposing views the element of acceptance of opinion and tolerance was found. However, in the private sittings the respondents had show intolerance and aggressive behavior. Respondent number 27 was cultural secretary of a student council and addressing the question on disinformation and intolerance he said,

“Yes, spreading of disinformation is very common in our main stream media. I have my own definition of this. The main stream media specifically targets one political party and show all what is bad on their part. There is bad governance on part of all of the political parties during their rule in their provinces. During 2013 to 2018 the media showed all bad (governance) of Karachi. Why they were targeting one province? It is still on YouTube, the news bulletin of 9 (PM) used to start with Karachi and end on Karachi.”

Such views were not very common among the respondents, however in most of the interviews and on this topic during FGD, the respondents talked about the dual face of main stream media. They were of the opinion that the national media is not natural in terms of showing the transparency on the governance of all political parties. It was documented that owing to this controversial role of the national media the respondents had opposing behavior to authenticated and tur news and impartial views of analytics. On

social media there were direct criticism and sometimes and counterarguments without real evidence. This shows the intolerance among politically active youth of Pakistan.

Political Biases and Polarization of Society

The difference of opinion is the beauty of the society, however, this difference had divided the population in various political groups. This division has further played a part to bring polarization in the society. Before the excessive access of social media, there used to be political belongings and biases but polarization of the society was not based on political affiliations. During this study it was observed that the political biases had prompted polarization of the society. Respondent number 6 was vice chairman of one of the student's councils and was worker of Pakistan People's Party. During in-depth interview, he was emotional on his political biasness and said,

"Everyone is biased in his (or her) personal life. Be that is the matter of their family, siblings or children. So, there is no harm in being politically biased. I do not like the workers of Noon League (PML-N) and PTI. On campus I am helpless and I have to live in working relationship with the students of opposite political ideologies. But in my personal life I do not give space to the workers or even well-wishers of these two (PML-N and PTI) parties. I do not purchase anything from a shop if I know they have sympathies for them (PML-N and PTI). . . . I have nothing to do whatever the leadership of PPP is doing as they are in good terms with Noon League (PML-N) and sharing power. . . . I know how I will meet Bibi (Benzir Bhutto)."

These narratives and common observations of the society and news stories reveal that during last two decades, the political biases and extensive use of social media to share the content of personal linking has developed polarization in the society. This is not a common practice but few respondents of this study had similar opinion and shared their practices as well. One of the respondents said that he had political differences so he is no more in any type of terms with his elder brother. In Pakistani culture, the younger are socially, morally and ethically bound to respect their elders. Whereas, at the institution level these moral binding is being vanished slowly. On the other hand, in the society the cultural norms are still powerful, but even than such events are happening in isolation.

Political Polarization University Premises and Administration

The administration looks well aware about political participation of the students within the premises of the university but it has been ignored. In the university areas public spheres play the significant role in making the minds politically polarized. Most the students sit on the night canteens and huts and indulge themselves in some sort of futile and obsolete political, ethnic level of discussion. From the various ethnic councils and groups of the enrolled students, the senior students play the key role to ignite the junior students. The faculty members along with the various university administration personnel are also found there to take tea and get breakfast and lunch sometime. They are aware of mods of communication for ethnic and political discussion and such places are engaging the students in physical space.

Discussion

This research study provides fascinating insights into the intricate interplay among social media and its users and how this complex relationship led to political polarization especially within students in Pakistan. Respondents of this study showed a great deal of engagement with social media platforms. Majority of respondents claimed that they used social media on daily basis. WhatsApp and Facebook emerged as the most preferred social media platforms among participants. A study conducted on regulated Social Media in India: A Study of Media User Perception (Pathak, 2023) claims that everyone has right for freedom of speech but due to government limitations they feel there is no freedom of

speech or expression exist at all. This reflects the complex relationship between social media freedom and government limitations. Governments are responsible to control undesired contents which are harmful morally and against norms and values of the society. However, masses thought it the restraint and all they do is to control people freedom of speech as well as their expressions. Hence, it is concluded that participants showed serious concern regarding government limitations on social media platforms. Another study conducted by (Abdullateef, 2021) in Nigeria has highlighted that government controlled on social media create more polarization among youth. Respondents did not support the government's moves and measures to regulate social media platforms. Considering the regulation and banning of more social media platforms led to a loss of trust between the people and the incumbent government. In the context of this discussion, it was observed that not only in Pakistan but people from the other countries also have same opinion regarding government control over digital networking sites. People argued that restriction is not the solution of anything because we all are aware what government's up to, consequently this cause intolerance and political polarization among individuals.

The concept of political views on social media refers to the respondent's online engagement in politics. A study by (Garcia & Luces, 2019) explained that Filipinos are enthusiastic and actively participate in politics by sharing political memes, as well as these sharing memes reveal their political stance with a particular political party. Further sharing of political memes affects other people as well. Another studies conducted by (Guess et al., 2019; Weinstein, 2014) highlighted that people online civic expression by clicking on 'like' and 'sharing' button showed their engagement in politics and affiliation with particular political party. In addition to this Finnish researchers (Lonkila & Jokivuori, 2023) theorized this political participation of youth as nano-level participation: which includes 'liking' and 'sharing' post on social media platforms related to politics and other existing social issues. According to (Weeks et al., 2023) we all are living in diverse political environment where each of us has our own point of views and ideology. With this, thing in mind individuals does not share their views in terms of writing something on social media platforms, due to the fear of being socially sanctioned and facing cyber bullying for expressing political views online. The findings of the above discussed studies are similar to the findings of this present study conducted in Islamabad, where the respondents are active in politics by expressing their actions on social media platforms. Their online political actions and engagement depends on their preferences. Respondents prefer to share and like political post just to express their stance and they also share political memes to convey their message clearly.

Fake news is viewed as a unique type of deception (Fallis, 2015). Fake news reports can be misleading, stating something accurate but conveying a false impression. Wrong and misleading information or remarks are considered fake news. Fake news are intended to deceive or demonstrate a contempt for truth, in that case fake news are classified as crap (Jaster & Lanius, 2018). The study conducted on fake news and polarization by (Ribeiro et al., 2017) explained that fake news creates biases among people. The word "fake news" are popular among people as they use this word to disagree with the opinions of others and consider important to spread it bluntly, in spite of knowing the fact, that they are sharing fake news. Therefore, according to participants opinions or news on social media that are against their ideology or political party are fake as per their opinion. According to (Spohr, 2017) Fake news spread on social media leads to ideological polarization because fake news contains limited or one-sided information that triggers others and generate biases among them. People belief on any information without checking its credibility, at the same time they only concerned about who spread this information and it should be align with their ideology. If fake news matches with their belief and views then it is no longer fake and they consider this information as facts. Respondents were preferred selective exposure in accessing political information or participation in politics. Therefore selective exposure confirm their bias towards certain

political groups (Baptista et al., 2021). In addition, the results discussed above are similar to the results of this present study, as the respondents claimed that they believed only that information that was consistent with their views and the rest were false to them.

A broader literature on politics revealed that ethnic identities have a significant role in shaping individuals political behavior as well as political preferences (Blais & Nadeau, 1992; Chernyha & Burg, 2012). According to (Souleimanov et al., 2013), the internal tensions among nationalities are caused by the politics of multi-ethnic groups. In this view they were talking about the rise of nationalism among Iranian Azerbaijanis. Ethno-national identities generate political conflicts and forms a heterogeneous group in the society. Different ethnic groups engage in manipulation and start conflict with others who oppose their ideology (Hierro & Gallego, 2018). Research study conducted by (Pujolar, 2008), stated that after the changes in media dynamics their discourses (mediascape) influence the youth by which they know about their ethno-language identity and participation in politics. Youth from traditional background are changing their attitude and used their identity in political position. In relation to this view, youth practices in terms of political participation or activism abandoned the traditional pattern of politics particularly talking about militancy organization. Moreover, people who find out their ethnicity may join some relevant social groups as well as online group that enhance their exposure and make themselves beneficial for politics. Talking about this present study findings, all respondents were belonged to different ethnic groups and actively participate in politics with having different political affiliation with mainstream political leaders. Apart from this, they had more knowledge about Pakistan current affairs, also they give credit to social media pages for increasing their knowledge and information.

Social media and traditional media both are shaping people perspectives and opinions about society (Yang et al., 2016). Study conducted by (Mehran & Iqbal, 2023) on political polarization in which the findings revealed that respondents actively engaged in social media platforms for political discussion and most of them shared their political affiliation with PMLN & PTI. Further this study findings also observed political polarization among respondents created by media. Attitude and approaches of individuals reflects the violence and protest against a disliked political party and their leader. This political polarization leading towards the social fragmentation which influence other people as well. According to (Jaha et al., 2017) Political intolerance among people is caused by media conglomerates. In the case of Ghana, the main reasons of political intolerance were ethnocentrism and partisanship of some media groups and media practitioner towards various political groups. These media houses would focus on one issue and discussed disliked political leaders and make a character assassination of them. Moreover, the population in Ghana are illiterate and create a misunderstanding among them regarding political activist and party are easy for media. Considering the above discussion in mind, this study findings are also similar to the previous discussed studies as respondents of this study claimed that Pakistani media houses are biased they only highlight certain issues and respondents do not accept the opposing point of view highlight on the media, and most of them like to watch that channel which highlight the narrative of their political party. This shows political intolerance behavior among Pakistani youth.

According to (Levin et al., 2021) Biases and polarization exist in society since the cultural evolution such as economic interactions and inequality create polarization over time. Democratic states are faced more political polarization because democracy is both a system that built on diversity and have to manage the diversity. So, this complex system contains political biases and polarization in society. Concepts like opinions, feedback, ideas and distinct perspectives of individuals are the dynamics of polarization. Another study conducted by (Goyal & Goyal, 2023) talked about American society and explained that the role of social media is critical and enhance political biases in society by showing them customized contents that align with individuals views. Here the game of algorithm is so strong that they never reached their users to access other information and never get

exposed. Such echo chambers created by social media eliminate and unable the user's interactions with other views as well as sources of information. Therefore, social media echo chambers create biases among users by showing limited content. The false extreme content on social media create extreme political polarization among users. The findings of this present study are also similar to the above discussion, as most of the respondents narrate that they share the content based on their personal likes or dislikes. Their opinions about relevant group/party had always existed before the advent of social media but after the widespread of social media platforms and its extensive use led to more political polarization among them.

Conclusion

Currently, we are living in the era of post-truth and bombardments of information. Media is the medium of flow of such information. The social media has replaced the traditional public sphere because of its outreach to the masses. Debates, discussions and brainstorming have always been playing the key role in the catharsis of human being on the public spheres. Political news is the center of all sorts of media in Pakistan. The verification and validation of information is seldom in our country because of ethnic, lingual, political and religious sectorial identities and biases. The emotional attachment of youngsters with these identities ensures further complexities. This research study has explored how cathartic mid of young students in the sampled universities drag them towards political polarization. The power state institutions, so called political leaders and media-centric capitalists are the beneficiaries of such polarization that is dangerous and regressive situation for any society.

Recommendations

- This study can help the researchers, academicians, and policy makers to develop new policies for control of disinformation that is highly unethical in a Muslim Society, however the contemporary society considers it as a tool to change the mindset of youth for getting political benefits.
- Educational institutions especially colleges should add information literacy and media in their curriculum so that students know how to become a responsible and active citizens, when they use their right to vote or use social media, they will be able to differentiate among public opinion and political advertisement.
- Although the fact that youth are highly active on social media as majority of them spend their time in online activities but these activities do not contribute to national development nor enhance their capacity building. Therefore teenagers should reevaluate their use of social media.

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