# Social Media: a Tool of Social and Political Change in Pakistan. (An Analytical Study 2007- 2013)

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**ABSTRACT**

*Social networking has become part of daily life all around the globe. Among its many uses, it is also being used for the political and social awareness around the world. Socializing networks have become a tool for political and social change. In this study we evaluated the role of social media in the political and social change in Pakistan. The objective of the study was to find out the impact of social media and, and its usage to reach out the masses. This study was quantitative in nature and used survey technique to collect data. The sample size of study was one thousand one hundred and thirty six 1136. The data was collected from all four provincial headquarters and the federal capital of Pakistan. We calculated the impact of social media on the lives of users, and how it changes the dynamics of politics and brings the social change. We used the SPSS software as analyzing tool. The key finding of the study is that although social*

*media is new form of media but it has great impact on common man's life. The information dispatched through social media has played vital role in political and societal awareness in the recent past. Social media has become more powerful than conventional media as it has easy access and wide audience. It was also found that social media has changed the political paradigm of many countries around the world.*

## INTRODUCTION:

Social media is the carrier of social and political change around the globe. It is a long going debate since the emergence of the internet technologies about the online political conversation. In 2002, Nicholas Thompson wrote a column in Boston Globe about the Iraq war and online political conversation. Thompson put the heading "Freedom to Flame-Online Political Chat is an insult to Democracy" of his column which reflects his opinion about online conversation. He also wrote that online political conversation is full of insult and an insult to democracy. (Stromer-Galley & Wichowski, 2013). On the other hand public sphere is the strong idea which was emerged by western political thoughts. Jurgen Habermas (1989) put the idea that educated elites of society form civil society which started debate about the issues of public concern. (Habermas, 1989). With the advancement of social networks idea of civil society emerged around the globe. Many of the issues were taken by the civil society, which were previously ignored by the conventional media. Social media took the lead to address these issues and put them into lime light. The concept of the civil society got well defined after the emergence of issues on social media. Educated citizens of the society made nonpolitical platforms to address the issues. Shahzeb Murder case was the first case of the social media and civil society activism in Pakistan. Shahzeb was shot down in the night of 24$^{th}$ December 2012, by a

landlord and influential family. (Baloch, 2013) There were no news on conventional media, but Shahzeb's family took stand against the cold blooded murderer and started a social media move by the Hash tag "justice for Shahzeb". This move attracted masses across the globe and the murder of Shahzeb became the talk of the town. Eventually conventional media also reported the incident and the law enforcement agencies acted accordingly to arrest the accused persons. This social media activism gave a new dimension to the civil society in Pakistan. That has resulted in political awareness and strengthening of the civil society.

This social and political change was observed across the globe. Arab spring was characterized by the effective use of social media for political change. It was not the first event that made the change with the help of social media. In past, there are several examples where social media asserted its role for the change in regime. But the Arab spring is the most significant event in the recent history of social media which proved the power of social media for change. (Lotan, Graeff, Ananny, Gaffney, Pearce, & Body, 2011) There are many other aspects of the social media which were investigated and researched after the Arab spring, like social media as a carrier of political change and in the presence of conventional media how the social media took the lead to change the regime. Even though when everyone realizes the power of conventional media, social media beats it and opens the new avenue to study the role of social media for political and social change.

Social media technologies have been used especially in organizing and implementing collective activities, promoting a sense of community and collective identity among marginalized group members, creating less-confined political spaces, establishing connections with other social movements, and publicizing causes to gain support from the global community. (ELTANTAWY & WIEST, 2011) Web activism and social change through web and social media characterized by the social environment where the power of conventional media just serves the purpose of elites. The control on conventional media and the media policies of the States

empower the new media. The common man and the deprived communities are unable to find any avenue to address their issue and raise their voice against injustice and state policies. In that scenario social media becomes the alternative route to address the issues. If we go through the Arab spring we can see the control of state on conventional media. Another factor that is almost common in all Gulf States is monarchism, dictatorship and single party rule. Although there is a private media but single narrative that is state narrative propagated through conventional media. In that scenario social media becomes an alternative tool to connect the neglected and deprived communities. The deprived communities use the communication power of social media to address the issue and raise their voice against injustice.

Pakistan has a unique position in this given scenario. Pakistan is a democratic country where, there is not a single party rule, there is existence of private media which is very vibrant and vocal on public issues. It is very interesting to study the role of social media in Pakistan for the social and political change. We can't compare the role of social media for the uprising in Gulf with the role of social media in Pakistan on the same grounds. As we discussed the ground realties of Gulf and Pakistan is very different to it. However, social media is yet a powerful tool of communication in Pakistan. Somehow it brings many social issues on limelight. In this study we will discuss the role of social media for the social and political change in Pakistan.

**LITERATURE REVIEW:**

Internet has several interrelated psychological components that are distinct from those of the offline word. The psychological components are anonymity, control of physical appearance, control over interaction, ease of finding similar others, high accessibility in time and place, fun and equality. (Amichai-Hamburger & Hayat, Internet and Personality, 2013) On the basis of these psychological factors people feel more protected in the online environment they also feel empowered to express themselves. Harlan Lebo conducted a research in USA about usage of smart phone and

social interaction. Study concluded that the users of smart phone in USA give preference to use smart phones and ignore people around them. Many of them felt ignored because the other house hold member spends so much time on smart phone. (Lebo, 2013) Psychologists have done several studies on the behavior of social media and introduced new phenomenon "Fear of Missing Out" in which social media users are constantly connected through information technology and digital media because they have a fear that they might be marked absent on digital forums. (Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan, & Gladwell, 2013)

Clay Shirky, Professor of New Media at New York University wrote an article, titled, "*The Political power of Social Media*" (Shirky, 2011). Shirky commented on potential of social media with reference to political changes. Many examples were cited where social media played very important role for political movements. Some succeeded while others failed. He thought that the social media was an important tool to support civil society. It was a tool which could play vital role to form political environment. Shirky commented on many political movements that arose by way of social media and pointed out the fact that the social media acted as coordinating tool for nearly all of political movements around the world.

Rita Safranek wrote a paper, titled, "*The Emerging role of Social Media in Political and Regime Change*", where she conducted a comprehensive analysis of political unrest across the globe from 2009 to 2012 (Safranek, 2012). She covered the Philippines protests against President Joseph Estrada; Moldova uprising in 2009; Arab Spring; Tunisia 2010 protest and revolution against President Zain-ul-Aabdeen bin Ali; Egypt's revolution 2011 against the then President Hosni Mubarak and the uprisings in Lebanon, Syria and Libya. From all the examples she concluded that the social media was not a "silver bullet" that brought the political changes. Rather, it was just a tool of communication which could be used swiftly and with the least censorship. The successful use of social media for the political communication

depended upon factors, such as, ethnic diversity; rate of literacy and the existence of modern telecommunication infrastructure.

Stefan Stieglitz, Linh Dang-Xuan wrote a paper, titled "*Social media and political communication: a social media analytics framework*". (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2012), where they discussed that in recent past the social media created an impact on public discourse in particular, but the social media was also being used for political communication. Twitter has been an ideal platform to disseminate the messages and yet Facebook also played as another powerful tool. Political organizations created many pages and groups on Facebook to engage the masses into political communication. There are several social media platforms which have been used for political communication, and it is very difficult to analyze the political communication that took place through social media. In this paper, the authors proposed methodological framework for impact analyses of social media in the context of politics.

**RELIABILITY OF SOCIAL MEDIA:**

Reliability of any kind of media is very significant for its use and diffusion. A research in Spain, *"Journalism and Social Media: How Spanish Journalists are Using Twitter"* (Álvarez, AndúJar, & CurIel, 2012), sought to estimate the usage of social media sources in reporting. In Spain journalists used Twitter as a reliable source for investigative journalism (about 92 percent of the news gathered from Twitter). Blogs are another rich resource of news gathering (76 percent of the news gathered from the blogs). A study conducted in USA and Canada, "*Building Trust in Government through Social Media"* (Patricia & San, 2014) concluded the trust in government fell but the trust on social media has increased as credible source of information.

In a study managed by the Cision and The George Washington University, "*Social Media & Online Usage Study"* (Bates, 2009), revealed that about 84 percent of the journalists said

information delivered via social media was slightly reliable or less reliable.

**SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND:**

Stephen Mills wrote "*Use of Social Media in Politics by Young People in Australia*" (Mills, 2013). In this article, he made a comparison about political participation of the youth in Australia and New Zealand. Australian political parties tried to pursue the party supporters rather than the young voters via social media.

UMR research survey showed that most of the users of social networking sites belonged to the 18-29 age group. Another UMR survey that was conducted in July 2011 found that 32% of 18-29 age-group, read a hard copy of the newspaper daily and 56% sought news from the internet. Another UMR survey pointed out that 92% of the New Zealanders in 18-29 age groups had Facebook accounts; 79% of Australians and 86% of Americans in the same age groups had Facebook accounts. Young people were found more active online via posts, comments, political material. They encouraged others to take political actions. The same pattern was observed in USA, Australia and New Zealand. (Mills, 2013)

Thomas Tude Hope, former social media advisor to Australian liberal leader Malcolm Turnbull, said, "Women over 35 were heavy social media users."Tude Hope commented that the social media had to be part of an integrated political communications strategy. Social media should be seen as just another communication channel - "You can get obsessed with social media about young people and technology, while it was really just another means for communicating". He believed that the messages should precede the strategy for reaching the audiences, who in turn would be involved in a choice of platforms which might include social media. (Tudehope, 2013)

In Australia and New Zealand social media had been a very effective tool for political communication. The political leaders of

both countries made effective use of the social media to mobilize their workers, supporters and the masses. Social media was also found a good tool to catch the swinging votes that cast their impact on electoral results.

## SOCIAL MEDIA AND MALAYSIAN GENERAL ELECTION 2013:

Ibrahim Suffian wrote an article about the role of social media in Malaysian General Elections 2013, titled, "*Social Media Utilization In The 2013 Malaysian General Election: Lessons Learned*" (Suffian, 2013). In this article he analyzed the facts of the Malaysian politics and the role of the media. The 13$^{th}$Malaysian general elections were held on 5$^{th}$ May, 2013, and it were the toughest ever elections of the Malaysian history. The National Front (the ruling coalition) was challenged — for the first time — by the opposition People Alliance led by Anwer Ibrahim, the former Deputy Prime Minister. The strategy of the elections was to hit those voters who were aged below 40 years. They used internet to reach them, since the state-owned media would not permit them to reach the prospective voters. Malaysian population is composed of mainly three major ethnic groups: Chinese, Indians and Malayan. Malaysian and English newspapers were owned by the groups affiliated with the ruling party. Indian and Chinese newspapers were those of the large companies and the ruling elite. More or less the same situation prevailed in the electronic media. All of the TV channels and most of the radio stations were either state owned or run by pro-government companies. (Suffian, 2013)

According to an analysis of local free media advocate, Centre for Independent Journalism, the mainstream media including Malaysian and English newspapers and the television channels "remained strongly in favor of the ruling coalition. Almost 90% of the news content in those outlets was in favor of the National Front while more than 80% of any reports about the Opposition were negative". In that scenario, in the absence of free media, the opposition was left with no option but to resort to the internet for reaching the voters. According to an estimate, the internet access in

May 2013 was about 66% and it was mostly in urban centers. According to an estimate, eight out of ten internet users were on Facebook and one out of five used Twitter.

This was a big field and every political party used the internet to access the prospective voters. Ahead of the general election 2008 the online political communication was 6.8% and in 2013 it reached about 33%. All the political parties took it seriously and made strategies to reach out to the masses. In that respect the ruling party made some special arrangements and the Prime Minister Najib Razak joined the social media to reach the masses. As a result the opposition could no longer enjoy the dominant role on social media.

Prime Minister Najib himself campaigned on social media via blogs and by different slogans that had a great impact and soon he surpassed the opposition leader Anwar Ibharim by attracting up to one million fans, in 2012.Regional and ethnic trends were strong during the election campaign and different political parties targeted different ethnic groups. The election results also depicted significantly different patterns among voters of various age groups. Younger voters, in their twenties and thirties, showed less support for the ruling coalition.

The Malaysian election 2013 proved an excellent case study about how information was accessed in democracy and how political communication took place through the social media in case of blockade by the state. During the election, the ruling party enjoyed domination over information flow through conventional media and there was no chance left for the opposition, namely, the People's Alliance to reach the masses, but they effectively used the social media for the political communication and gave a tough time to the ruling party.

The longstanding presence of the People's Alliance over the social media and the internet resulted in its sweeping victory for nearly all of the urban parliamentary seats, and even in the strongholds of

the ruling party. The majority of the electoral seats belonged to the rural areas where no internet connectivity was available so they had to depend totally on the conventional media, which was acting as a mouthpiece of the ruling party. Some factors such as ethnic and tribal issues also cast their impact on the election results. Political communication through the social media became the game changer in the Malaysian Elections 2013. It is expected that in the upcoming elections of Malaysia, the people will enjoy more access to information through internet.

**SOCIAL MEDIA AND GENERAL ELECTION 2009 IN INDIA:**

The social media was used in India for political communications for the first time ahead of 2009 elections. Anisha Bhaduri wrote a chapter, titled, "*India unwired — Why new media is not (yet) the message for political communication*". It examined why the social media campaign failed to deliver in India's general elections of 2009. (Bhaduri, 2010)

The author was then deputy news editor of *The Statesman*, a highly respected Indian national newspaper printed in English. The chapter she wrote about the failure of social media campaign in India was based on comprehensive data and ground realities of Indian politics and society. Indian National Congress (INC) had been the biggest party of the India, having ruled India for four decades. The INC had traditionally been headed by the Gandhi family and was credited as the founder of the independent India. Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) is another mainstream political party of India, which ruled several states of India and is known as a radical Hindu party.

There are many controversies associated with the BJP. A few of such controversies are about Muslims, the largest minority of India, whereas, the Muslim vote always plays a significant role in Indian elections. On 6$^{th}$December 1992, during the rule of BJP, the Hindu fundamentalists demolished the oldest and historical *Babri Masjid* in Utter Pradesh. (BBC, 2012) That event sparked the worst

Hindu-Muslim riots in India. Hundreds of Muslims were killed and the BJP was blamed for committing Muslim genocide. Another unfortunate incident took place in Indian Gujarat during the rule of BJP when a train full of passengers, most of them Hindu nationalists, was burned at Godrah, a small railway station. That flared up riots all across Gujarat and hundreds of Muslims were killed and displaced from their houses. Later on, an inquiry in that matter revealed that the train was set on fire by the workers of the BJP itself to put the blame on Muslims. (The Times of India, 2011) Those two major incidents painted a bad picture of BJP among the minorities, especially among the Muslims.

The BJP had to face some other issues as well. The former BJP Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee was 85 and the BJP candidate for the post of Prime Minister LK Adavani was 82. Thus, both of the prominent leaders of the BJP were senior citizens. On the other hand the leadership of the INC was very young. Rahual Gandhi, son of Rajeev Gandhi, was 39 years old. He himself headed the youth wing of his party and was very popular among the youth. According to the census, more than half of the Indian population (1.1 billion) was under 25 years of age and two-thirds were under 35. As per figures released by the Indian government in July 2010, the total number of internet subscribers in India was 16.18 million and 8.77% had broadband facility in March 2010.

A survey conducted jointly by IMRB international and the internet and Mobile Association of India (IMAI)_suggested that India had 45 million active internet users as on September 2008. (The active user meant those having used internet at least once during the past month): 30% of Indian voters belonged to the youth, falling in the age group 18-30. (Noronha & Venniyoor, 2008) According to a report published in business news portal www.livemint.com on March 18, 2009, every political party wanted to capture the attention of youth, by using conventional as well as non-conventional media. The total advertising budget of INC for the elections of 2009 was US$32 million and five percent of the budget was allocated for campaigning through digital devices. The

BJP spent US$25.5 million and they used 360 degree approach to cover the traditional and the new media. All political parties spent a total of US$85 million for advertising in the context of elections. (livemint, 2009)

In India, BJP was the first party to reach the masses through new media technologies. They targeted 150 million people and allocated five percent of the campaign budget for new media. The campaign was professionally designed to reach the urban population. In that campaign the BJP used every possible tool to reach the masses through new media. They created blogs, websites, sent text messages, used pre-recorded voice clips and reached 20 million email users besides 20 million phone users. Thus, the BJP which was once labelled as an old-fashioned party with old leaders presented with a new face. It was like a soft image of BJP, painted as a liberal party as opposed to being a radicle party. Beyond any doubts, BJP was the most active party on the new media before 2009 elections.

The results were eye opening for everyone. The overall effort of all parties managed to get the turnout of 58.8 per cent in elections 2009, which was similar to the turnouts of the elections held during past two decades. According to a survey conducted by the New Delhi based Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), sponsored by the government of India, the voters turn out among the youth (18 to 25 years) dropped and it was lower than the percentage recorded in the previous general election of 2004. In 2004, the turnout was 55 percent and in 2009 it declined to 54 percent. The survey also revealed that 38 percent of the respondents were only marginally exposed to the media, and 13 percent were highly exposed during the election campaign. Another interesting finding of the survey was that despite spending millions of rupees on advertising and campaign, only 67 percent of the surveyed youth (18-25 years) were able to recall the Indian National Congress' advertisements and 53 percent those of the BJP. (Rai, 2009)

The new media campaign initiated by the political parties aimed to reach masses, especially those between 18 and 25. But the survey revealed that the voter turnout in metropolitan cities like Mumbai, Delhi and Bangalore was far below the national figure of 58.8 percent. India's financial capital, Mumbai, saw a turnout of 43 per cent — lower than in 2004. In Bangalore, the software hub of India, the turnout was 51 percent, 9 percent lower than in 2004.

**HYPOTHESIS:**

1. $H_{o:}$ Social media could not play significant role for bringing the social and political change.

2. $H_{A:}$ Social media play significant role for bringing the social and political change.

**METHODOLOGY:**

For the study we used the quantitative research method and for the data collection used the survey method with the help of closed ended questionnaires. The survey was based on the relevant questions to know the opinion of social media users about the social and political change. For data analysis Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 21 was used.

**POPULATION:**

According to the estimate seventy percent of the social media users in Pakistan belong to the youth. According to UNESCO, people between the ages of 15 years to 24 years are considered as youth (UNESCO, 2009). So the target of the study was youth. We focused to reach the target population and conducted the survey in Universities, office and work place, and house bound women which belonged to youth and all age groups. The data was collected from the provincial headquarters and federal capital of Pakistan which include Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, Quetta, and Islamabad.

Since, youth was the main target of this study, higher education institutions, offices and workplaces across the country were focused to reach the targeted population of the study. By using random sampling technique, 13 the sample size of 1400 was obtained and was evenly distributed among all five federal and provincial capitals according to their respective population. Out of 1400 questionnaires given to the respondents, 1136 were received back and were all included in the study.

| **Change in opinion due to the social media** | **other than social media which form of media changed your opinion** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Did not answer | Newspaper magazine | Television | None |
| **Yes** | 9.1% | 36.9% | 36.8% | 17.2% |
| **No** | 4.8% | 32.9% | 33.6% | 28.7% |
| **Total** | 7.0% | 35.0% | 35.3% | 22.7% |

3.

| **Chi-Square Tests** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Value | d.f | p-value |
| **Pearson Chi-Square** | 26.114 | 3 | < 0.001 |

Using the chi-square test with 3 degree of freedom it was found that $p < 0.001$, indicates that there is significant difference between change in opinion due to social media and other than social media which form of media have changed the opinion.

Null hypothesis was rejected, stating that Social media played significant role for bringing the social and political change.

**CONCLUSION:**

Social media has played significant role for bringing the social and political change in Pakistan. Some of the factors which must be acknowledge are that internet is the carrier of the social and political change today and gives power to every user, allows them to contribute and access the information. As the Amichai-Hamburger & Hayat discussed the psychological factors of the online environment, people feel more protected in online environment and feel empowered to express themselves. It is the social media that gives power to every individual so he or she can feel protected while floating the ideas and it is the first step of the ledder of social and political change. Another factor which give the promenace to social media is the interactive form of medium which gives the more interactions among the masses. This power of the interaction gives more power to every individual to debate and argue about the ideas and bring the change in the social and political arena. The political parties in Pakistan took the advantage of the social media to communicate the message among the masses and to reach them out. The same phenomenon exsists around the globe where political parties used the social media for the political communication and sucessfully demonstrated the power of social media for the political change. Social media is also beign used for the social change around the globe. In Pakistan, Shahzaib murder case is one of the examples of social change that is brought by the social media where people spoke out and seized the influential culprits behind the bar. Although, social media is a new medium of communication but it has become an influential tool of social and political change in Pakistan. It is expected that with the more technological difussion social media will become create the greatest impact in opinion making in Pakistan.

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