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Abstract

Background: Social media (SM) have become popular among all genre of people due to its instant and dynamic communication ability. Substantial use of social media as a source of political information raises a concern of researchers to investigate the usage patterns of SM about socio-political issues of the society.

Objective: The aim of this study was to investigate the use of social media as a source of political information regarding Panama Leaks in Pakistan.

Method: A quantitative research approach based on survey method was used to collect the primary data from a sample of 500 educated adults conveniently available in Lahore city of the Punjab province of Pakistan. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used for data analysis in SPSS-25.

Findings: The findings revealed that majority of the educated adults used social media platforms (i.e. Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Twitter and Wikipedia) on daily basis. The

educated adults commonly acquired information to know historical perspectives of Panama Leaks (PL); update themselves with general discussions and opinions; understand political and economic conditions due to PL outbreak; be aware of court proceedings/judgments of PL; and get information for entertainment, education and research.

Introduction

Historically, mass media have been dominant in society as information source in providing credible, valuable, and timely information. However, newer types of media i.e. social media (SM) have become more vital as information source among educated people for the last decade due to its instant capacity of sharing and receiving information regarding crises, risks and danger of socio-political issues in society (Kapoor et al., 2018). The major hallmark of social media is collaborative online communication and instant interaction through established accounts and pages for sharing and acquiring information according to people's interests and agendas (Wickramanayake & Jika, 2018). Correspondingly, social media has played a vital role in developing, shaping and reshaping the behavior of its users towards national and international politics (Vraga & Tully, 2019). Additionally, it has grabbed the attention of researchers to discuss the role of social media as an information source among students, journalists, etc. (Al-Daihani, 2016; K. S. Kim et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2017; Mansour, 2016; Westerman et al., 2012, 2014).

Previous studies describe social media have political impact and influence on the public perceptions on account of the regional as well as the world's socio-political issues (Casero-Ripollés, 2018; Matook & Butler, 2015). Hence, social media is playing a significant role in building public opinion, political awareness and shaping narrative of individuals directly and instantly by spreading awareness on current socio-political issues (Ye et al., 2020).

Although literature is limited, a couple of studies has claimed that SM platforms including Twitter, Facebook, and others have profoundly shaped individuals' behavior towards political participation (Cha et al., 2010; Jungherr et al., 2012; Lynch, 2011; Shirky, 2011). As the use of social media is linked to organize rallies and cause of political protests in many cities of the different countries such as Moscow, Kiev, Istanbul, Ankara, Cairo, Tripoli, Athens, Madrid, New York, Los Angeles, Hong Kong, and Ferguson, Missouri (Faris, 2010; Lotan et al., 2011; Mungiu-Pippidi & Munteanu, 2009). Furthermore, people are increasingly indulged in sharing information about the crisis, violence, social and political issues [e.g. Panama Leaks]. However, the community is still learning for using social media systematically and appropriately for political participation and how to react during any crisis (Lane et al., 2019). Thus, SM platforms have become popular as online communication tools among all type of people especially adolescents and adults, and most widely popular platforms include Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and YouTube (Subrahmanyam et al., 2008). Consequently, social media networks have caused a great wave of changes in society and also in politics; on account of that wave, several research studies have addressed the impact of social media on political information (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013).

As the case of Panama Leaks (PL) is concerned, millions of records comprising secret financial documents were disclosed by the biggest offshore law firm, Mossack Fonseca in terms of Panama Leaks in the world on third April, 2016 (Rabab'ah et al., 2016). This leak was made it a hot issue of the decade which affected the social and political situation of the involved countries. In Pakistan, Panama leaks has also been a burning issue of the country which has attracted the attention of the youth of the country through social media. A recent study analyses that Panama Papers outbreak captured the attention of all types of media in Pakistan (especially social media) which have built up the opinion of general public (Arshad et al., 2019). This issue was created a hype not only on mass media (radio, TV, prints) but also electronically on social

media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram). People began to propagate and disseminate information regarding Panama Papers on social media platforms which influenced the perceptions of educated adults (Rahman, 2017).

However, the literature is unable to explain how the social media platforms have facilitated people in general type of communication, production and propagation of contents, collaborative discussions and development of shared understanding towards the outbreak of Panama Leaks. The empirical research is scant to addresses the use of social media as a source of political information in Pakistan. Therefore, this study intends to investigate the use of social media as a source of political information regarding Panama Leaks in Pakistan. To date, this is the first empirical study on this area of research which may contribute to the literature on information management, information communication and social media use. This present study can help to understand social media as a political information source in Pakistan. The present study may help to understand the patterns and purposes of using social media platforms as political information source. This study may be helpful for policy and decision-makers (information and media institutions) in Pakistan to consider social media as a tool of political communication, interaction and information source. The findings of this study may also provide a baseline for institutional and academic management to take strategical actions in the promotion of social media networks as political information source among educated adults and to open new horizons for future research.

Literature Review

A number of studies were identified in literature that had indicated the political engagement of people through social media platforms. Social media platforms were found to be playing a vital role in promoting political enlightenment among the public. The published research revealed that people used social networking sites as a tool for engaging people in politics. Therefore, social media had played a very significant role for political revolutions in many countries of

the world (M. A. Khan & Shahbaz, 2015).

For instance, Kushin and Yamamoto (2010) carried out a web survey to examine the use of social media for political purposes among college students during the election campaigns. The results showed that social media platforms were being used for participation in online political discussions, exchanging political opinions, creating and posting multimedia messages and computer artwork to express political views.

Kugelman (2012) explored the influence of social media on Pakistani society. This author identified social media as a specific tool to be mobilized for "breaking stories disregarded by conventional media; preparing individuals for social and different causes; advancing and arranging humanitarian portions of problems and issues; dissident for social reasons; and quickening correspondence in the middle of government officials and their masses".

Similarly, another study by Muntean (2015) explained the effect of using social media on political participation. The results indicated that SNSs were used for seeking political news by Romanian young people. The study also found relationship between the SNSs usage (Facebook and Twitter) and political participation especially during the electoral processes. Moreover, the study of Dauda Abdu et al. (2016) also discovered the "sudden and unprecedented increase" of Facebook usage for engagement of political activities among youth. The results also indicated a positive association between Facebook usage and youth political participation.

Moreover, empirical evidences published in literature also highlighted that people used social media platforms (Facebook, YouTube, blogs, Twitter) for election campaigns (Apuke & Apollos, 2017), writing political posts, informing the online community and self-expression, entertaining and political information, acquiring news, reasoning and political knowledge (Laganas et al., 2017). Moreover, Bene (2017) confirmed Facebook as the primary political

information source for university students.

The social media platforms contributed to more online political discourse over the years. It was ascertained that people used SNSs for obtaining political information, developing political efficacy and it had statistically significant positive associations between social media use and political participation. (Stanley, 2017). As a previous study by Stieglitz et al. (2012) determined that political parties made their communication through social media and the German citizens had growing interest of social media based communications for political parties. An increased use of social media was also observed among German politicians.

Furthermore, Facebook and Twitter were profoundly shaping political participation, especially when it came to protest behavior. Jost et al. (2018) summarized evidence from studies of protest movements in the United States, Spain, Turkey, and Ukraine demonstrating that social media platforms facilitated the exchange of information that was vital to the coordination of political activities like protest, news about transportation, turnout, police presence, violence, medical services, and legal support.

In Pakistan, the first ever study conducted by Shaheen (2008) investigated the political activism through using social networks among students during political crises and emergency imposed by the Government of Pakistan in 2007. The findings concluded that social media was used by the students to promote democracy, freedom of expression and greater awareness about their rights during the political crises in Pakistan. Later, the researchers investigated the use of social media for political practices by political personalities. For example, Zafar et al. (2013) measured Facebook "likes" and "talking about this" options among Facebook users to find opinion about political figures. The findings showed that President Parvez Mushraf had more fans than President Asif Ali Zardari. Further, it was concluded that PTI got top rank among other political parties on Facebook. Another study by Eijaz (2013) indicated Facebook as a most popular SNS among youth in order to spread political information in comparison with

other tools i.e. Twitter, my space, blogs, and email etc. The youth found to be mobilizing social media for the issues of load-shedding, socio-economic factors, etc.

A couple of studies (Ahmad et al., 2019; Ali & Fatima, 2016) identified that Pakistani people were found to be using the SNSs for social networking, getting political information and propagating political beliefs. Political parties had established their independent accounts on social media platforms and private websites to attract the users and to mobilize people to achieve their political agendas. Social media became a hub for political parties and political activists to attract, engage, and remained connected with people for their support. Additionally, PTI, one of Pakistan's largest political party, found to be the biggest example of success of using SNSs in creating impact on the younger generation of Pakistan (M. A. Khan & Shahbaz, 2015).

Moreover, social media had become a chief medium for campaigns, promotion of ideology and to get the support of masses for politicians and political parties in this modern era. Social media played an effective role for political socialization among youth of Pakistan and had great influence on social and political learning of its users (M. A. Khan & Shahbaz, 2015)

A few of the recent studies in Pakistan had found the social media as an acting agent for political awareness and developing political participation among the educated youth (Ali & Fatima, 2016). Hence, social media platforms (especially Facebook, Twitter) influenced political activism of people as it provided current information about the socio-political happenings, empowered the public in getting information and sharing their views (Karamat & Farooq, 2016). Alike the developed world, social media was used to influence ethnicity, religious thought, and voting process in Pakistan. More individual engagement with SNSs, more the intention towards voting was developed. This media had urged a revolution in political domain by diffusing ideas and impacting others. After the announcement of electoral

process of 2013 in Pakistan, the use of social media got climax among the masses. Political parties mobilized it for promoting their agenda and to attract country's 80 million registered electors during the recent elections in Pakistan (Butt & Awang, 2017).

Hassan (2018) described that the massive use of social media as an information source was first observed when a pro-democracy civil society movement emerged against the then-ruler General Pervez Musharraf. Facebook and Twitter exploded with protests against the military dictator's state of emergency imposed on November 3, 2007. Social media were more noticeable as, at the time, the traditional media were tightly controlled. By 2011, social media were being used by many urban Pakistanis. There are many instances where intense activity on social media became apparent as people were uploading, sharing, producing, circulating, debating and reflecting on political content all the time.

The literature review recapitulates that the extreme popularity of social media tools among people has involved the researchers to investigate the individuals' behaviors while using social media as information source. People commonly use social media channels or platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, Wikipedia, YouTube, etc. These SM platforms are frequently used to look for information for the purposes of social networking, marketing, reading user reviews, daily routines, religion, food products, disasters (floods), educational and research (Kubiak, 2017; Li et al., 2018; Martínez-Ruiz et al., 2018; Sutherland et al., 2018; Thakur & Chander, 2017; Wickramanayake & Jika, 2018). A few of previous studies also that social media also involves with political discussions and exchanging opinions regarding national and international political issues that have influenced the behavior, mindset and attitudes of young adults (Hassan, 2018; Howard et al., 2018; Kahne & Bowyer, 2018; Stanley, 2017; Tucker et al., 2018). Likewise, the social media have been used to create hypes regarding socio-political issues in recent years particularly on Panama Leaks in Pakistan. However, a dearth of literature is observed that can explain what types of political information

acquired by the educated adults while using different SM platforms as an information source especially in the case of Panama Leaks in Pakistan. Through this literature review, this phenomenon has been found unresearched across the world and particularly in Pakistan. This study tends to fill this gap existing in literature.

Research Objectives

This study addressed the following objectives:

1. To identify which social media platforms are used by educated adults as a source of political information in case of Panama Leaks.

2. To measure the extent of use of social media as an information source in the case of Panama Leaks in Pakistan.

3. To identify the types of information acquired by the educated adults from social media regarding Panama Leaks.

4. To determine the demographic differences in the use of social media as a source of political information among the participants.

Hypothesis

H_o1. There are no demographic differences (gender, age, qualification and political affiliation) in the extent of social media use as a source of political information regarding Panama Leaks among the participants.

H_o2. There are no demographic differences (gender, age, qualification and political affiliation) in using social media platforms as a source of political information regarding Panama Leaks among the participants.

Methodology

To achieve the objectives, this study used quantitative research approach based on survey method. Survey method was identified suitable as the previous such type of quantitative studies had also employed survey method to investigate social media use as an information source (Al-Daihani, 2016; Bene, 2017; K.-S. Kim et al., 2014; K. S. Kim et al., 2011). Survey

method is very useful to approach large and scattered universe of respondents, (Creswell, 2011; Gay et al., 2015).

The population framework of this study was comprised of educated adults possessing at least secondary school certificate (SSC) education. Convenience sampling technique was used to collect the data from the respondents. Non-probability sampling was used due to unavailability of complete list of educated adults living in Lahore city. However, different efforts were made to reduce subjectivity and biases regarding the sample of the study. For example, the data was collected from an adequate sample of N=500 educated adults of Lahore city to reduce biases of Non-probability sampling technique. The survey tool was distributed among the respondents available at various political, educational institutes, community places to get the heterogeneity in data and variety of responses.

As the case of Panama Leaks was novel in the political history of the world and particularly of Pakistan, the literature could not provide any trustworthy tool to investigate the use of social media as a source of political information for Panama Leaks. Therefore, a structured questionnaire was developed for data collection by the researcher after reviewing and consulting various sources of information. Various items were identified according to the objectives of the study. The survey tool was segmented into three sections such as i) personal information (gender, educational level and political affiliation); ii) extent and type of using of SM as an information source; iii) types of information acquired about Panama Leaks. A pilot testing was carried out to validate the constructed questionnaire among the 40 educated adults of Lahore. The instrument was revised based on suggestions, comments and feedback given by respondents as well as a panel of five field experts about the comprehension of the content of tool. Moreover, the Cronbach's Alpha (CA) was applied to ensure internal consistency and reliability of 30 items (extent of SM of use and types of information acquired on PL) of the questionnaire. CA determined the value of 0.856 i.e. reasonable (George & Mallery, 2014) for

reliability of the scale. A final draft of data collection instrument with a covering letter for seeking prior permission was self-administered and distributed among the respondents. The respondents were approached available at the offices of political parties, educational institutes, public and academic libraries, and public spots of the city of Lahore.

The filled responses were entered into SPSS (version-22) after manual screening process. Data cleaning is the essential step before analysis (Mertler & Vannatta, 2017). Accuracy of data was ensured after removing missing and abnormal responses and discarding unusable questionnaires as this is necessary before data analysis (Levy, 2006). Quantitative data analysis comprising of descriptive (frequency, percentage, means and standard deviations) and inferential (independent sample *t*-test, ANOVA) statistics was carried out for interpretations.

Results

The general characteristics (gender, age, educational level, and political affiliation) of the sample were presented in Table 1. The socio-demographic variables of a total of 500 respondents were presented with the help of tables, figures and graphs. The results of gender frequency showed a majority of male respondents (f = 350, 70%) than their counterpart (f=150, 30%). The table further presented the age of the participants of this study and revealed the most potential users of social media belonged to the age group of 21-30 years (f=186, 37%) followed by the group of 31-40 years (f=112, 22%). Moreover, the results of education level of the respondents indicated that a majority (n=169, 33.8%) possessed graduate qualification followed by master's degree holders (n=126, 25%) and M.Phil./Ph.D. (n=37, 7.4%). The findings of Table 1 also identified that the largest group of the respondents (n=178, 35.6%) had affiliation with PTI and 2nd big group (n=99, 19.8%) was the followers of PMLN. Although, PPP is a prominent political party of the country, but it secured third rank in the results might be due to its corruptive reputation

Additionally, the participants were asked whether they used social media platforms as a source of political information and got in touch with the case of Panama Leaks. The results reflected that all the respondents (N=500) used social media platforms to get political information regarding Panama Leaks (Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic information of the respondents (N=500).

Measures	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	350	70.0
Female	150	30.0
Age		
Upto 20 years	103	20.6
21-30 years	186	37.2
31-40 years	112	22.4
41-50 years	55	11.0
51 years & above	44	8.8
Educational level		
Secondary School	88	17.6
Intermediate	80	16.0
Graduation	169	33.8
Masters	126	25.2
M.Phil/ Ph.D	37	7.4
Political Parties		
Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)	178	35.6
Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PLMN)	99	19.8
Pakistan People's Party (PPP)	52	10.4
Jamat-e-Islami Pakistan (JIP)	44	8.8
Tehreek Labbaik Pakistan (TLP)	44	8.8
Jamiyat-e-Ulma-e-Islam (JUI)	38	7.6
Pakistan Muslim League Quaid (PLMQ)	37	7.4
No Political Affiliation (NPA)	8	1.6
Use of SM		
Do you use SM as a source of Political Information	500	100.0

Extent of social media use

The respondents were asked to show their extent of SM platform usage. The results of Figure 1 indicated that most of the participants (341, 68.2%) used social media platforms to acquire information regarding Panama leaks on daily basis followed by weekly (76, 15%). However, a small number of respondents (51, 10%) remained "always online" or connected with social

media platforms as illustrated in Figure 1. Similarly, the results of a study of Ahmad et al. (2019) reveal that individuals mostly visit social media platforms daily to participate in online political activities about election issues, party leaders, or local candidates.
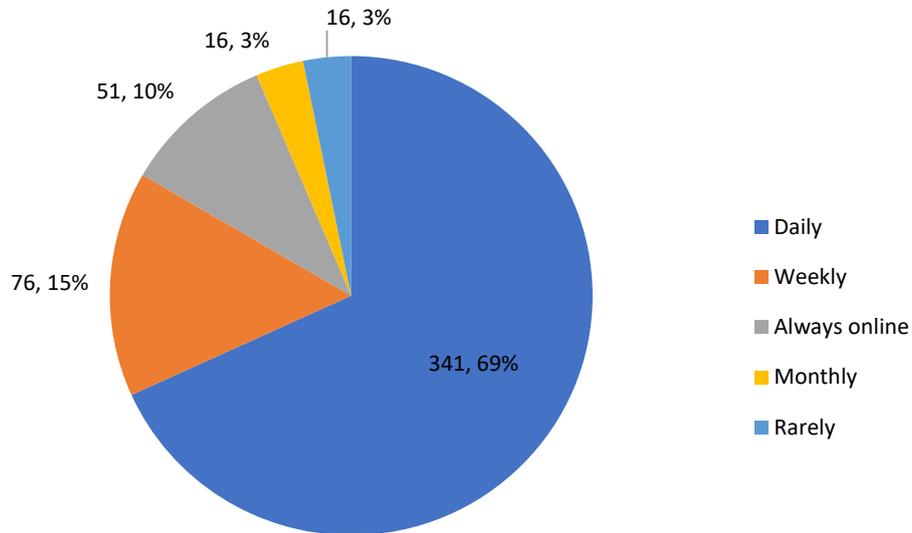

Figure 1. Extent of social media use as political information source (N=500).

Social media as a source of political information

The participants were asked to provide their opinion regarding social media platform(s), they used for getting political information. Figure 2 revealed that educated adults found to be connected with multiple SM platforms regularly. However, Facebook (n=463,92.6%) was heavily used by the respondents than WhatsApp, YouTube, Twitter, Wikipedia, Instagram, respectively. A previous study carried out in Pakistan corroborates that Facebook is the most used network among youth for political information compared with other social networks such as Twitter (Ittefaq & Iqbal, 2018). According to a recent social survey conducted by the Hootsuite (2019) confers that social media is a tool for frequent use among the younger generation and the mainstream social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp and others cannot be avoided.
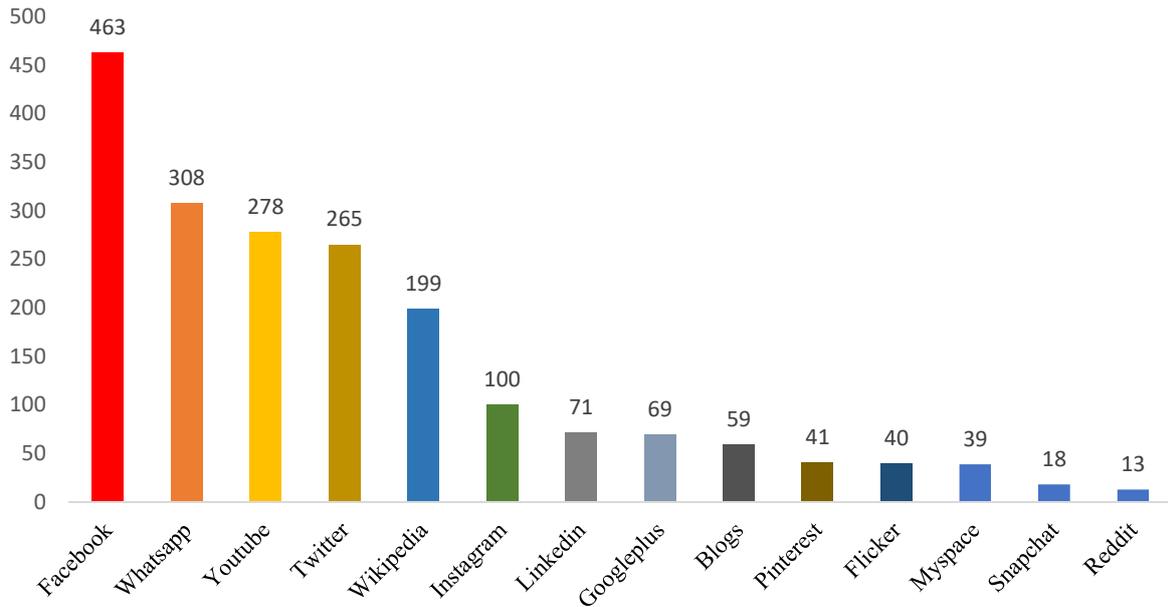
Figure 2. SM Platforms used by educated adults.

Types of information acquired by educated adults from social media about Panama Leaks

An inventory of 29 items (Table 2) were categorized into seven themes to designate different types of political information in the case of Panama Leaks in Pakistan. The participants were asked to rate each item on a Likert scale (1-5). The descriptive results of each item under the seven categories of information types regarding the Panama Leaks were computed and ranked in Figure 3. The outcomes of analysis determined "Entertainment regarding Panama Leaks" as the most important type of information followed by the "General discussions & opinions regarding Panama Leaks" and "Court proceedings / judgments regarding Panama Leaks" (Figure 3).

Information on history and background of Panama Leaks

The respondents were asked whether they used to know about the "history and background of Panama Leaks" through social media platforms. Table 2 revealed that most of the respondents (mean=2.46) got information about the organization which leaked Panama Papers followed by the meaning of Panama (mean=1.73). The results showed that respondents acquired different

connotations about Panama Leaks including the meaning of Panama Leaks, its organization, country and geographic information from social media platforms.
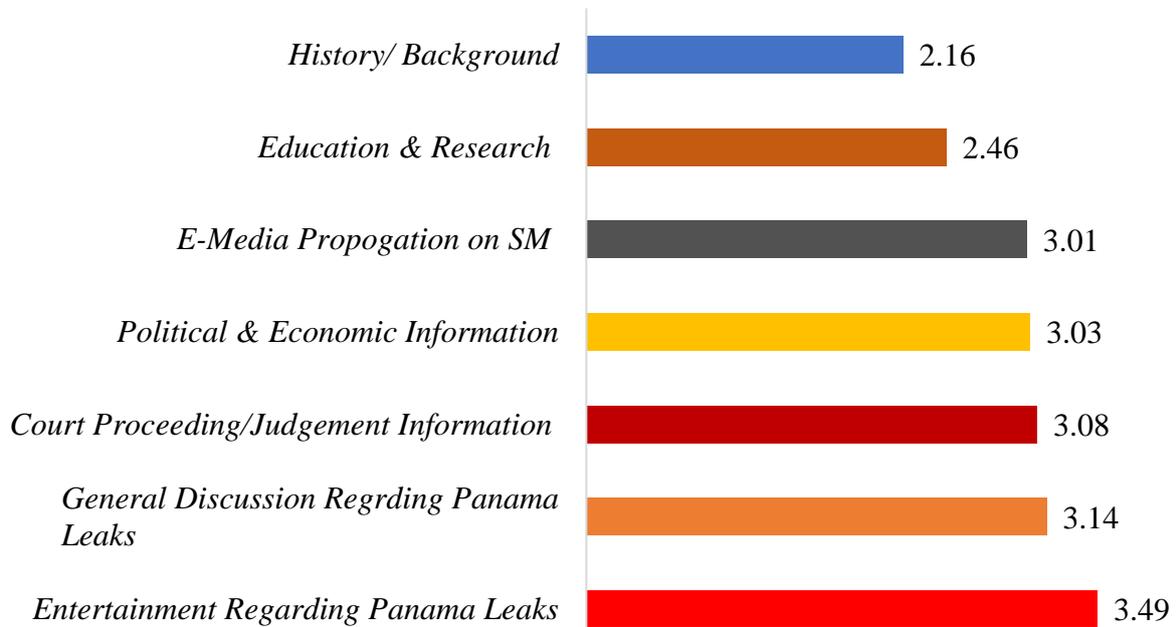

Figure 3. Types of Information Regarding Panama Leaks.

Electronic media propagation on social media platforms about Panama Leaks

The results (Table 2) exposed that educated adults got different type of information created by "mass and print media" and shared on social media platforms. The types of information included "video clips of talk shows (mean=3.27), breaking news (mean=3.19), watching live news channels (mean=3.09) and reading print media content on social media platforms (mean=2.96).

Information about "general discussions and opinions on Panama Leaks"

The respondents were asked whether they used to know about the "general discussions and public opinions on Panama Leaks" through social media platforms. Table 2 presented that the statement "opinion of political workers" got highest mean=3.18 followed by "Journalist opinion regarding Panama Leaks" mean=3.17; whereas, the statement "Public opinion about Panama Leaks" got lowest mean=3.10. The results showed that respondents were found

acquiring "political awareness; opinions of general public, political workers, journalists, political leaders; and news links from social media platforms.

Information on "political and economy conditions due to Panama Leaks"

The educated adults were asked whether they used to know "political and economy conditions due to Panama Leaks" through social media platforms. Table 2 described that the statement "Information regarding the political personalities involved" obtained highest mean=3.14; however, the statement "Impact of Panama Leaks on national economy" got lowest mean=2.97.

The results showed that, through social media platforms, respondents used to get awareness of "political personalities involved in Panama case, international reactions on Panama Leaks, short comments about Panama Leaks, impact on national politics and economy.

Information about "court proceedings / judgments for Panama Leaks"

The participants were questioned whether they used social media platforms for getting information about "court proceedings / judgments regarding Panama Leaks". Table 2 revealed that the statement "NAB references regarding Panama Leaks" gained highest mean=3.39 followed by "JIT proceedings and reports regarding Panama Leaks" mean=3.01; whereas, the statement "Court proceeding regarding Panama Leaks" got lowest mean=2.92. The results disclosed that respondents used social media as a source of information regarding NAB references, JIT proceedings, court judgements and proceedings about Panama case.

Entertainment regarding Panama Leaks

The participants of the study were inquired about whether they used social media platforms for getting information about "entertainment regarding Panama Leaks". Table 2 showed that the statement "Funny video clips, cartoons, funny images on Panama Leaks" got highest mean=3.69, followed by "Jokes, rumors, mimics, regarding Panama Leaks on social media" mean=3.50; however, the statement "Comments of social media users' on Panama issue for recreational purpose" obtained lowest mean=3.28. The findings exposed that respondents used

to get entertainment through social media platforms in terms of acquiring "funny video clips, cartoons, funny images, jokes, rumors, mimics, recreational comments of users about Panama Leaks".

Table 2. Types of information regarding Panama Leaks.

History/ background information regarding Panama	Mean	SD
Organization which leaked Panama Papers	2.46	1.162
Details of Panama Leaks	2.45	1.107
Country/ geographic information of Panama	2.02	.902
Meaning of Panama	1.73	.898
Education and research regarding Panama Leaks	**Mean**	**SD**
Critical and analytical columns regarding Panama Leaks on social media	2.67	1.215
Short stories on Panama Leaks	2.46	1.117
Information on Panama Leaks for education or research purpose	2.25	1.161
Mass & print media propagation on social media platforms regarding Panama Leaks	**Mean**	**SD**
Video clips of talk shows regarding Panama Leaks	3.27	1.057
Breaking news about Panama Leaks	3.19	1.244
Live news channels on social media regarding Panama Leaks	3.09	1.021
News from print media regarding Panama leaks	2.96	1.237
Political and economy conditions related to Panama Leaks	**Mean**	**SD**
Information regarding the political personalities involved	3.14	1.162
International reactions regarding Panama Leaks	3.04	1.269
Short comments about Panama Leaks	3.01	1.072
Impact of Panama Leaks on national politics.	2.99	1.225
Impact of Panama Leaks on national economy	2.97	1.114
Court proceedings / judgments regarding Panama Leaks	**Mean**	**SD**
NAB references regarding Panama Leaks	3.39	1.264
JIT proceedings and reports regarding Panama Leaks	3.01	1.098
Court judgement/ decision regarding Panama Leaks	2.99	1.119
Court proceeding regarding Panama Leaks	2.92	1.182
General discussions & opinions regarding Panama Leaks	**Mean**	**SD**
Opinion of political workers regarding Panama Leaks	3.18	1.112
Journalist opinion regarding Panama Leaks	3.17	1.103
Political opinion/awareness about Panama Leaks	3.14	1.175
Opinion of political leaders regarding Panama Leaks	3.13	1.056
News links regarding Panama Leaks on social media	3.13	1.271
Public opinion about Panama Leaks	3.10	1.019
Entertainment regarding Panama Leaks	**Mean**	**SD**
Funny video clips, cartoons, funny images on Panama Leaks	3.69	1.199
Jokes, rumors, mimics, regarding Panama Leaks on social media	3.50	1.105
Comments of social media users' on Panama issue for recreational purpose	3.28	1.151

Scale: 1= Never   2= Rarely   3=Occasionally   4= Frequently 5=Always

Information for "education and research purposes on Panama Leaks"

The respondents were questioned whether they used social media platforms as a source of information for "education and research purposes on Panama Leaks". Table 2 disclosed that the most of the participants used SM to read the "Critical and analytical columns regarding Panama Leaks" as it gained highest mean=2.67; while, a small number of respondents used SM for "Information on Panama Leaks for education or research purpose" as it got lowest mean=2.25.

To investigate the gender difference on "extent of social media use" as a source of political information in case of Panama Leaks, *t*-test was applied with alpha level of 0.05. The results of *t*-test (Table 3) found no gender differences (p=.41) on "extent of SM use as political Information source". However, a significant difference was observed in the "use of SM platforms" including Facebook (.052), Twitter (.025) and Blog (.008).

Extent of social media use between the age groups was measured through analysis of variance (one-way ANOVA). The data (Table 4) revealed that a significant difference (.000) was found in the extent of social media use as political information source. Furthermore, statistical difference was also found between age groups in respect of "extent of SM platforms usage" including Twitter (.000), WhatsApp (.013), Blogs (.001), LinkedIn (.001) and Snapchat (.006).

Table 3. Gender difference in extent of SM use and social media platform(s).

Factors	Mean (SD)		Independent *t*-test	
	Male n=350	**Female** n=150	***t***	**p-value**
Extent of Social Media Use	3.81(.79)	3.75(.78)	.801	0.41
Facebook	1.06(0.232)	1.11(0.318)	-1.952	.052
Twitter	1.44(0.497)	1.55(0.499)	-2.251	.025
WhatsApp	1.37(0.482)	1.43(0.496)	-1.269	.205
Instagram	1.78(0.413)	1.84(0.368)	-1.533	.126
YouTube	1.43(0.496)	1.48(0.501)	-1.055	.292
Wikipedia	1.62(0.486)	1.56(0.498)	1.243	.215
Blogs	1.86(0.347)	1.93(0.25)	-2.656	.008
LinkedIn	1.85(0.359)	1.88(0.326)	-.958	.339
Snapchat	1.97(0.182)	1.96(0.197)	.304	.761

Table 4. Age wise difference in extent of SM use and Social Media Platform(s).

Age groups	Upto 20 yr. Mean (SD)	21-30 yr. Mean (SD)	31-40 yr. Mean (SD)	41-50 yr. Mean (SD)	51 yr. & above Mean (SD)	F Score	Sig.
Extent of SM Use	3.92 (.871)	3.94 (.651)	3.67 (.853)	3.51 (.791)	3.50 (.792)	6.536	.000
Facebook	1.09 (.284)	1.10 (.304)	1.07 (.259)	1.02 (.135)	1.00 (.000)	2.127	.076
Twitter	1.37 (.485)	1.68 (.469)	1.38 (.486)	1.36 (.485)	1.20 (.408)	15.405	.000
WhatsApp	1.34 (.476)	1.45 (.498)	1.44 (.498)	1.27 (.449)	1.23 (.424)	3.225	.013
Instagram	1.79 (.412)	1.78 (.412)	1.79 (.406)	1.78 (.417)	1.93 (.255)	1.324	.260
YouTube	1.43 (.497)	1.47 (.500)	1.37 (.484)	1.42 (.498)	1.61 (.493)	2.159	.072
Wikipedia	1.56 (.498)	1.64 (.481)	1.59 (.494)	1.62 (.490)	1.55 (.504)	.617	.650
Blogs	1.87 (.334)	1.95 (.226)	1.84 (.369)	1.89 (.315)	1.73 (.451)	5.040	.001
LinkedIn	1.82 (.390)	1.93 (.256)	1.82 (.385)	1.89 (.315)	1.70 (.462)	5.072	.001
Snapchat	1.91 (.284)	1.96 (.191)	2.00 (.000)	2.00 (.000)	1.95 (.211)	3.617	.006

The information regarding the difference in extent of SM and its platforms usage based on educational level was tabulated in Table 5. In order to measure the difference in mean score ANOVA test was applied. The results showed that a significant difference was found (p=.051) in extent of SM use as a source of political information source between respondents based on their educational level. Additionally, the statistics also concluded that a significant difference was found with reference to the use of SM platforms including Facebook (.011), Twitter (.000), WhatsApp (.015) and Wikipedia (.001).

Table 5. Difference in extent of SM use and social media platform(s) based on educational level.

Educational level	Secondary School Mean (SD)	Intermediate Mean (SD)	Graduation Mean (SD)	Masters Mean (SD)	M.Phil./Ph.D. Mean (SD)	F Score	Sig.
Extent of Using SM as Info Source	3.94(.594)	3.66(.841)	3.79(.912)	3.83(.735)	3.54(.605)	2.380	.051
Facebook	1.06(.233)	1.03(.157)	1.08(.267)	1.13(.343)	1.00(.000)	3.299	.011
Twitter	1.32(.468)	1.35(.480)	1.53(.501)	1.63(.486)	1.30(.463)	8.416	.000
WhatsApp	1.38(.487)	1.54(.502)	1.34(.476)	1.39(.489)	1.24(.435)	3.121	.015
Instagram	1.88(.333)	1.81(.393)	1.74(.440)	1.83(.381)	1.78(.417)	1.907	.108
YouTube	1.34(.477)	1.44(.499)	1.42(.495)	1.52(.501)	1.54(.505)	2.227	.065
Wikipedia	1.47(.502)	1.73(.449)	1.64(.480)	1.61(.489)	1.43(.502)	4.526	.001
Blogs	1.86(.345)	1.93(.265)	1.86(.350)	1.92(.271)	1.81(.397)	1.567	.182
Google plus	1.89(.319)	1.84(.371)	1.85(.356)	1.89(.316)	1.81(.397)	.638	.636
LinkedIn	1.88(.333)	1.85(.359)	1.87(.337)	1.87(.343)	1.76(.435)	.900	.464
Snapchat	1.97(.183)	1.91(.284)	1.96(.186)	1.98(.125)	2.00(.000)	2.262	.061

Table 6. Difference in extent of SM use and Social Media Platform(s) based on political affiliation.

Political Affiliation	PMLN Mean (SD)	PTI Mean (SD)	PPP Mean (SD)	JIP Mean (SD)	TLP Mean (SD)	JUI Mean (SD)	PMLQ Mean (SD)	NPA Mean (SD)	F Score	Sig.
Extent of Using SM as Info Source	3.74 (.899)	3.94 (.661)	3.85 (.777)	3.77 (.522)	3.59 (.996)	3.79 (.704)	3.38 (1.037)	3.75 (.463)	2.970	.005
Facebook	1.12 (.328)	1.10 (.295)	1.04 (.194)	1.00 (.000)	1.00 (.000)	1.00 (.000)	1.08 (.277)	1.38 (.518)	3.864	.000
Twitter	1.61 (.491)	1.54 (.499)	1.35 (.480)	1.27 (.451)	1.55 (.504)	1.21 (.413)	1.27 (.450)	1.75 (.463)	6.306	.000
WhatsApp	1.53 (.502)	1.40 (.491)	1.38 (.491)	1.41 (.497)	1.23 (.424)	1.26 (.446)	1.19 (.397)	1.50 (.535)	3.226	.002
Instagram	1.79 (.411)	1.77 (.422)	1.81 (.398)	1.86 (.347)	1.82 (.390)	1.84 (.370)	1.78 (.417)	2.00 (.000)	.684	.686
YouTube	1.41 (.495)	1.46 (.500)	1.44 (.502)	1.34 (.479)	1.36 (.487)	1.47 (.506)	1.59 (.498)	1.63 (.518)	1.172	.317
Wikipedia	1.78 (.418)	1.63 (.484)	1.33 (.474)	1.70 (.462)	1.64 (.487)	1.32 (.471)	1.46 (.505)	1.88 (.354)	7.897	.000
Blogs	1.98 (.141)	1.90 (.295)	1.85 (.364)	1.77 (.424)	1.77 (.424)	1.79 (.413)	1.95 (.229)	1.75 (.463)	3.952	.000
LinkedIn	1.92 (.274)	1.90 (.295)	1.73 (.448)	1.86 (.347)	1.73 (.451)	1.95 (.226)	1.68 (.475)	2.00 (.000)	4.999	.000
Snapchat	1.96 (.198)	1.96 (.208)	1.96 (.194)	2.00 (.000)	2.00 (.000)	2.00 (.000)	1.95 (.229)	1.75 (.463)	2.336	.024

The mean comparison based on respondents' political affiliation in terms of extent of social media use showed a significant difference as the *p*-value is less than the (p<.005). As far as the use of SM platforms were concerned, the one-way ANOVA identified a statistical difference between groups of political affiliation in terms of Facebook (.000), Twitter (.000), WhatsApp (.002), Wikipedia (.000), Blogs (.000), LinkedIn (.000) and Snapchat (.024) as presented in Table 6.

Discussion

The present study has investigated the use of social media as a political information source regarding the case of Panama Leaks in Pakistan. Currently, social media has become a vital and essential source of information as billions of people get connected with each other on the social media platforms to share, communicate and acquire information about the political issues. The distribution of socio-demographic variables explains that male participants are

dominant part of the sample. Moreover, majority of the respondents are young of age between 21-40, possessing graduate qualification and affiliation with PTI, a political party.

The previous research supports that males are more addicted to use social media for political interests than females (Su et al., 2019). Similarly the study of (Ida et al., 2020a) endorses that the young adults are predominantly and actively engaged with their domestic politics on social media platforms. A most recent study by (Ahmad et al., 2019) supports that males are more addicted to use social media for political interests than females. However, a couple of studies also supports that female are more likely to use social media for their common interests (Y. Kim et al., 2016).

Additionally, the studies conducted in India and Sri Lankan also confer that educated adults like students actively take part in political campaigns (Cody, 2020; Pandian & Kalaiyarasan, 2013), respectively. Owing to high level of individuals' education helps people in socialization, learning and engaging in political activities (Carretero et al., 2016; Lo, 2017) and enhances capacity of thinking critically (Lo, 2017) through various channels of expression (Cody, 2020). Affiliation with a dynamic political party also urge individuals to be remained updated with national political issues as the study of (Ida et al., 2020b) indicates that all Pakistani political parties are engaging the public on social media, but the most popular is PTI.

The findings of this study revealed that majority of the respondents (68.2%) used social media platforms on daily basis. A little number of individuals (10%) also remained "always" connected with social media platforms to acquire information regarding Panama leaks. Results of this study found similar to the recent studies by Guraya et al. (2018); A. Khan et al. (2017) as these authors also concluded that a large number of students used social media as an information source on daily basis. Another study (Raza et al., 2016) also corroborated that majority of the students used social media up to 2 hours in a day for sharing information.

The educated adults were found using several platforms to be connected with social

media. The results revealed that the social media platforms were frequently used including Facebook (92.6%), WhatsApp (61.6%), YouTube (55.6%), Twitter (53.0%), etc. and the least used platform were Reddit (2.6%) as information source to get information regarding Panama Leaks. The results identified Facebook as one of the foremost social media platforms being used as an information source followed by WhatsApp and YouTube respectively. Results of this study found quite similar to the study conducted by Hussain and Pervez (2016) as they determined that Facebook was the most popular social networking site being used by Pakistani youth as an information source. Likewise, studies (Adebayo, 2015; Khalid, 2017; Nkatha et al., 2015) found that majority of the students considered WhatsApp as the second biggest social media platform for getting different types of information.

The outcomes of the study showed that the educated adults also used social media platforms as an information source for reading critical and analytical columns, short stories, and getting information for education and research purposes regarding Panama Leaks. The results of this study revealed that educated adults used to get different types of information regarding Panama Leaks including history and background, general discussions and opinions, court proceedings/judgments, status of political and economy conditions due to Panama Leaks, recreational, educated and research-oriented information.

The previous studies also reported that young adults used social media sites like YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and blogs to get political contents, commentary from other members of the social media community, to get information from news sources and campaigns, to create and share different ideas, information and pictures, watching videos, for educative purpose, socialization, gratification, entertainment and for recreational purpose (Guraya et al., 2018; Karamat & Farooq, 2016; A. Khan et al., 2017; Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010; Mansour, 2016; Wickramanayake & Jika, 2018).

Independent sample t-test and ANOVA was applied to determine the differences in

extent of SM and its platforms usage as political information source in the case of Panama Leaks among the educated adults based on their demographic variables including gender, age, education level and political affiliation. The study found out no gender differences on extent of SM use as a source of political information. However, the use of SM platforms including Facebook, Twitter, Blog and Flicker was found higher among female respondents than their counterparts.

Moreover, there is no significant difference was found on the extent of using SM as political information source among the age groups of the educated adults except the age group of 21-30 years. Additionally, the extent of using SM Platforms including Twitter, WhatsApp, Blogs, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Pinterest and Myspace was found higher among the respondents between the age of 21-30 years.

Similarly, a significant difference was found on account of respondents' educational level. The extent of using SM as a source of political information was found higher among the respondents with secondary school education followed by participants with Masters and Graduation education respectively. Furthermore, the use of SM platforms was found different among the participants according to their educational level. The finding showed that Facebook, twitter and YouTube was used higher among the Masters degree holders followed by graduates and WhatsApp and Wikipedia among possessors of intermediate education, respectively.

A significance difference was found towards the "extent of using SM as a source of political information" and the "use of SM platforms" on account of respondents' political affiliation. The results showed that PTI affiliates used SM as a source of political information to a great extent and they were likely to discuss/share political information on the frequently used SM platforms including Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Wikipedia, etc. was found statistically higher among the followers of PTI than the affiliates of other political parties.

PTI is a new party in the political arena of Pakistan and its supporters are mostly young

and educated. As the social media has gained much importance and popularity in the field of politics, Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf has left no stone unturned in using these tools very effectively to highlight its visions, goals, activities and publicize its campaigns in Pakistan. Therefore, PTI is the only active player in the sphere of social media than other political parties of Pakistan. (Jahangir, 2020). Henceforth, the PTI followers use social media more than the followers of other political parties of Pakistan. The study of (Ida et al., 2020a) also indicates that all Pakistani political parties are engaging the public on social media, but the most popular is PTI led by the former cricket star Imran Khan. Moreover, a recent social survey conducted by the Hootsuite 2019 underlines that the youth of Pakistan is the second highest population in the world after Yemen which has created huge impact on the dynamics of Pakistan's politics through social media.

Implication of study

The present study has the implications for understanding the patterns and purposes of using social media platforms as information sources. Moreover, this study is helpful for policy and decision-makers (information and media institutions) in Pakistan to consider social media as a tool of communication, interaction and information source.

Limitations of study and future research directions

This study has the limitation of using the convenience sampling approach and a specific population framework which was delimited to the city of Lahore only. Other than quantitative approaches, this area of research is needed to be explored for rigorous results. Such studies may be conducted in other geographical regions of Pakistan to see credibility and recency of social media as an information source. This study has addressed the case of Panama Leaks, such studies may also be carried out in other phenomenon to see credibility and recency of social media as an information source.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the educated adults of Pakistan are substantial users of social media as information source. They are found frequently engaged with sharing, acquiring, discussing and commenting on political issues especially about the case of Panama Leaks on social media. This study has also identified most frequently used social media platforms including Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Twitter, Wikipedia, and Instagram as political information source in the context of acquiring different types of information regarding the involved political personalities with PL, international reactions, opinions of political workers and journalists, status of NAB references, JIT proceedings and reports, and court judgement/ decisions on Panama Leaks. Although the social media have developed a critical, analytical and academic behavior of educated adults towards political issues but also it has endorsed an infotainment for the public in terms of creating and sharing "funny video clips, cartoons, funny images, jokes, rumors, mimics and recreational comments by the social media users on Panama Leaks.

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