Facebook Use for Political Motives Difference in Time Patterns and Student Demographics

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Abstract

Facebook is used for diverse motives. This social networking site is also used for the political motives but with difference in time patterns and demographics. The current study contributes to the theories of uses and gratifications, individual differences and the social categories by researching the association of Facebook use with the political motives; and the difference which the variables of time patterns and demographics make in the dependent variables of Facebook use and the political gratifications. The study utilizes the quantitative approach of cross sectional survey with offline questionnaire as research instrument among a sample of university students in Lahore. The study shows a medium level of correlation of Facebook use with the political gratifications. Medium level of interaction effect of weekly and daily time patterns is found for the political motives for Facebook use. The age has shown the prominent medium effect for the difference in Facebook use and the political gratification. Male students are found to be using Facebook generally and specifically for the political motives more than the females. The students are found to be inclined towards using Facebook for the political gratifications between thirty minutes and two hours with an emphasis on an interval for two days. The older age group between the ages of 25 and 28 is using Facebook more for the political motives when compared with the less age group.

Keyword: *Facebook use, political motives, uses and gratifications, time, individual differences, social categories, digital divide*

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Introduction

People in Pakistan are found to prefer cyber world socialization than real world socialization There were 37 million mobile broadband subscribers with 3G/4G technology, with 44 million social media accounts among 30 million Facebook users ("Social media accounts in Pakistan hike up to 44 million", 2017). The popularity of Facebook among Pakistani students can be recognized from the fact that when it was blocked on 19th of May, 2010, it was accessed by them via virtual private network (VPN) and other proxy servers like V-Tunnel (Walsh, 2010). Facebook was introduced with the aim of educational motives at Harvard but now it is more private and social space. This social networking site is used for diverse motives or gratifications. Under discussion site is observed to be the most popular one because students are talking about it on campuses. There is an often asked question, "Are you on Facebook?"

Hussain and Saleem (2016) have researched the associations of the political motives for Facebook use with the Facebook addiction. In another study (Dhaha & Igale, 2014) it is also researched the associations of the political motives for Facebook usage with the Facebook addiction. Both the studies have found the small and medium levels of correlations but these studies have researched the students into vulnerable paradigm. The associations of the political motives for Facebook use with the Facebook addiction in these previous studies do not provide the sufficient logic for these associations. But the descriptive data provided by these studies is useful for making scales and researching youth in powerful paradigm of uses and gratifications.

The associations of the political motives with the Facebook usage make sense because it is accepted that youth are an integral component of the democratic process of any country. In context of the emerging democratic state of Pakistan, the research about the political engagement with the social media among student youth is of great importance. These educated youth bulge are the next generation of decision makers. Therefore, the research about the political motives for Facebook use brings into lime light the active behavior of the student youth regarding their political involvement and their involvement in the decision making in an evolutionary democratic process. In this broader context, the current study contributes by researching the:

- Association between Facebook use and the political motives;
- The difference which the daily and the weekly time commitment for this social networking site make for the Facebook use and the political motives;
- The difference which age and the gender of respondents make in the Facebook use and the these political motives;
- The difference which social economic status and the educational institutional affiliation of students make in the scores of Facebook use and the political motives.

Literature Review

The social networking sites are web-based services with the purpose of building a profile and connection (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 211). Among these social networking sites Facebook is a structured social network (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008) and a source of information about human behavior with layers of

ecological validity (Wilson, Gosling & Graham, 2012). It was introduced with the aim of making people happy and to know their world (Cassidy, 2006).

The social networking use was found to be the negative predictor of political cynicism and it is reported in context of uses and gratifications' notions that the influence of social media on political cynicism is more attributable to user influence background and media-use differences than to sheer use of these popular sites (Hanson, Haridakis, Cunningham, Sharma, & Ponder, 2010).

There is an unlimited access to internet with the additional feature of Wi-Fi hotspot in educational institutes e.g. dormitories and computer laboratories. It is fair to argue that students who are in the emerging adulthood stage with flexible study hours, independent living and the mobile technology, are giving considerable time to Facebook (Koc & Gulyagci, 2013).

The social networking site of Facebook has increasingly become an essential part of the lives of student youth because this multitasking site is used for fun, interacting with friends, even making new friends and also keeping in contact with the previous friends therefore this site has a huge impact on the daily routine of these youth (Dhaha & Igale, 2014).

Heavy users of Facebook are found to be the extrovert females, aged 22 years and above (Shahnaz & Wok , 2011). The teens and emerging adults are found to be disproportionally using online communication methods with the freedom of living on their own, having a family of their own or a career (Bumgarner, 2007).

In the previous research the political motives for Facebook usage are conceptualized as how youth perceive about their Facebook use for knowing about the political development and the problems in the country, getting updates about gossips, sharing latest news related to politics, getting involved in political discussions, getting latest information about political affairs, and keeping in touch with the politics around the world (Dhah & Igale, 2014). Hussain and Saleem (2016) have used the same motives in their study for measuring the responses for political motives for Facebook usage. Both the studies have utilized the cross sectional survey design and have taken students as respondents. The scale for the political motives for Facebook use has shown good reliability score in these studies. The reliability score for the political motives for Facebook use in Dhah and Igale study (2014) is .939. Hussain and Saleem (2016) also revealed good reliability score of .866 for the political motives for Facebook use. Therefore this scale is selected for the current study to measure the political motives for Facebook use among students.

The previous research (Dhaha & Igale, 2014; Hussain & Saleem, 2016; Shahnaz & Wok, 2011) does not adequately explain the difference which the daily and weekly time patterns and the diverse demographics make in the scores of Facebook use and the political motives for Facebook use, therefore, the current study fills the gap by researching the difference which these diverse demographics make in the scores of Facebook use as well as in the scores of political gratifications from this popular social networking site.

Theoretical Framework

The study uses the theories of uses and gratifications, individual differences and the social categories to inform the analysis and the discussion. The approach of uses and gratifications explains something of a way in which individuals use communications among other sources in their environment to satisfy their needs and to achieve their goals, further the audience or people are sufficiently self-aware to report their motives and interests (Katz, Haas, & Gurevitch, 1973).

In context of Facebook, the users can gratify their needs of political motives from the sources of status updates or by using liking, sharing or commenting on the political content of this social networking site. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated.

H1. Facebook use is likely to be correlated with the political motives among university students.

Because of the corruption in Pakistan there is lack of interest in the political affairs and it is assumed at the beginning of the study that there will be low levels of correlations between general Facebook use and the political motives for Facebook use.

The uses and gratifications research ignores the time for media use, therefore, the time patterns for the Facebook use and the political motives are integrated for the analysis.

RQ1. Do the daily and weekly time commitment for Facebook make any difference in the scores of Facebook?

RQ2. Do the daily and weekly time commitment for Facebook make any difference in the scores of political motives?

Social categories theory assumes that, "there are broad collectives, aggregates, or social categories in urban-industrial societies whose behavior in the face of a given set of stimuli is more or less uniform" (DeFleur, 1970, pp.122-123). Baran and Davis (2008) add that, "people with similar backgrounds (e.g., age, gender, income level, religious affiliation) will have similar patterns of media exposure and similar reactions to that exposure" (p.154). The individual differences theory assumes that people vary greatly in their psychological make up and the media influence differs from person to person (Baran & Davis, 2013). Therefore, to research the difference in the scores of the overall Facebook use for the social categories, following research questions are formulated.

RQ3. Do gender and age of university students make any difference in the scores of Facebook use?

RQ4. Do social economic status and the educational institute affiliation of university students make any difference in the scores of Facebook use?

To research the difference in the scores of political motives for Facebook use, following questions are designed.

RQ5. Do gender and age of university students make any difference in the scores of political motives for Facebook use?

RQ6. Do social economic status and the educational institute affiliation of university students make any difference in the scores of political motives for Facebook use?

Methodology

The universe for the study is university students. The population for the study is the university students in Lahore. By

using convenience sampling technique, the study selects 2 universities in Lahore. First, one is the University the Punjab and the second one is Minhaj University. The sample size for the study is four hundred and fourteen students which is the final sample after eliminating the questionnaires with incomplete responses; therefore, there are no outliers.

Facebook use is measured on 6 items, " I use status update feature of Facebook;" " I use Facebook for tagging pots;" " I use Facebook for creating groups;" " I use like feature of Facebook;" " I use comment feature of Facebook;" and " I use share feature of Facebook;" , on five point Likert Scale, " 1 = strongly disagree;" " 2 = disagree;" " 3 = neutral;" " 4 = agree;" and " 5 = strongly agree."

The political motives for Facebook use are extended from the previous research (Dhaha & Iglae, 2014; Hussain and Noshina, 2016) and are measured on 7 items, " I use Facebook to know the political development in my country;" " To know about the political problems occurring in my country;" " To get updates about political gossips;" To share latest news related to politics;" " To be involved in political discussions;" To know latest information about political affairs;" and " To keep in touch with politics around the world;", on a the same five point Likert scale.

Daily time for Facebook use is measured on 5 point nominal scale, " 1 = more than three hours;" " 2 = more than two hours;" " 3 = approximately two hours;" " 4 = between thirty and sixty minutes;" and " 5 = less than thirty minutes." Weekly time for Facebook use is measured on four point nominal scale, " 1 =

almost every day;" " 2 = after two days' interval;" " 3 = once in a week;" " 4 = twice in a week."

The gender is measured on two point nominal scale, " 1 = male;" and " 2 = female." The age is measured on 4 point nominal scale, " 1 = less than 18;" and " 2 = between 18 and 22;" " 3 = between 23 and 25;" and " 4 = between 25 and 28." The social economic status is measured on 4 point nominal scale, " 1 = less than twenty thousand Pakistani Rupees;" " 2 = between thirty thousand and fifty thousand;" " 3 = between fifty thousand and one hundred thousand;" " 4 = more than one hundred thousand." The type of university is measured on two point nominal scale, " 1 = public;" and " 2 = private."

The reliability of the continuous measures in checked. The correlation test is applied to analyze the level of significance between the independent variable of Facebook use and the dependent variable of political motives for Facebook use. To analyze the difference in the dependent variables of Facebook usage and the political motives by the independent variables of daily time for Facebook usage, weekly time for Facebook usage, gender, age, social economic status and type of educational institute, two way between groups analysis of variance or Two Way Between Groups ANOVASs are run.

Results

This section reports the reliability of scales for Facebook use. The descriptive statistics of the items are tabulated. The correlations of the Facebook use with the political motives are reported. Finally are explained the levels of difference which the independent variables of time patterns and demographics make

in the dependent variables of Facebook use and political motives with the help of tables and figures.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics and the Reliability for the Continuous Variables (N = 414)*

Variables	Items	M	SD	α
Facebook Usage	I use status update feature of Facebook	3.302	1.180	.749
	I use Facebook for tagging posts	3.063	1.239	
	I use Facebook for creating groups	2.831	1.259	
	I use like feature of Facebook	3.333	1.124	
	I use comment feature of Facebook	3.396	1.136	
	I use share feature of Facebook	3.374	1.153	
Political Motives	I use Facebook to know about the political development in my country	3.316	1.084	.875
	To know about the political problems occurring in my country	3.314	1.041	
	To get updates about political gossips	3.307	1.111	
	To share latest news related to politics	3.201	1.133	
	To be involved in political discussions	3.101	1.223	
	To know latest information about political affairs	3.205	1.139	
	To keep in touch with politics around the world	3.309	1.183	

Table 1 reports the reliability of the scales and descriptive statistics related to items. For the variable of Facebook use, the Cronbach Alpha value based on standardized items is .749 and for the political motives for Facebook use is .874. Both the scales show score above .7 recommended by Pallant (2007). In Table 1 all the items have mean scores more than 3 except for the item, " I use Facebook for creating groups."

From Table 1 it is evident that the comment feature of Facebook use is the mostly used feature (M = 3.396, SD = 1.136), followed by features of share (M = 3.374, SD = 1.153), like (M = 3.333, SD = 1.124) and the status update (M = 3.302, SD = 1.180).

Students are also using Facebook for tagging (M = 3.063, SD = 1.239) and creating groups (M = 2.831, SD = 1.259) .

The students are using the Facebook for the political motives like to know about the political development (M = 3.316, SD = 1.084) and political problems (M = 3.314, SD = 1.041) in the country; for keeping in touch with the politics around the world (M = 3.309, SD = 1.183); to get updates about political gossips (M = 3.307, SD = 1.111); to know about latest information about political affairs (M = 3.205, SD = 1.139) and to share latest news related to politics (M = 3.201, SD = 1.133).

Table 2: *Correlation between Facebook Use and Political Motives (N = 414)*

	Political Motives
Facebook Use	.313**

*** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)*

The variables of Facebook use and political motives are transformed to check the correlations between them. Table 2 reports that there is significant relationship between Facebook use and the political motives among students in Lahore. According to the recommendations of Cohen (1988), the study reveals medium level of correlation in the positive direction between the variables of Facebook use and political motives seeking from this social networking site, r = .313, N = 414, p < .0005. It was predicted at the beginning of study that there will be small levels of correlations between Facebook use and political motives or the gratifications but against this prediction the medium level of correlation is found between the variables.

Table 3: *Difference in Dependent Variables for Time Patterns and Social Categories (N = 414)*

Dependent Variables	Independent Variables	η2
Facebook Use	Weekly Time	.036
	Daily Time	.028
	Weekly Time * Daily Time	.041
	Age	.036
	Gender	.000
	Age * Gender	.017
	Type of University	.005
	Socio Economic Status	.013
	Type of University * Social Economic Status	.010
Political Motives	Weekly Time	.022
	Daily Time	.039
	Weekly Time * Daily Time	.055
	Gender	.014
	Age	.033
	Gender * Age	.012
	Social Economic Status	.001
	Type of University	.002
	Social Economic Status * Type of University	.010

Cohen (1988) interprets the eta squared values (η2) .01 and .05 as small effect size, based on these recommendations, Table 3 reveals that there is a small interaction effect (η2 = .041) of the weekly and daily time on the overall Facebook use. But, the effect of weekly time for Facebook use is greater (η2 = .041) than daily time for Facebook use (η2 = .028) . The Post Hoc comparisons show that there is the highest mean score for those who use Facebook twice in a week.
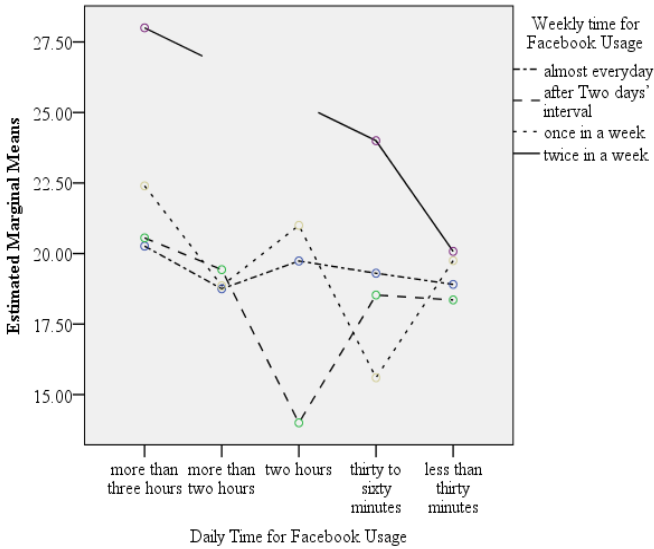
Figure1. Difference in Facebook Usage Scores for Time

Figure 1 reveals an upward preference for Facebook usage from less than thirty minutes towards higher usage for more than two hours among students who use this social networking for twice in a week.
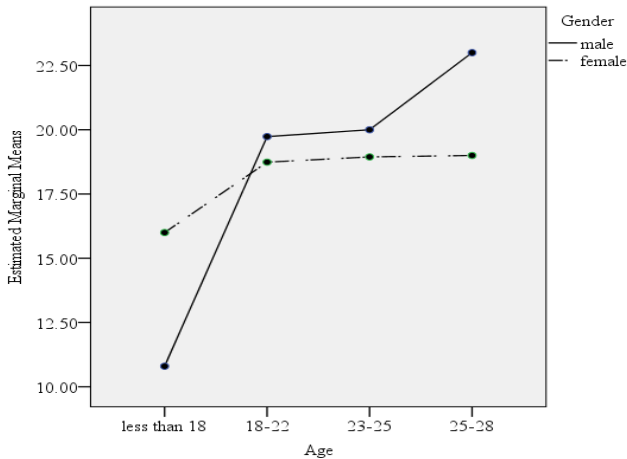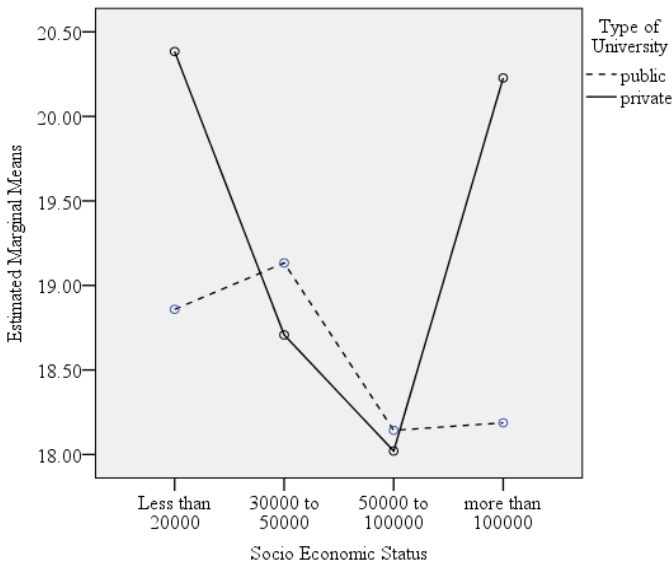

Figure 2. Difference in Facebook Usage Scores for Age and Gender

Table 3 states that there is a small interaction effect of the age and gender on the Facebook use ($\eta2$ = .017) but the single

variable of age has the greater effect size ($\eta2$ = .036) but gender has no effect ($\eta2$ = .000). However, Figure 2 displays that there is a higher mean score with upward inclination for Facebook use among male gender in comparison to female. Students between the ages of 23 and 28 are using Facebook heavily in comparison to students between the ages of 18 and 22 and the lesser age. Male students between the ages of 23 and 28 years are comparatively using Facebook more than the female gender.

Figure 3. Difference in Facebook Usage Scores for Social Economic Status and Type of University

      Table 3 documents the small interaction effect of the social economic status and the type of university ($\eta2$ = .010). The contribution of social economic status is larger ($\eta2$ = .013) but the type of university does not have any effect ($\eta2$ = .005). Figure 3 demonstrates that students of private university are using the Facebook more than the students of the public university. There is a conflict in findings related to the Facebook use among

students of least social economic status. The students in the group of least social economic status from the private sector university are using Facebook more than the students of public university. There is a decline for Facebook use among moderate income students who belong to either public or private educational institute. Then there is an upward trend for Facebook use among highest social economic status group who belong to private sector with a huge difference of mean score when compared with the students from the public sector university.
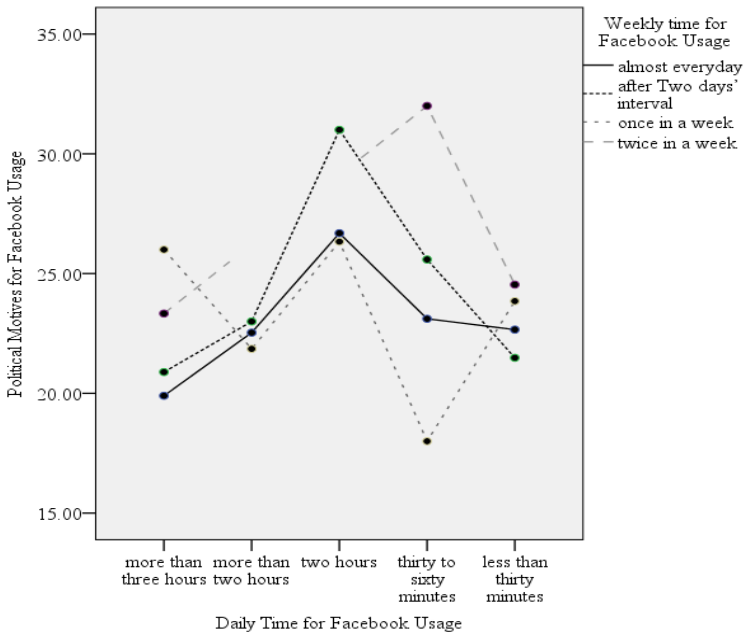

Figure 4. Difference in Political Motives for Facebook Usage for Daily and Weekly Time

According to Table 3, there is an interactional effect for the difference of the weekly and daily time ($\eta2$ = .055) on the political motives which is approximately .6. According to Cohen

(1988) .6 is considered as medium level effect for the difference. Daily time for Facebook usage showed a greater difference ($\eta2$ = .039) than the weekly time ($\eta2$ = .022) for Facebook usage. Further the Figure 4 enlightens that students have inclination towards using Facebook for political motives from half an hour to two hours either twice in a week or after two days interval.
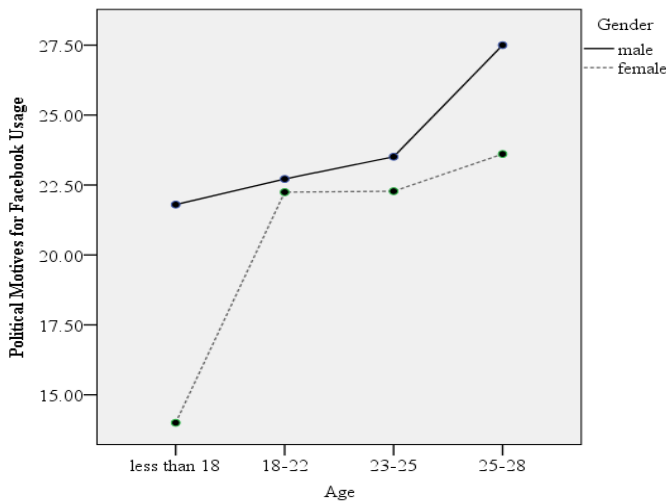

Figure 5. Difference in Political Motives for Facebook Usage for Age and Gender

Table 3 reflects that there is small interactional effect of the age and gender ($\eta2$ = .012) on the political motive seeking from Facebook. Both the independent variables, age ($\eta2$ = .033) and gender ($\eta2$ = .014) individually have small effects on the dependent variable of political motives for Facebook usage. Figure 5 states that the mean score for the age is higher than the gender. Figure 5 demonstrates that Male students compared to female students are using Facebook for political motives more than female students. Further, this Facebook usage for political

gratifications is higher among the students between the ages of 23 to 28 compared lesser age groups.
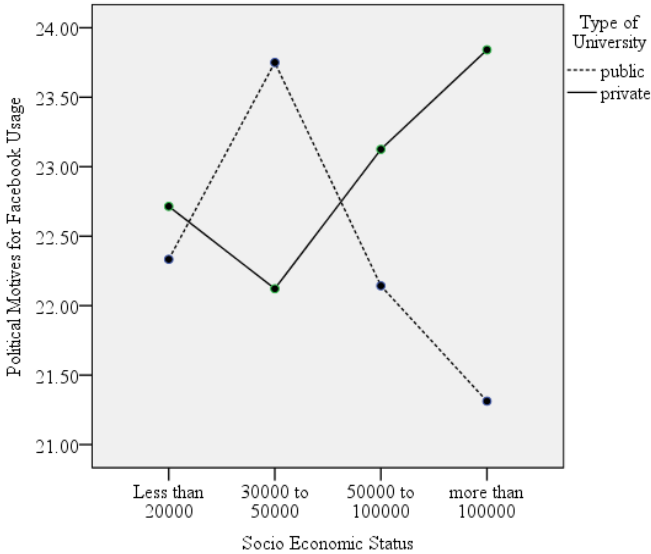

Figure 6. Difference in Political Motives for Facebook Usage Scores for Social Economic Status and Type of University

In view of Table 3, there is a small interaction effect of the social economic status and the type of university on the political motives for Facebook usage (η2 = .010), however, there is no individual effect of the variables of social economic status (η2 = .001) and the type of university (η2 = .002) on the overall scores for the political motives for Facebook usage. Figure 6 states that the students of private university with the high social economic status are found to be using Facebook for the political motives more than the students of the public sector university with higher social economic status. The low income status students of the public university have used Facebook for the political motives

seeking more than the students of public university with low economic status.

Discussion

The study contributes to uses and gratifications theory in context of Facebook use and for the political seeking from this social networking site among students in Lahore by researching the associations of the independent variable of Facebook use with the dependent variable of political motives for Facebook usage. The medium level of correlation is found between the variables which imply that youth have been using Facebook for the political goals. This reflects the democratic participation of student youth in Lahore in the online space with the aid of social networking site of Facebook which is getting popular day by day.

Time is an important factor which determines the levels of Facebook use and political goal seeking differently. It is evident that there are small to medium levels of interaction effects of the daily and weekly time on the Facebook use and the political motives for Facebook use respectively. There is small interaction effect of the independent variables of daily and weekly time commitment on Facebook use ($\eta2 = .041$). However, the interaction effect of the independent variables of daily and weekly time on the political motives seeking is higher ($\eta2 = .055$) with medium effect. The Facebook use like using this social networking site with the help of features like commenting, sharing, liking, for status update, tagging and creating groups among students is higher among those who use it twice in a week when compared with the daily use for Facebook use. Students are found to be using this social networking site on daily basis for two hours

specifically for the political motives like to know about the political development or problems of the country, to keep in touch with the politics around the world, to get updates about the political gossips, to know about latest information about political gossips and the political affairs along with sharing latest news related to politics. The daily time of two hours for the political motives for Facebook use reflects the strong level of affiliation of the students with this social media platform for the gratifications of political motives.

The study in hand also contributes to the social categories theory by exploring the difference in the independent variables of age, gender, social economic status and the type of university for the dependent variables of general Facebook usage and political motives. The results of the study are contradictory to DeFleur (1970) and Bran and Davis (2008) who have assumed that similar patterns of media usage among the social categories because in our study there is evident stratification for the demographics of students for the general Facebook use and the specific political gratifications from this social networking site. There is a difference with medium size effect in the Facebook use scores ($\eta 2$ = .017) for the interaction of the variables of age and gender. There is also small interaction effect of age and gender for the political motives ($\eta 2$ = .012). There is no effect of difference in gender for Facebook use ($\eta 2$ = .000) but there is found to be small effect of gender for the political motives for Facebook use ($\eta 2$ = .014). Male students are using Facebook more for the political motives than the female students. Findings are contradictory with Shahnaz and Wok (2011) who have found female gender excessively using

Facebook. In context of Lahore city of Pakistan, male students in comparison to female students are using Facebook excessively generally and specifically for political gratifications. Although in educational institutes in Lahore, especially in the public sector, the enrollment of the female students is increasing but their lack of interest in hard issues of politics is observed. For the current study, the same attitude of lack of interest in political affairs is visible in the online and virtual space of Facebook where female students in comparison to male students are disengaged with the political discussion on the social networking site of Facebook. Male students' interest in the political discussion on Facebook is understandable because they have the ritual of sitting together for the political gossip in offline spaces of restaurants and hostels with smart phones in their hands and using Facebook. But it is also visible that interest in political motives for Facebook use increase with the increase in age. As far as the impact of age is concerned, this variable has shown differences with small effects with the slightly greater effect for the general Facebook use ($\eta2$ = .036) than for the   political gratifications ($\eta2$ = .033). The independent variable of age has shown a visible difference for the Facebook use and the political gratifications from this site and there is an upward increase from the less age to the greater age. In this line, the findings are consistent with Shahnaz and Wok (2011) who have found that the students in older age group are using Facebook more in comparison to lesser age groups. Less Facebook use among age groups younger than 25 is a concern because these youth should also be involved in the international and political affairs with the effective political participation. The

average difference however between the 18-22 and 23-24 groups of age is marginal but the difference in groups of 18-22 and 25-28 is huge. The age group between the ages of 25 and 28 comparatively shows higher interest in the political motives for Facebook usage. For an evolving cycle of democratic process in Pakistan, the participation of the age groups less than 25 years need the attention of the policy makers. Although there are same marginal to small effects of difference for the interaction of the social economic status and the type of university on the Facebook use and the political motives but the single variable of social economic status has small effect on the Facebook usage which reflects the digital divide for the Facebook use among students. However, the mean scores reflect that the students of private sector university are more keen for using Facebook in general and specifically for the political motives. This score is higher in both the low social economic and high social economic status categories but the moderate income students of these private universities feel less interest in both the usage and the political gratifications.

The study has implications for the policy makers for making political communication strategy to engage the age groups between the ages of 18 to 25 especially the female gender for effective democratic participation and interest in national and international politics. This is the age group which look for the employment opportunities and explore things themselves. When the government will provide the opportunities to this age group and will use Facebook effectively then there are chances that the

interest of these students in Facebook usage will move from the apolitical to political.

Conclusion

Medium level correlation between Facebook usage and political gratifications among students in Lahore was found. In addition to this, students have been spending between half an hour to two hours for the political motives for Facebook usage twice in a week. But, there is stratification in age groups for such usage. The students who are less than 25 years have shown least interest for the political gratifications for Facebook usage which is a concern. Female students are also showing less interest in the political motives for Facebook usage. The youth bulge between the ages of 18 and 24 is going to be the next vote casting youth cohort and their lack of interest in political affairs in the virtual space of Facebook indicates that there will be less engagement of youth especially the female gender with the international and national political affairs.

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