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An empirical analysis of social media usage, political learning and participation among youth: a comparative study of Indonesia and Pakistan

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Abstract

Youth participation in political matters has gained attention among people around the globe where youth involvement in certain political activities has been witnessed (of public in Indonesia and Pakistan). Keeping in view this scenario, the current study aimed to identify the sway of social media in enhancing youth involvement in political learning, political participation and political efficacy. This quantitative study was conducted through online and offline survey in both countries at the time of general elections. The data was gathered from both countries in systematic manner where the data was collected from Pakistan (General Elections, 2018) firstly and then from Indonesia (National Elections, 2019). A total of four hundred respondents (200 from each country) gave their opinions through structured questionnaires. The results revealed that the youth being considered as millennial has a significant role in contributing to the discourse of politics. The results show that the use of social media facilitates youth to participate in political activities and those activities enhance their knowledge, provide a chance to participate and build the capacity of political efficacy. It is to conclude that youth has actively engaged and use to discuss the political matters on social media to sensitize the public. As such, the role of youth, to some extent, has changed the political situations in both countries.

Keywords Youth · Social media activism · Political participation · Indonesia · Pakistan

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1 Introduction

The emerging trend of using social media for political purpose has grasped the attention of over 44 million internet subscriber in Pakistan (PTA 2019), while in Indonesia, it is the total 68% of the total population are internet users (APJII, 2019). In the developing phase of democracy, it is a time of mass media to gain more importance for public information and discussions. Therefore, increasing the political participation, there are factors such as media influence the trend of participation in society (Halpern et al. 2017). In this era, the role of social media is important to interact with the community and the rest of the world (Carter Olson 2016; Allagui and Breslow 2016). It contributes to socialise people through online spheres that allow followers to chat and connect with others (Khan 2017). The main consumer of social media are the young people (Goodyear and Armour 2018), as it have big influence in the society. Social media also provides the opportunity for the youth to get information about their subjects or such as job opportunities (Franklin et al. 2016). The previous studies on social media indicates that it is a best instrument to sensitize public for political information (Koc-Michalska et al. 2019). Though this, political information easily can spread to their voters and followers. There are studies, which shows that almost youth are using social media accounts 8 h per day to use such applications: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and others (Boczkowski et al. 2017).

The objective of the study is to explore the emerging trend of social media participation in political activities in Indonesian and Pakistani society. A similar study conducted on social media and political participation suggested that youth in rural areas of Pakistan has shown the interests and participation in political matters and the social media has a dynamic role in the contribution of such change. It also show that, political efficacy and online participation has a significant positive relationship.

In Indonesian society the role of students in a political role cannot be forgettable. Where in the history, the Suharto period, young people participated in political and democratic activities. They arranged the demonstrations against the dictatorship of Suharto in 1998. After that, youth in Indonesian now participating in sensitizing the government and political participate in main democratic behavior (Lee 2011) where the youth spirit has increased their role in the Indonesian society, on the other side the social media promoting their participation in social movements and contribution in the democratic transition (Nisa 2018).

The recent studies on social media in Indonesia depicted that, Indonesia is the world's largest consumer of social media,¹ over 300 million mobile subscribers. Therefore, it is very easy for users to communicate and write about their social or political problems while using social media, and it helps to transform the exact public opinion.

Youth in both countries have the facility to communicate and take part in social and as well as political activities. The argument is supported by the famous theory of Habermas (1991), the commercialisation for mass media had changed the phenomena, and their advertisement and public relations are prioritized. The media content is colonized, and a capitalist economy has controlled the mainstream media to discuss the political discussion in the public sphere, and it affects the rational and democratic public discourse (Papacharissi 2019).

¹ <https://www.techinasia.com/indonesia-web-mobile-statistics-we-are-social>.

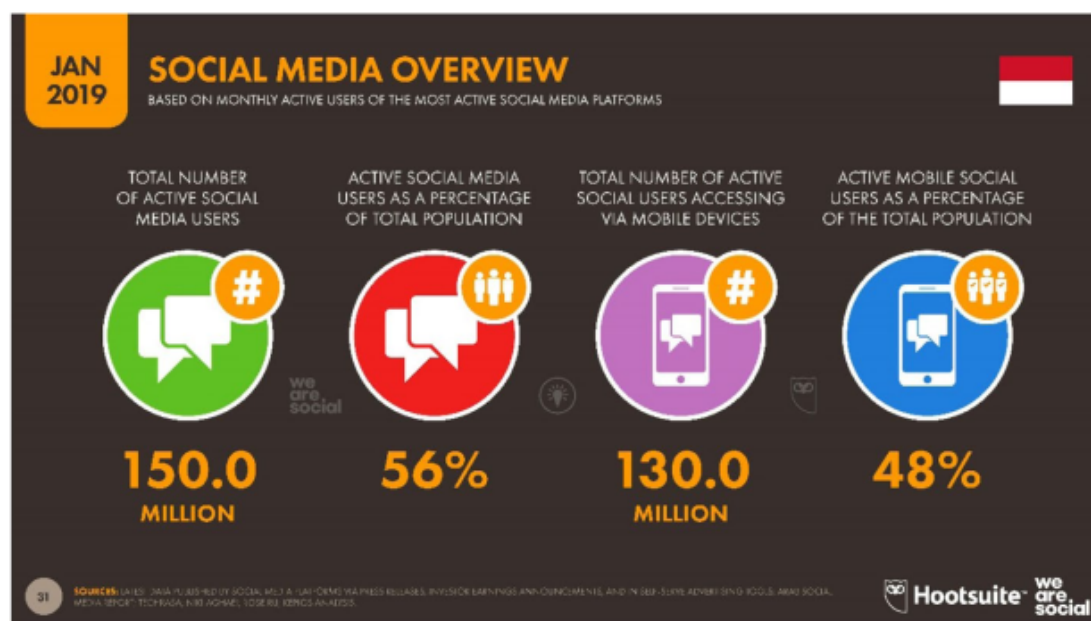


Fig. 1 Social media user survey in Indonesia. (Source: Hootsuite)

The role of youth in the democratic transition in Indonesia has dramatically changed the political behavior of public (Nisa 2018). Where the public is interested in getting information from social media accounts and hashtag also become a significant contributor to enhancing the activity (Suwana 2019). It emerge the recent campaign conducted by the civil society and youth against the corruption law in Indonesia (Suwana 2019). The digital activism has an important factor in supporting the democracy, the digital activism activity to participate online spheres and to accomplish some goals (Denning 2001), push factor for economic, social and political dialogue (Edwards et al. 2013).

A social survey conducted by the Hootsuite 2019, which found that social media is a tool for frequent use among the younger generation. However, discussing social media certainly cannot be separated with the names of mainstream social media today, call Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, to chat-based ones such as WhatsApp, Line, Cocoa Talk, Telegram and others.

Figure 1 illustrates the development of social media users. The total users reached around 150 million, and this means the majority of the use of the internet to socialise through social media. The number of social media users reaches 56% of the total population of Indonesia, with mobile-based users reaching 130 million. This is how all social media platforms are finally focused on optimising their applications on mobile. However, social media is no doubt the most popular way of communication among Indonesian citizens (Lim 2013). The trend of users continues to rise significantly, as well as features that can be enjoyed free of charge by more and more users and growing.

The political situation in Pakistan, where the political parties have changed their strategy to mobilize and integrate their voter through social media. During the research filed experiences, it is observed that almost all political parties have their own social media accounts. Many political parties are engaging the public on social media, but the most popular is Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) led by the former cricket star Imran Khan. The rest of the political parties are actively participating in social media, however, commenting, posting and replying to their followers are quite normal. In this Hootsuite survey, the Fig. 2

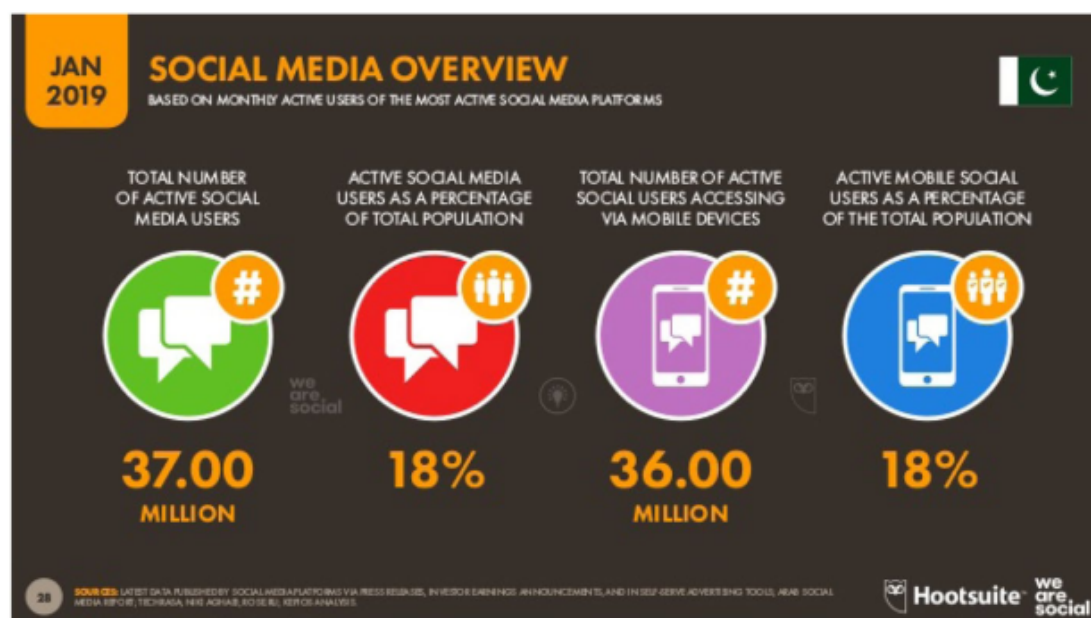


Fig. 2 Social media user survey in Pakistan. (Source: Hootsuite)

shows the user status of social media accounts in Pakistan, where the users are regularly increasing and participating online in such social and political spheres. The new trend of social media has changed the political discussion, where the political aspirants follow the blogs, Facebook pages, Instagram, WhatsApp groups, may receive news and can be a part of debates on social networks (Haque 2010).

Furthermore, the Internet and social media influence people to participate in the mobilization and perform collective action in demonstrations. In the historical events, the role of social media has influenced the situation of the Twitter revolution in Iran and the Middle East has mobilized millions of people through tweets (Al-Jenaibi 2016). The common use of 'Twitter' is now a day's easy way to transform the information and it globally attracts international audiences. It has developed a new discourse in the communication subject, where the journalist, public figure or politicians tweets as their news headlines (Al-Jenaibi 2016).

People from diverse backgrounds are using twitter for information, social affairs, and, most importantly, for political communication by political leaders, journalists, and internet users (Esfandiari 2010; Michaelsen 2011). Similarly, the situation in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011, Blankson (2007) stated that political communication among social actors are widely participating in the mobilization, as they have close connection easy access to technology.

1.1 Twitter, Facebook and political efficacy

New technologies emerged as a fast indicator of political participation for the public (Tapscott and Williams 2006). The social media applications have changed the behaviour of the public to practice, attitude toward political matters and loyalty toward participation in the national building of political structure. The most common social media useable applications are 'Facebook' and Twitter (Dannen and White 2011). The trend, social media activism has become very relevant for many political groups, youth activists and the users



Fig. 3 Theoretical framework. (Self-source)

(Velasquez and LaRose 2015). There are more relevant studies claimed that social media apps were quite popular in 2008 campaign organised for elections, to share information, exchanged political views, and to express support for the candidates (Smith and Rainie 2008). Additionally, social media apps are the factors that influence people to interact and participate in politics, hence, social media is a major role to increase the political efficacy of followers.

1.2 The rationale of the study

The use of social media has gained the attention of user to participate in the online spheres and offline spheres. The current article is aimed to find the role of social media in Indonesia and Pakistan that have changed the political behaviors, political learning, participation in public matters and in short some political activities. The comparative and cross sectional study examined the social and political change in both countries to address the phenomenon. The present study unique in nature to address social media as the main indicator for political efficacy, political awareness and political participation. The purpose of this study was to find out the role of social media with regard to influencing the political behaviour and activities of youths.

1.3 The objective of the study

1. How does social media provide opportunities for political aspirants?
2. Does the use of social media can increase the tendency of political activism in youth?

1.3.1 Theoretical framework

The current study opted the theory of Habermas (2004) "*the public sphere*". The theory which claims that people use to discuss their matters in public spheres, where it started by the Stewart (2001) that public sphere feeds debates and mobilize general masses for some specific issues. The theoretical framework of the study (Fig. 3).

2 Materials and methods

The section deals with the procedures adopted for accomplishing this research on social media and youth political efficacy among Pakistani and Indonesian youths. The purpose of this cross sectional study was to examine the role of social media in enhancing political participation of youth and their democratic practices in online and offline spheres. The present research employed multistage sampling techniques where, at the first stage, two countries were chosen through purposive non-random sampling technique. The aim behind choosing this particular sampling technique was to address the specific purpose of this research, i.e., to give an equal chance of representation of youth from Indonesia and Pakistan in the current study.

Moreover, the sampling framework was designed keeping in consideration certain socio-demographic characteristics of the population such as their age, usage of social media and involvement in political activities. A sample of 400 respondents was chosen, keeping in view the availability of respondents as per the required characteristics of the population and time constraints.

Simple random sampling is selected when the research population is known (Mugo 2002). As the sampling frame was already made, so the individuals were approached for data collection and were asked to fill the questionnaire available online. Five hundred respondents were approached in this regard as this size of a sample is considered good for generalisation in quantitative research where a total of 400 respondents (200 from each country) responded and gave their opinions (the response rate was 80%). The study covered June, 2018 General Elections of Pakistan and National Election (Indonesia) period of April 2019. The data was collected through survey questionnaires, where the respondents were requested to fill the forms in hard copies and also through online google forms.

A questionnaire consisted of certain variables such as socio-economic and demographic characteristics, gender, age, political background of the respondents, involvement in political activities and tendency towards using social media applications and it was constructed with the help of extensive literature review. The activities of political participation are mentioned in Table 2 in the data analysis part. In the present study, social media was taken as an independent variable, whereas youth political participation was dealt as a dependent variable. The data was coded in SPSS-25 and was analyzed through frequency distribution, percentage and Pearson correlation.

3 Data analysis

The data and analysis part briefly explained the results gathered from this study. The results are presented in graph, table and figure, hypothesis and description (Table 1).

The above results presented in Table (1) generated from SPSS-25 software and thoroughly explained the uni-variate analysis of the respondents. Each variable discussed the $n=400$ respondents results. The socio-demographic variables are; country-wise population, gender segregation, age component, the status of residence in rural and urban and their occupation.

The study was conducted in Indonesia and Pakistan, and the total sample was obtained from the fields are four hundreds. Each country has two hundred equally population represented in this study. The second variables are gender variations, where the greater number

Table 1 Socio-demographic variables (n = 400)

No.	Variable	F	%
1	Country of the respondents		
A	Indonesia [East Asia]	200	50.0
B	Pakistan [South Asia]	200	50.0
2	Gender variations		
A	Female	215	53.8
B	Male	185	46.2
3	Age categories		
A	18 to 22 years old	221	55.3
B	23 to 27 years old	117	29.2
C	28 to 30 years old	62	15.5
4	The rural and urban figure		
A	Rural	187	46.8
B	Urban	213	53.3
5	Occupation of the respondents		
A	Working	179	44.8
B	Seeking job	20	5.0
C	Student	201	50.3
	Total sample size	400	100.0

Table 2 Indicators regarding usage of social media for political activities (n = 400)

No.	Variable	Regularly	Several times in a week	Once a week	Rarely
1	Follow political groups	103 (25.8%)	184 (46.0%)	77 (19.3%)	36 (9.0%)
2	Follow campaigns groups	208 (52.0%)	86 (21.5%)	1 (.3%)	105 (26.3%)
3	Follow public figure	308 (77%)	89 (22.3%)	2 (.5%)	1 (.3%)
4	Follow news channels	11 (2.8%)	197 (49.3%)	104 (26%)	88 (22.0%)
5	Commenting on political posts	202 (50.5%)	104 (26.0%)	88 (22.0%)	6 (1.5%)
6	Follow political oriented news	230 (57.5%)	108 (27.0%)	21 (5.3%)	41 (10.2%)

($f=215$, 53.8%) of respondents are female, while the second majority ($f=185$, 46.2%) are male. There are studies, which supports that, female are more likely to use digital media and can influence the general masses for common interests (Taylor 1989; Kim et al. 2016).

Age and gender variables also help to identify the ratio of respondents regarding the variations in age and gender association as age is considered a significant indicator in political participation and social media approach (Keating and Melis 2017). The table further discussed the age of the respondents of this study. Youth age 18 to 22 ($f=221$, 55.3%) years old predominantly active and engaged with their domestic politics, in which it signifies a

Table 3 Participation in political activities during elections (n = 400)

No.	Political activities	Yes	No
1.	Have your ever cast your vote in recent elections	54.8% (219)	45.3% (181)
2.	Youth involvement in political activities has changed the political scenario	66.5% (266)	33.5% (134)
3.	Have you ever been part of a party council	72.3% (289)	27.8% (111)
4.	Held a function as a youth representatives	67% (268)	33.0% (132)
5.	Attended any political function	73.3% (293)	26.8% (107)
6.	Important and active role in party meetings	73.8% (295)	26.3% (105)
7.	Organized a political event	78.5% (314)	21.5% (86)

General elections in Indonesia (April, 2019) and Pakistan (June, 2018)

positive indicator for the potential political participation of youth in both countries. As the studies supports that, young people are big consumer of social media accounts (Thomas et al. 2018; Duffy and Chan 2019), which endorsed the current results of the study. The further results indicate the occupation of the respondents, which found that a majority ($f=179$, 44.8%) are fully or part-time working in the government and private sectors, while the greater ($f=201$, 50.3%) are students studying in schools, colleges and universities. A study conducted by Cody (2020) also found that college students are relatively active in political campaigns, such as the ‘Tamil spring’ (Pandian et al. 2013) indentities that students participation against the Sri Lankan government and gathered for hunger strikes.

Table 2 briefly describes the political activities, that performed by the respondents while using social media accounts or applications. These activities accomplished on social media are; (1) do you follow political groups or pages, following any political or social campaigns, follow the public or political figure, reading or watching political news, commenting on political posts, and follow politically oriented news. The above description on ‘*follow political groups*’ shows regular (f 103, 25.8%) participation of youths, they are likely to use social media applications [Facebook, Twitter or Instagram] for continuing their participation in political matters. The second variable states ‘*follow campaign groups*’ shows greater interests (f 208, 52.0%) of youths to part of a campaign specified for social, political or any common interests.

The respondents were asked to share their opinion regarding ‘*follow political figure or public figure*’ therefore, a higher number (f 308, 77.0%) of respondents are regularly following politicians or public figure posts. Therefore, the following politicians and personality to show the followers locality and closeness with their interests. They are watching news channels to get information about current affairs and political news. However, respondents are watching news channels several times a week (f 197, 49.3%) to gain and learn the discussion of politicians on electronic media channels. It is common among public to comments or likes on social media posts, where the current results shows (f 202, 50.5%) are regularly commenting and liking the posts. These posts generate and provide the opportunity for the follower to like or dislike their opinion. In last, ‘*follow political oriented news*’ shows the interests of watching and following political material on social media, the results shows, majority (f 230, 57.5%) of the youths are regularly getting the opportunity to follow political news on social media (Table 2).

The emperical study conducted by Shea and Green (2007) investigated that young voters are the future of political parties. In according the above data (Table 3) demonstrates

Table 4 Model performing Pearson correlation on social media as the main indicator of political efficacy, political activities and political participation

No.	Variable	Social media	Political activities	Political participation	Political efficacy
1	Social media	1			
2	Political activities	.418**	1		
3	Political participation	.436**	.506	1	
4	Political efficacy	.639**	.449**	.419**	1

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

the various political variables that show the youth involvement in political activities, the majority (f 219, 54.8%) have cast their vote in elections while 45.3% of the respondents have 'not cast' their vote due to various reasons.

Youth in Indonesia and Pakistan are interested in participating in political transitions. Therefore high percentage (f 266, 66.5%) of the study results reveals that youth involvement in political activities has changed the political scenario while 33.5% of the respondents are not agreed to support youth as political changer in Pakistan and Indonesia.

Political parties usually organize political events to engage youth to be a part of party memberships, in universities political councils are famous, and students from different backgrounds are interested in participating shows high percentage (f 289, 72.3%) of the respondents are a part of political, ethnic or language based councils and participating in social and political activities, while 27.8% are not linked to any part of political council.

Galston (2004) defines a primary concern when it comes to youth involvement in politics is the amount of variation in political knowledge between individuals of differing ages. Young political representatives are working in political parties to support and hold political functions in the community, the greater majority (f 268, 67.0%) of the respondents are working and holding many political functions in their surroundings, whereas, the small ratio only 33% is not supported any political event.

Specifically, Quintelier (2007) argues that young people do participate politically, just in ways in which scholars have yet to examine at length. Some of the young people's fresh political activities that include: 'youth commissions and legislature, youth conferences, local group actions and initiatives, political consumerism, cultural movements, politics of a single issue, demonstration politics and peer support groups'. However, the results (f 293, 73.3%) are attending a political function, and only 26.8% are taking an active role in such political events. While the majority (f 295, 73.8%) of the study population are not attending such party meetings and small ratio (26.3%) have a very weak role in such meetings. For instance, Rankin (2013) finds that youth have low levels of political knowledge, both textbook and surveillance, but it finds that their political knowledge greatly increases with political events, however, greater majority (f 314, 78.5%) are organizing such political events while 21.5% are not interested or not having such activities to organize such events (Table 3).

In the Table (4) dataset was performed Pearson correlation concerning social media, political participation, political efficacy and political awareness. The statistical results found that there is a significant relationship between social media and political activities ($r = .418^{**}$), political participation and social media ($r = .436^{**}$), political efficacy and social media ($r = .639^{**}$). The analysis further shows the more positive association between political efficacy and using social media among youth. The results show that social media

is not only facilitating communication among the public, but it also providing wider opportunities for the user to get information and aware of political matters. In short, social media is a unique platform that allows user to talk freely about their wish and interests.

4 Discussion

The present study on social media and youth political participation is amongst emerging phenomena that is difficult to find in the context of Indonesian and Pakistani youths. The current survey tried to explore the role of social media in promoting political participation, enhancing political knowledge and efficacy among young generations. The major variables including socio-demographic characteristics, use of social media and political activities found that youth is engaged in the political system of both countries. The use of social media is easy for users to develop a large number of contacts with like-minded people, therefore aiding social movements to reach critical mass (Lovejoy et al. 2012). A similar findings shows by Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2012) also discussed that social media networks function as information centers, thereby enabling users to screen their contacts and remain updated about recent happenings around them through notifications and news feeds.

The usage of social media variables also depicted that majority of the respondents are following politically oriented news, page/groups, commenting and writing posts, watching news channels (political talk shows) and following politicians on social media applications. A similar study on the use of Facebook and participation in politics create much knowledge of public affairs (Feldman et al. 2017). Whereas as, using social media create opportunities for youngsters to take part in political and social issues. Social media has changed the political behavior of youth in this society (Wei and Zhao 2017). Furthermore, it supports the argument of the current study, that social media has a role in democratic transition in Indonesia and Pakistan.

The Pearson correlation results show significant relationship between the usage of social media and political participation ($r = 436$). Thus, the studies explain that before the social media and digitalisation it was hard for the public to participate in the political will; therefore, the social media provider and become a major factor in integrating and uniting public to participate (Stanley 2017).

In addition, results also reveals that the reports of Hootsuite (2019) in Pakistan and Indonesia, show the status of social media users are more in Indonesia as compared to Pakistan. In order to examine possible antecedents of this relationship, the researcher has provided a theoretical lens out of the existing body of knowledge to examine why social media use facilitates political activism among social media users in both countries. It has been established through existing research that the acquisition of news through social media is a vital source of interpersonal, political discussion that enhances the likelihood of learning about political developments and subsequently facilitating political activism (de Boer and Velthuisen 2011; Eveland 2004).

5 Conclusion

The use of social media in day to day life has provided certain opportunities to people in various walks of life and to youth particularly. This phenomenon can also be witnessed where youth behaviour has been influenced with regard to participation in political

activities. The youth participation in various activities, such as following politicians on social media has affected and interconnected the followers. This communication format and prodigy helps all the stakeholders to get connected with their party affiliations. Youth participation in political activities during the elections also encouraged them to use social media for political updates. The study investigate that quantitative study on social media can be useful for a further survey on dual countries, which can provide diverse experience, knowledge and indeed learning of the scholars. The findings of the study suggest that social media is a good instrument for the youth to learn, experience and practice political exposure. It is therefore likely to report that, the mechanism through which social media exposure needs to address more on the genre of youth, and should be addressed further in future crosssectional researches. Moreover, results of this study implies that, Indonesia and Pakistan are Islamic brotherly countries and have greater number of young population but there is no mechanism to utilize youth in the political sector through social media platforms. The author (s) strongly suggests that the Government of Republic Indonesia (RI) and Government of Islamic Republic of Pakistan (PAK) may formalize a strengthen policy to engage young generation for political candidates and on state level positions.

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