RAISING THE INFLUENCE OF NEW MEDIA IN INSTILLING POLITICAL EFFICACY AMONGST YOUTH

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The aim of the research was to find out the role that new media is playing in creating political efficacy amongst the youth in Pakistan. Political efficacy is the belief on the part of an individual that he can play an important and integral role in the political processes. Campbell, Gurin & Miller (1954) presented the idea of political efficacy as a feeling that individual political actions can have an impact on the overall political processes. In this regard, the individual citizen becomes an important entity who has a strong faith in his position and significance in the political processes. Later studies showed that the original idea of political efficacy actually comprised two separate elements internal efficacy and external efficacy. The present research looked at the various factors which influence internal efficacy like knowledge, discussion and participation.

According to Kim & Kim (2007), political socialization of adolescents includes the processes of acquiring basic knowledge about political procedures and issues, learning how to articulate thoughts and opinions about political issues, gaining basic skills to share the political thoughts and opinions with others, and developing motivations to participate in political activities as responsible citizens.

Orgeret, (2004) defines democracy as the process of self-ruling within given geo-political boundaries and where there is widespread agreement on the identity of 'the nation' or 'the people'. Freedom and democracy are one of the most important rights of the individual; they are the stepping stone towards an ideal state. However, the concept of a true democracy does not merely focus on rights but on responsibilities as well (Bachen, Raphael, Lynn, McKee & Philippi, 2008). It is the duty of the citizens of a democracy to protect it which can only be done if they have sufficient knowledge and awareness. It is not only the duty of the state to protect and look after the interests of its citizens; they too have to protect the
system. Simple acts like voting seem to be insignificant but they are the lifeline of democracy. However, of late, there has been a shift in the attitudes of the public all over the world, e.g. there has been a relative decline in voter turnouts (Wass, 2005; Hooghe, 2004; Dunsmore & Lagos, 2008) which if taken in extremes would render the whole notion of a democracy meaningless.

According to Gimple (2003) adolescence is one of the few periods during the life cycle when there are nearly universal opportunities to collect and absorb political facts and information. However, the messages that they take in vary in quantity and quality across the different media. Scholars have realised the potential of all these mediums, and increasingly, research is focusing on the influence of all these different forms of media on the processes of political socialization at large and political efficacy in particular (Hoffman & Thomson, 2009; Dunsmore & Lagos, 2008; Kim & Johnson, 2006). Although conventional media has retained its place amongst the younger generations, yet, new media has emerged as a powerful force as new media particularly the internet provides a unique opportunity to the users as unlike conventional media; they are interactive and have room for feedback. (Sun, Rubin & Haridakis, 2008; Kim & Kim, 2007; Jackson & Lilleker, 2007; Albarran et al., 2007 and Bachen et al., 2008). Inspite of the fact, that new media has had a very short history in Pakistan yet it has witnessed massive growth. In particular, the use of internet is increasing day by day, according to Shafique and Mahmood (2008) although internet penetration in Pakistan is relatively low yet its numbers are growing. They report that the numbers of internet users had crossed 12 million (7.2 percent of the population) by 2006. All this indicates that new media particularly the internet is gradually emerging as a dominant force which would be shaping our futures.

**Background**

**Role of youth in Pakistan’s political history**

The youths in Pakistan have traditionally been politically very active. The freedom struggle that lasted from 1857-1947 mainly relied on the energy and efforts of the younger generation who made innumerable sacrifices for the cause of independence. Even though, at that time, there were very few means of communication and those too were under the control of the British government, yet, the youth of the sub-continent managed to put up a very dynamic freedom struggle.

After independence, the youth of the newly created Pakistan did not sink into oblivion; it was the movement led by students that toppled the
very powerful regime of Field Marshal Ayub Khan. Later, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto’s rise to power was also due in part to his popularity amongst the youth of that era. When, General Zia-ul-Haq imposed his dictatorship on the country, it was the students who put up a fight and bore all kinds of atrocities for their beliefs. However, in the last twenty years, youth and particularly students have turned away from politics, there is certain disillusionment with the whole process and the emphasis has been on getting an education, finding a job, improving one’s own life and not on bringing a positive change in society as a whole. Student politics has gradually come to be associated with violence and gang war amongst other things and is not seen as a stepping stone towards creating effective citizens of a democracy. Over the years, the number of urban voters has been on the decline, (Election Commission of Pakistan) average voter turnout in Pakistan was 48.2 percent (FAFEN 2008) and with the low levels of literacy; the rural voters are forced to vote in accordance with the wishes of the village elders. On the other hand, the urban voters have the knowledge and understanding to make informed decisions about the nation’s future but they choose not to exercise this right. The urban middle class as a rule does not vote or participate in any kind of political activity and the educated youth are restrained from showing any kind of political activism for the sake of a normal life.

**Literature Review**

The Media dependency approach states that the more dependent an individual is on the media to fulfill his needs, the more important the media will be for that individual. Thus, individuals do not depend on all media equally (Loveless, 2008; Kim & Kim, 2007; Albarran et al., 2007; Sun et al., 2008). Research by Jackson and Lilleker (2007) has shown that media users play an active role in selecting their media and are thus goal oriented in their media use thus new media is being used increasingly to receive information as well as aiding in voter choice. According to the researchers, new media is increasing being used to fulfill the needs of information, sensation seeking, and withdrawal because audiences have a clear perception of their needs and will abandon a medium if it does not gratify them (Albarran et al., 2007; Kim & Kim, 2007; Kim & Johnson, 2006). The internet has become an integral part of social life particularly of the youth (Liu 2010; Berson & Berson, 2005). The reasons for the popularity of internet lie in the inherent characteristics of the internet, it is cheap, interactive, convenient, customisable and accessible (Huang, 2009; Sun, Rubin & Haridakis, 2008; Kim & Johnson, 2006). Another major advantage of the internet is
that it allows for the merging of content origination and content organization, (Flew & Wilson, 2010). According to Livingstone (2007), what attracts the youth to new media technologies is the informal approach of this media, furthermore, the youth can also use this media very creatively despite opposition and censorship (Liu, 2010). According to Jenkins (2009) new media operate on different principles as compared to broadcast media; the focus is on participation, reciprocity and peer-to-peer rather than a one to many communication. Although, there are some reservations regarding the influence of the internet on the youth particularly with reference to immoral, illegal and unethical activities which might hamper their future (Liu, 2010; Livingstone, 2008; Berson & Berson, 2005), yet others like Blumler & Coleman (2010) suggest that the internet will prove to be useful for the expansion of free will as it provides opportunities for vertical as well as horizontal communication.

A recent trend is that younger audiences are increasingly leaving older media like terrestrial radio and television for their new media counterparts like satellite radio, MP3, streaming internet video, etc. (Albarran et al., 2007). Considerable research has shown that there are strong links between adoption of new technologies and age with the result that younger people are more likely to exhibit Internet dependency than older participants. (Sun et al., 2008: Albarran et al., 2007). Further, younger audiences are very much aware of their needs and motivations, thus it is not easy to gratify them (Albarran et al., 2007).

**Youth and Political Efficacy**

According to Gimpel (2003) an informed, knowledgeable citizenry is very important for democracy. He defines political knowledge as the capacity of citizens to recall facts about what government is and does. He further says that citizens who possess the least political knowledge are those who are least likely to participate in a wide variety of political activities and thus they do not inform their representatives of their needs. People who know more about politics are much more willing to engage in political discussions.

Hoffman & Thomson (2009) quoted Zimmerman, (1989) in defining political efficacy as ‘the belief that one has the skills to influence the political system’. Further, they used a broad criterion for calculating civic participation, in which they included participation in student government or debate club, involvement in any kind of youth organisations like sports leagues or boy scouts, volunteering for places of worship, school, youth programmes or civic group. Research has shown that there is a strong relationship between one’s belief that he can
influence political processes with actual participation (Almond & Verba, 1963; Campbell et al, 1954; Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995). As mentioned earlier, political efficacy is actually comprised two separate elements internal efficacy and external efficacy. Internal efficacy relates to the individual’s belief that he can make a difference in the democratic processes while external efficacy relates to the system’s responsiveness to the citizen’s needs (Craig, Niemi, & Silver, 1990; Craig, 1993).

Hively & Eveland, (2009) found that frequency of discussion is related to both factual, as well as structural knowledge but elaboration occurs only as a result of structural knowledge. According to Kim & Kim (2007), political socialisation of adolescents includes the processes of acquiring basic knowledge about political procedures and issues, learning how to articulate thoughts and opinions about political issues, gaining basic skills to share the political thoughts and opinions with others, and developing motivations to participate in political activities as responsible citizens. Wass (2005) is of the opinion that low voter turnout amongst the young is not a passing phenomenon but a generational feature partly due to a “demobilisatory socialising process” which he says is common to the younger age bracket. Further, he observed that politics had played a very small role during the formative years of the current younger generation but they still had a positive attitude towards political participation. Thus, he says that low voter turnout is probably not due to a lack of political socialisation. Dunsmore & Lagos (2008) observed that for democracy to flourish in future, it is imperative that the youth’s passion should be channelled appropriately. According to Jenkins (2009) the new participatory culture made possible by new media offer many opportunities for youth to engage in civic debates, participate in community life, or even become political leaders by enacting in video games. Jenkins (2009) assumes that the digital democracy would be decentralised, evenly dispersed, and profoundly contradictory and slow to emerge.

According to Jenkins (2009) politics has become a spectator sport which is watched but not participated in, while Cushion (2009) reiterates by suggesting that although the youths mistrust the political and democratic process, new media can be used to rectify this problem. Research has shown that Internet use has become the dominant way for political engagement, as compared to uses of their traditional media such as newspaper, TV, and radio (Kim & Kim, 2007; Kim & Johnson, 2006; Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2002; Kenski & Stroud, 2006) which has been dubbed as a “shift in media power” (Kim & Johnson, 2006). This is so because political action is made easier, faster and more universal by the developing technologies because ICTs lower the costs and obstacles of
organising collective action (Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2002). Research by Tian (2006) indicated that internet was being extensively used to gain political information but was not playing a significant role in political deliberation and participation. According to Pasek, Feldman, Romer, & Jamieson, (2008) the use of internet, as well as other news sources is very important to gain knowledge about political issues.

The literature thus suggests the following hypothesis in the Pakistani context:

**H$_1$**: New media is being used extensively by the educated youth.

**H$_2$**: Educated youth who use new media more show greater political efficacy.

**H$_3$**: Socio-economic status influences new media use for the purpose of political efficacy.

**Method**

The study was quantitative in nature and involved a survey from educated urban youth as they are the only ones to have access to new media in Pakistan. The sample was drawn from amongst the graduate and post graduate students from each of the four largest universities of the twin cities including International Islamic University (IIUI), Fatima Jinnah Women University (F.J.W.U), National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST), and FAST National University (FAST). These universities had been selected because their student population is quite large and the students come from different strata of society from all over Pakistan. A sample size of 400 was decided upon as there was relative homogeneity in the sample.

The sampling method that was used was the non-probability convenient sampling method. Graduate level students from each of the four universities approached the students and asked them to fill out the questionnaires. Four hundred questionnaires were distributed out of which 313 were returned, however, only 308 were found to be complete and valid.

Initially, a pretest of the questionnaire was administered to a sample of 30 students from IIUI to explore the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. Analysis of the pretest results resulted in minor changes to the questionnaire. The pretest data was not used in the final analyses. The questionnaire that was finally administered to the sample comprised of 44 questions along with relevant demographic information. Reliability test revealed that the instrument had a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.767.

As the main variable of the study was internal efficacy alone, it was
measured keeping in view its three main aspects which are political knowledge, interest and participation. Political knowledge was measured by testing the respondent's knowledge of Pakistani politics. There were 17 questions of varying difficulties; some of them were about issues that have been discussed regularly in the media while others pertained to the structure of governance in the country. The questions were posed as statements which were either correct or incorrect. Interest in politics was measured by the frequency of discussion with friends and family which was measured on the Likert Scale. The respondents were also asked whether they participated in any political processes through political clubs, political forums, student councils, political campaigns and voting.

To establish frequency of use and distinguish between frequent and non-frequent users, it was decided to label those who had been using the internet for more than two hours each week as frequent users and those who used the internet for less duration as non-frequent users. This was done keeping in mind the issues of access and the time spent by the students on studies and similar activities. As access is still a major issue for a majority of the populace and even the number of PC in major universities are not enough to cater to all the students thus most students get to use the internet only for a short while each week. Secondly, vast numbers of students come from far flung areas where there is still no internet penetration and are thus not familiar with ICTs. However, the local students from Islamabad – Rawalpindi lead a very different life; they are as connected as the youth in any developed nation of the world. In such a situation, the demarcation between heavy and light users had to be done with a great deal of leniency.

**Results**

The number of questionnaires that were distributed was 400; however, only 313 were returned which meant that the response rate was 78 percent. However, only 308 were included in the final analysis as the remaining five were either incomplete or the responses were unclear. The data that was thus compiled revealed that 51 percent of the respondents were male while 49 percent were female.

The respondents ranged in age from 18 to 25 years old (\(M = 22, SD = 1.797\)). Respondents’ annual family income ranged from less than Rs.10,000 to Rs.50,000 or more (\(M = 50k+, SD = 1.034\)). Almost 40 percent of the respondents belonged to households with a monthly income of Rupees fifty thousand and above (50K+), 26 percent were in the 25-49K category, 25 percent were in the 15-24K category while only 10 percent belonged to household where the monthly income was rupees
ten thousand or less. This anomaly can be explained by the fact that the level of literacy in Pakistan is very low and only the middle and upper income groups can afford to provide their children with education in general and higher education in particular.

As far as the respondent’s knowledge of Pakistani politics is concerned, the results were pretty impressive, only 2.6 percent had a score of below 25 percent. Thirty-four percent of the respondents scored between 25 percent and 50 percent (below average), 50 percent scored between 50 percent and 75 percent (above average), while 13 percent scored above 75 percent (good). The average score of all the respondents was 62 percent. The questions were posed as statements which were either correct or incorrect.

\( H_1: \text{New media is being used extensively by the educated youth} \)

\( H_1 \) hypothesised that new media is the more commonly used medium by the educated youth of the twin cities. To determine this, the respondents were asked for how long they had been using internet which gives access to most of the forms of new media. The results showed that 56 percent had been using the internet for over four years while another 26 percent stated that they had been using the internet for a period of 1-4 years. Pearson’s Correlations test was run to test whether a relationship existed between the lengths of time since the respondents started using the internet and the time spent on using the internet. The results (\( r=0.508, p>0.01 \)) show that there is a positive and significant relationship which shows that the respondents who had been using the internet for a longer period tended to use it for a longer period of time (Table 1).

**Table 1**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Duration of internet use in a week</th>
<th>Length of use of the internet</th>
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<td>0.508**</td>
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Note: data are correlation coefficients

\( **p<0.01 \)

Furthermore, 57 percent reported that they had been using the internet for more than two hours each week, which, was the maximum duration
mentioned in the questionnaire while another 17 percent said that they used it for a period of 1-2 hours. It is evident that new media is being used extensively by the educated youth of Rawalpindi-Islamabad region. Thus, $H_1$ stands proven.

$H_2$: Educated youth who use new media more show greater political efficacy

$H_2$ hypothesised that educated youth who use new media more show greater political efficacy. In this regard, efficacy was measured in terms of knowledge, discussion and participation in the political processes as a first step towards gauging the confidence level of the youth. To find out the level of political knowledge of the respondents, the instrument had included a set of 17 questions pertaining to the political scenario of Pakistan. In this regard, 63 percent of the respondents scored over 50 percent which is a fairly high score and one can safely say that the educated youth of the twin cities are well informed about Pakistan’s politics.

Further, applying correlation coefficient revealed that level of political knowledge is strongly related to the length of use of internet ($r=0.161, p > 0.01$), whereby, a greater number of the respondents who used the internet frequently had greater political knowledge which goes on to show that using internet in particular may lead to an increase in the level of political knowledge.

To analyse the other aspects of political efficacy like discussion and participations, similar correlation coefficients were applied. Results showed that there is strong relationship between weekly internet use and the frequency of political discussions with friends ($r=0.231, p > 0.01$), and ($r=0.273, p > 0.01$). Thus, those respondents who use the internet frequently have frequent discussion with their family and peers which shows that they are interested in discussing political issues. However, no relationship was found between weekly internet use and participation in political activities such as clubs, forums, students’ councils or political campaigns. As mentioned earlier, efficacy is the belief of an individual that he can make a positive difference for his country, and this involves action, as well as hope. Thus, when we see Pakistani youth displaying considerable political knowledge and interest but no actual participation, which is the ultimate aim. It can be concluded that educated youth who use new media more are not showing greater political efficacy and thus $H_2$ is not proven.

$H_3$: Socio-economic status influences new media use for the purpose of political efficacy

$H_3$ hypothesised that socio-economic factors play a strong role in how
new media is used for the purpose of political efficacy. The application of correlation coefficient revealed that income is strongly related to the length of time since the respondents first started using the internet \((r=0.189, p>0.01)\) as well as the duration of weekly use of internet \((r=0.137, p>0.05)\), whereby suggesting that those respondents who came from comparatively more affluent backgrounds had been using the internet for a longer period of time and their weekly use was also comparatively greater. However, there was no significant influence of income on the political knowledge of the respondents.

To analyse the other aspects of political efficacy like interest, discussion and participations, similar correlation coefficients were applied. Results showed the youth belonging to more affluent households were the least interested in finding out about national politics while using new media \((r=-0.120, p>0.05)\). However, no significant influence of income was found on the frequency of political discussions with friends and family, as well as participation in any political organization. However, a significantly lower number of respondents belonging to more affluent backgrounds voted in the last general elections. It was revealed that 42 percent of the respondents belonging to the lowest income category of upto Rs.15,000 voted as compared to the 58 percent who did not. On the other hand, only 24 percent of the respondents belonging to the highest income category of over Rs.45,000 voted in the last elections as compared to the 76 percent which did not. However, it has to be remembered that as all the respondents belonged to the age group of 18-24, some of them may not have attained the minimum voting age of 18 when the last general elections were held in February 2008, two years before the study was conducted.

Table 2

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Income Category</th>
<th>Upto Rs.15K</th>
<th>Rs.15K-30K</th>
<th>Rs.30K-45K</th>
<th>Rs.45K+</th>
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<tr>
<td>Voted in the last election</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not vote in the last election</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>76%</td>
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**Cross-tabulation of Income and Voting**

Data also revealed that there was no significant difference in the level of political knowledge of those respondents who belong to the higher income group and those who belong to the lower income group. Similarly, there were no drastic differences in the pattern of discussion, joining of political bodies, etc. of higher income group respondents and lower income group respondents. The only difference that was observed
was in regards to whether they had voted in the last election t(198.2) =2.04, \( p=0.042 \). In this regard, the results indicated that a greater number of respondents belonging to the lower income group (\( M=1.63, SD=0.047 \)) had voted in the last election as compared to those belonging to the higher income group (\( M=1.74, SD=0.031 \)). This is indeed a significant finding taking the socio-political environment of the country. It further indicates that those belonging to the higher income group were showing greater apathy for the whole political process. However, efficacy entails various aspects and not merely voting. Thus, can be concluded that the present data shows that socio-economic status as indicated by income level is not acting as a strong influence on new media use for the purpose of political efficacy. Thus, \( H_3 \) is not proven.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

All over the world new media is increasingly being used for generating activism as it has the potential of reaching a large number of people without the interference of a great many gatekeepers. The aim of the research had been to determine the role of new media in generating political efficacy amongst the educated youth. New media is a relatively new phenomenon in Pakistan and is more accessible in urban areas as compared to rural areas. Another significant factor relates to its usage by a significant number of youth who have quickly adopted the new information technology.

Gunther and Mughan (2000) elaborated, that in countries undergoing a transition, political communication through the media facilitates democratization and re-socializes the masses to new democratic rules of the game. New media can play a very strong role in encouraging interest and participation in politics and is thus being used widely across the world (Eagles and Davidson, 2001; Kim and Johnson, 2006; Kim and Kim, 2007; Bachen et al., 2008). However, unfortunately in Pakistan this is not the case. Although the youth who used new media had greater political knowledge but they showed no inclination to participate more actively in the nations affairs. Efficacy is the confidence of individuals but prior research has shown that this confidence comes with knowledge and participation (Almond & Verba, 1963; Campbell et al, 1954; Verba et al, 1995). Data revealed that although the youth had considerable knowledge regarding politics yet they did not discuss it with their family or peers and nor did they participate by joining student level political bodies or voting. This can be due in part to the apathy and distrust in politics, as well as a more recent trend where the youth are cocooned in their own rooms away from social life (Baumgartner &
Morris, 2010; Quintelier & Vissers, 2008; Scheufele & Nisbet, 2002).

The third hypothesis related to how socio-economic factors influence new media use for the purpose of political awareness. It was revealed that in the selected sample, income level did not have any particular influence on the use of new media for the purpose of political efficacy. This on the surface seems to negate the notion of the knowledge gap hypothesis which had declared that "as the infusion of mass media information into a social system increases, segments of the population with higher socio-economic status tend to acquire this information at a faster rate than the lower status segments, so that the gap in knowledge between the segments tends to increase rather than decrease" (Tichenor, Donohue and Olien, 1970). However, demographic information indicates that majority of the population who reaches the universities belongs to affluent households which is true all over the world but with the economic and sociological circumstances of Pakistan becomes doubly so.

In conclusion, one can say that new media has a great deal of potential in terms of creating political efficacy amongst the youth which can be explored further and effective measures can be taken to fully utilise its potential. The research showed that the youth have a great deal of interest in political issues but they do not have the opportunities to participate fully in the democratic process. New media can be used as a platform for the youth to play a more active role in the process. However, the problem areas that emerged related to the knowledge gap between genders needs to be rectified to fully develop the potential of this media.

The main limitation of the research related to the inaccessibility of new media to a majority of the country’s large population. Thus, the results can only be applied to limited and fortunate elite. Secondly, a longitudinal study of the changes that are taking place in the attitudes of the youth would have been more apt but due to time and financial constraints, the present research was limited to a single survey.

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Raising the Influence of New Media in Instilling Political Efficacy Against Youth


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