INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES BULLETIN
ISSN: (E) 3007-1917 (P) 3007-1909
Volume 4, Issue 6, 2026

GENDER DIFFERENCES AND ONLINE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN PAKISTAN

Rakhshanda Kokab[*1], Amber Ferdoos[2]

[*1]*PhD Scholar, Department of Sociology, International Islamic University, Islamabad*
[2]*Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, International Islamic University, Islamabad*

[*1]kokab.0015@gmail.com, [2]amber.ferdoos@iiu.edu.pk

Corresponding Author:
Rakhshanda Kokab
DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20551869

Received	Accepted	Published
07 April 2026	19 May 2026	05 June 2026

ABSTRACT

This study compares the political participation of males and females in Pakistan, both Active and Passive. The data were collected from 302 respondents (153 males and 149 females) using a quantitative method and analyzed using descriptive statistics and an independent-samples t-test. The results indicate that there is no significant difference between men and women in passive engagement (political news consumption); however, there remains a large difference in active engagement. Male users are more likely to engage in overt political activities, such as posting opinions, sharing content, and participating in discussions on political matters. By comparison, both sexes exhibit very weak institutional involvement, such as reaching out to elected officials. The study also shows that issues of safety and online harassment are major barriers to participation, with a negative impact on political expression. Results are discussed within the framework of the theories of Resource Theory (1995), Gender Role Theory (2012), and Social Capital Theory (1995), stressing the significance of social inequalities in terms of resources, social norms, and restricted civic networks. The study reveals that despite giving digital access to women, there are still structural and cultural hurdles that have an impact on the political participation of women in Pakistan.

KEYWORDS: *Political participation, Gender Differences, Descriptive*

Introduction

Online political participation has become a form of civic engagement that is critical in modern democracies as citizens move their political lives to the digital world and are able to access information, voice their opinions, and organize networks (Theocharis& van Deth, 2018). According to current telecoms statistics, internet access in Pakistan is increasing gradually, and more women have access; however, there is a digital gender gap in access, autonomy, and usage (GSMA, 2024).

This change in context brings new opportunities to study how gender impacts trends of online political participation, for instance, political conversation, political debate, and expressive participation. The inequality in access to online literacy, family ownership of devices, and online harassment can affect women more than men when it comes to their willingness to engage in visible political activity (Digital Rights Foundation, 2024).

In the broader debate on digital democracy, more recent research points out that online political participation takes place in the problematic shifts in so-called networked publics, in which social media platforms reshape the ways citizens encounter, make sense of, and share political

information (boyd, 2014; Castells, 2012). Political action in a digitally mediated space is not necessarily limited to more traditional political actions such as voting or campaigning, but is rather a daily routine of liking, commenting, and sharing political content. But researchers caution that these types of participation are unevenly distributed, with algorithmic visibility, platform governance, and unequal access to digital resources potentially influencing the participants and participation (Chadwick, 2017).

On an international scale, research has continuously indicated that social media has emerged as the main access point to political information, particularly among the youth. As an example, the evidence of surveys suggests that a considerable percentage of internet users now access political news on websites like Facebook, X (Twitter), and YouTube instead of the old news media (Pew Research Center, 2023). At the same time, the research on the digital divide has shifted focus from the access dimension to the differences in skills, autonomy of use, and quality of engagement, and meaningful participation is no longer about access/connectivity (van Dijk, 2020; International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 2024).

In South Asian contexts like Pakistan, online platforms are increasingly used for political expression, activism, and mobilisation around issues, but are also accompanying more polarization as well as gendered risks. Internet freedom reports have pointed out that while there has been an increase in opportunities for political communication through digital platforms, it has also become a channel for surveillance, harassment, and specific intimidation, leading to deterrence of open participation (Freedom House, 2024). Digital gender studies further show that women are more likely to be targeted in coordinated online attacks and engage in self-censorship, which helps limit their political expression, where it can take place (Khan &Gardezi, 2023).

Most of the research conducted on the Pakistani population focuses on either the role of social media during elections, the youth political activism, or the impact of social media on political attitudes. Not many studies have offered a multidimensional, scale-based measure of online political participation that differentiates between political discussion (online debates, commenting, peer/family discussions) and more visible participation behaviors such as posting, sharing, and online campaign participation. Also, previous research normally treats online participation as a single dimension, failing to distinguish between the different forms of participation that may vary in terms of their visibility and risk.

Hence, there is a lack of empirical understanding of how gender impacts the kinds of online politics in Pakistan. This paper addresses them by (1) conceptualizing online political participation as a multidimensional variable, (2) adding political discussions as an explicit engagement variable, and (3) using a scale-based survey design to descriptively compare the patterns of participation between genders. The purpose of this study is to provide a description of the patterns of online political participation of men and women in Pakistan.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is grounded in the assumption that online political participation is grounded in how citizens engage politics online (via social media, messaging apps, online portals, etc.). Since it is a descriptive, comparative (gender-based) study, the aim is to describe the degree and patterns of online political participation and make comparisons between the profiles of participation among gender groups, as opposed to testing causal effects. Therefore, gender is treated as a background/demographic variable, which could be used to describe the variation in participation of both males and females.

Online political engagement is likely to vary from individual to individual in terms of demographic considerations (such as age, education, place of residence, and internet access) and situational factors (such as digital inclusion and perceived safety). Available evidence suggests that women's use of mobile Internet in Pakistan has increased, and this digital gender gap has narrowed, suggesting more women are able to access the Internet, but the issue of digital independence and technology-fueled gender-based violence

restricting women's visibility and expression online persists (Digital Rights Foundation, 2024; GSMA, 2024). It is conceptualized as multidimensional, that is, the concept of participation involves a variety of different but related behaviors online: information seeking, expression, mobilization, e-participation, and contacting institutions online (Ruess et al., 2023; Theocharis& van Deth, 2018; Waeterloos et al., 2021).

Background Variables	Study Variable	Dimensions / Indicators
Personal Information • Age • Gender • Area of residence (urban/rural) • Education level • Employment status • Smartphone ownership • Internet access frequency	Online political participation	• Online political information seeking • Online political expression • Online mobilizational participation • Online civic contact (contacting officials digitally) • E-participation & digital collective action • (Optional contextual module) perceived online safety/self-censorship

Literature Review

Internet political participation has become a feature of contemporary political participation and is an indicator of the increasing influence of the Internet on civic behaviors. Researchers claim that the use of digital media has expanded the repertoire of political participation, because participation is more affordable and new expressive and networked forms of participation, such as posting views on social media, sharing political information, and participating in digital campaigns, are possible (Ekman &Amnå, 2012; Oser&Boulianne, 2020). In the recent conceptual studies, the use of online political participation may be viewed as a multidimensional construct that includes expressive (posting/commenting), mobilizational (campaigning/persuading), and digital collective acts (Ruess et al., 2023).

Political discourses are always mentioned as one of the important processes that link the political consciousness and action. Interpersonal discourse fosters political knowledge, civic competence, and likelihood of participation (Eveland&Hively, 2009). Using online political discussions has been seen to increase the likelihood of engaging in political acts as the former helps shape opinions and social support (Kim et al., 2013). In addition, peer and family conversations are also formative in political socialization and political behavioral normalization (McDevitt & Chaffee, 2002).

The use of social media greatly influences the results of political participation. The likelihood of online and offline interaction is higher with exposure to political content on social network sites when complemented by interactive actions like commenting and sharing it (Skoric et al., 2016). Valenzuela et al. (2009) established that Facebook use intensity has a positive relationship with civic participation, especially when Facebook users receive political information as opposed to social information in general. Similarly, Halpern and Gibbs (2013) believe that the frequency of use, platform type, and exposure to political accounts (e.g., parties, leaders, news channels) are also significant contextual variables when it comes to the interpretation of online political participation.

In the literature of gender and politics, studies have shown that digital media have the potential to decrease and reproduce inequalities in participation. While online spaces may eliminate physical and mobility barriers to participation, gender gaps in visible political participation may still be prevalent (Hargittai& Shaw, 2013). Studies have shown that sometimes women do not tend to speak up in online debates or discussions of a controversial nature because they fear social

backlash or negative publicity (Bode, 2017). Moreover, it has been revealed that exposure to online harassment leads to self-censorship among women and decreases their desire to post political information, discuss, or get involved in discussions (Fox & Tang, 2017).

Only recently have research efforts begun to study how algorithms and platform design shape political involvement, and how curated information environments are said to be increasingly shaping political involvement. The algorithmic curation determines what political content is exposed, which means that users view, engage with, and ultimately participate in politics (Kreiss & McGregor, 2019). There is evidence that exposure to personalized political content can improve selective engagement by users of such content, who are more likely to engage with content that matches their beliefs, to engage more in like-minded networks, and to reduce cross-cutting discussion (Cinelli et al., 2021). At the same time, interactive features such as the share, retweet, and comment buttons lower the bar for participation, encouraging low threshold engagement behavior that can go on to create the opportunity for greater mobilization of political activity (Bossetta, 2018).

This implies that online political engagement is not only an activity that is motivated by individuals, but also influenced by technological structures, which determine patterns of interaction. A second new direction in research brings focus to the concept of connective action, wherein people engage in political action by sharing personalized content as opposed to an organized structure (Bennett &Segerberg, 2012). This type of participation is especially applicable to the digital environment, where people have the opportunity to express their political views through posting opinions, hashtags, and content related to issues to their networks. It is through such an individualized form of interaction that it is more evident with younger users and has a higher likelihood of engaging in digitally mediated interaction involving personal identity and political expression (Theocharis et al., 2021).

Nonetheless, uneven patterns of participation can also be generated through this type of engagement, where people who possess a higher level of digital confidence and social capital will engage more prominently. The concept of digital transformation has greatly transformed political communication in the Pakistani context. With the growing penetration of smartphones and the spread of the Internet, the capacity of citizens to receive and spread information on political issues has also increased. According to a recent study in Pakistan, the engagement of political information exposure on social media during general elections is positively related to political attitude and engagement behavior changes (Iqbal, 2024).

Similarly, Warraich and Akhtar (2021) determined that political information sharing by users on Facebook in Pakistan was linked to wider patterns of engagement, thus confirming the role of online spaces of discussion in the process of participation. Heuristic studies of university students in Pakistan show that there is a positive relationship between social media and political awareness and political participation; however, the relationship between political content interaction with the social media contents and the mere consumption of social media contents has been found to be negative (Jamil & Shah, 2021). However, the gender role of online participation is also highlighted in Pakistani studies. Women are at a disproportionate risk in digital environments, and there are significant instances of technology-enabled gender-based violence, as reported in the Digital Rights Foundation (2024). Likewise, the research by academic institutions on the issue of harassment in Pakistan has found that women are discouraged from engaging in visible politics due to harassment and threats on the Internet (Naseer& Ashraf, 2022).

These dynamic implications suggest that gender differences in political participation online may be moderated by the type of mode, and that these differences may be quite significant for more visible forms of political participation, such as posting and debating publicly. The literature shows that online politics manifests itself in the context of a complex of political discourses, trends of social media use, and the social reality of gender. However, in Pakistan, the literature of digital political communication is accumulating, but there is still a lack of systematized scale-oriented measurement of the political discourse

and political participation online under the umbrella concept of a single descriptive model. This paper fills such a gap by systematizing the operationalization of these constructs and analyzing gender-based trends in online political participation.

Theoretical Framework

The present study is based on an integrated approach where Civic Voluntarism Model (Resource Theory), Gender Role Theory, and Social Capital Theory have been combined to get a better understanding of gendered patterns of online political participation. All these are frameworks that together account for the structuring of participation in the digital political sphere, in terms of structural resources and socio-cultural norms. Digital platforms create new opportunities for engagement, but access, skills, social norms and expectations, and network configurations have an impact on who does what.

According to Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady (1995), political participation is understood in terms of resources, motivation, and recruitment, which is known as the Civic Voluntarism Model. This model suggests that one will be more likely to participate if he or she has the necessary resources, including time, education, and civic skills. These resources also include technological access, internet connectivity, smartphone ownership, and digital literacy, in the digital context. The pertinence of this model in the current research is that it can help to understand how unequal access to digital resources can influence political participation online. There is a decreasing gender gap in mobile internet users in Pakistan (GSMA, 2024), but gender gaps in digital autonomy and skills and access to mobilising networks remain. The inequalities can constrain women's participation, including in more active and visible online political participation.

Gender Role Theory, as proposed by Alice Eagly and Wendy Wood (2012), offers an understanding of the socially constructed notions of masculinity and femininity, and the effect that these have on behaviour. One theory is that traditional gender roles tend to link the act of political expression and leadership with men, and women are put in less visible spaces, or the private sphere. These norms are still influential in patterns of participation within digital environments. Women might not be as likely as men to actively participate in "public" political behaviour, like posting on social media, because of fear of social disapproval or damage to their reputation. Further, gendered exposure to online harassment also serves to perpetuate and reinforce self-censorship and curtail participation. Pakistan's evidence shows that women face a disproportionate impact of technology-facilitated harassment, which hinders them from participating in online political spaces (Digital Rights Foundation, 2024). Therefore, Gender Role Theory can be used to help explain the role that norms and perceived risks play in the gender differences in online political behavior.

According to Robert D. Putnam's (1995, 2000) Social Capital Theory, some of the key factors that facilitate political participation are social networks, trust, and civic involvement. There is a difference between bonding and bridging social capital, bonding being more intimate and bridging more expansive and diverse. Women are likely to be more restricted within the bonding network of their family and close friends, whereas men have more access to the bridging network, which will expose them to political information and opportunities to participate. This network structure can affect political activity, awareness, and confidence in that activity. Online, these trends could manifest as unequal participation in which those with wider networks are more inclined to participate in conversation, mobilize, and express themselves politically.

These three theories give a wholesome framework to understand online political participation as a multidimensional phenomenon, and it is a gendered phenomenon. The role of unequal digital resources is highlighted in the Civic Voluntarism Model, while social norms and perceived risks are explained in the Gender Role Theory, and network structures and social connections are emphasized in the Social Capital Theory. The present research seeks to explain the gender differences in online political participation in Pakistan by incorporating these perspectives and how they interact with one another, with

different patterns of political participation in the online sphere.

Quantitative Cross-sectional Descriptive Method

The current study was a quantitative cross-sectional descriptive study in order to explore the trends in online political participation of men and women in Pakistan. A survey approach to research was used to recruit and self-report online political activities of the participants. The reason for this choice was that it would allow for systematic description and comparison of behavioral patterns of the gender groups without the manipulation of variables.

Participants

The respondents in the research were 302, consisting of 153 males and 149 females. Convenience sampling was chosen in recruiting the participants online as a non-probability sampling. The sample constituted a heterogeneous population, as there were people with different educational and social backgrounds. The research was focused on the issue of online political participation in the context of Pakistan, and only those who are active online and who live in Pakistan were considered.

Instrument

A structured questionnaire was used to measure online political participation as a multidimensional construct to collect data. The measurement of the responses was based on a Likert-type scale (e.g., 1 = Never to 5 = Very often). The scale was created based on literature reviewed on online political participation, with adaptations to the Pakistani context. The content validity was achieved by orienting it to previous theoretical models and empirical research on online political involvement. Cronbach's alpha was used to measure the internal consistency of the scale, and it provided a value of $\alpha = .918$, which implies that this scale is highly reliable and has good internal consistency.

Reliability and validity were considered and well maintained during the research process. The standardized Likert scale items were used to measure each construct in order to provide reliability, and the overall scale had a strong internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.918), meaning that items consistently measured what was intended.

The questionnaire was designed to be valid, using literature and existing questionnaires regarding online political participation. The items were carefully formulated to be representative of each construct. Using multiple indicators within each dimension aided in the establishment of construct validity. The study applied measures to enhance the consistency of the results, and also to ensure that the patterns of online political participation under study are accurately represented.

Table 1: Reliability Scale of variables

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.918	31

Procedure

The data gathering was done through an online questionnaire using social media and electronic means of communication. The respondents were advised of the reason why the study was conducted, and participation was voluntary. The informed consent was signed electronically, and the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants were assured. No personally identifying information was collected.

Ethical Considerations

The research was carried out in accordance with the ethical rules in social studies research. All the participation was voluntary, and respondents were told they had the option of stopping their participation at any time without any repercussions. The data collection procedure was carried out with consideration of informed consent. Confidentiality and anonymity of participants were ensured through the research, as no information was collected that identified

participants, and data were secured. The internal consistency of the measure was high (Cronbach's alpha of 0.918), indicating high reliability of the items in measuring the constructs intended. To achieve this, a variety of ages and gender groups were used to ensure meaningful comparisons and generalizable findings while keeping with the idea of keeping it varied. The research was ethical, protecting the rights of the participants, securing the data, and following the standard research protocol during the research process.

Operationalization

Online Political Participation

Online political participation is the political activity and action people conduct using digital platforms to acquire political information, share or express political opinions, affect other people, organize collective action, or communicate with political institutions. Studies in recent years have pointed out that engaging in political participation online is not a stand-alone behavior, but rather a collection of various behaviors (Ruess et al., 2023; Theocharis& van Deth, 2018). In this context, it was measured by using items that were based on frequencies and used a Likert scale, and yielded subscale scores for each indicator, which can then be added together to form a composite Online Political Participation Index. (source: Digital Rights Foundation, 2024; Waeterloos et al., 2021).

Online Political Information Seeking

Online political information seeking is the extent to which individuals access, monitor, and validate political information online. It involves reading political news on the Internet, subscribing to political pages/accounts, watching political news, and checking the accuracy of political news. (Ruess et al., 2023; Theocharis& van Deth, 2018). It has been measured with questions on Likert scales measuring the frequency with which people read the news, follow political sources, watch political videos, and check facts online.

Online Political Expression

Political expression and response online: This type of expression is more. Online political expression is the extent to which people express online political opinions and/or political responses through posting, commenting, sharing, debating, or creating political information (Digital Rights Foundation, 2024). It will be assessed by using Likert scale questions that will indicate the frequency of occurrence of the person reacting, sharing political posts, commenting on political issues, posting personal opinions, and participating in political discussions. (Waeterloos et al., 2021).

Online Mobilizational Participation

Online mobilizational participation is a practice and behavior that mobilizes, persuades, or recruits others to participate in politics. It involves spreading calls-to-action, persuading others to vote, reaching out to others to join political activities/groups, and organizing outreach with online devices (Boulianne, 2015). It was measured by use of Likert scale questions that measure the frequency with which the respondents, when instigating others to take part, share mobilizing messages, invite others to attend campaigns, or organize political outreach using platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, or X.

Online Civic Contact

Online civic contact refers to direct online interaction with an institution or actor with a political concern, a call for action, or feedback. These include messaging and tagging institutions openly, filing online grievances, and using official portals to seek answers from elected officials. (Theocharis& van Deth, 2018). It was measured through the frequency of contacting the officials by email/message, tagging the institutions online, and using online government portals, using the Likert scale questions.

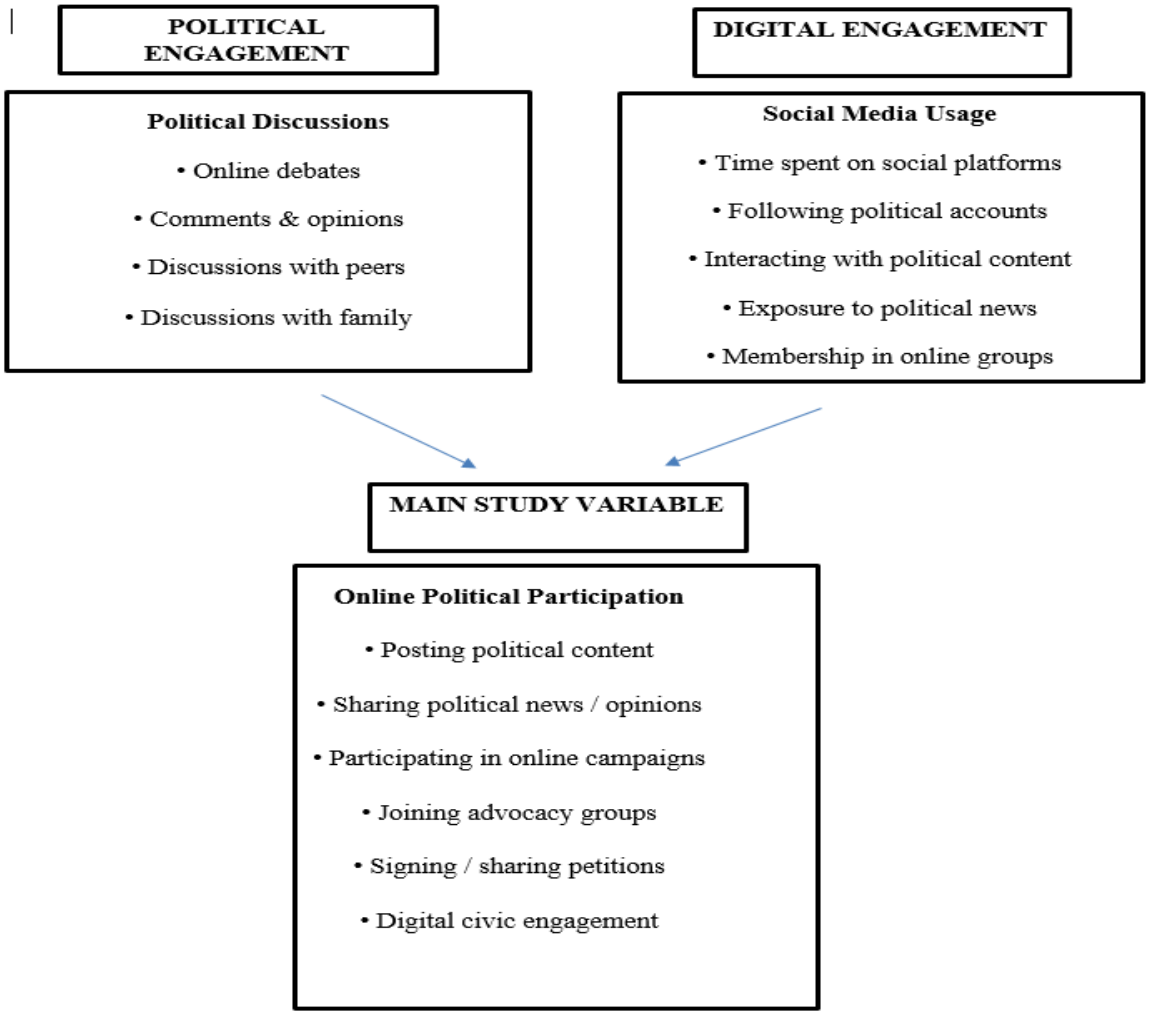
E-Participation and Digital Collective Action

E-participation and digital collective action: participation in digitally mediated civic and political activities such as e-petitions, signing up to online advocacy groups, participating in hashtag movements, and participating in online campaigns on social issues. (Ruess et al., 2023; Theocharis& van Deth, 2018). Measured through Likert scale items of petition attendance, hashtag campaigns, online advocacy groups, and online campaigning.

Optional Contextual Module: Perceived Online Safety and Self-Censorship

Online safety and self-censorship refer to the level of online safety the respondents feel when expressing their political opinions online and the fear of being harassed for participating. (Digital Rights Foundation, 2024). It was measured using Likert-scale items about fear of harassment, comfort using the Internet to express views, and avoidance of posting views politically.

Variable	Category	Male f (%)	Female f (%)
Age	15–20	33 (21.6%)	48 (32.2%)
	21–25	55 (35.9%)	56 (37.6%)
	26–30	46 (30.1%)	27 (18.1%)
	31 and above	19 (12.4%)	18 (12.1%)
Education	Secondary or below	9 (5.9%)	5 (3.4%)
	Intermediate	45 (29.4%)	64 (43.0%)
	Bachelor	64 (41.8%)	41 (27.5%)
	Master/PhD	35 (22.9%)	39 (26.1%)
Area of Residence	Urban	93 (60.8%)	104 (69.8%)
	Rural	60 (39.2%)	45 (30.2%)
Employment Status	Student	52 (34.0%)	96 (64.4%)
	Employed/Self-Employed	88 (57.5%)	26 (17.4%)
	Other/Unemployed	13 (8.5%)	27 (18.1%)



Conceptual Framework:1

Descriptive Analysis

The current study aimed to survey 302 respondents to investigate the gender of online political participation. The data collected were analysed with the use of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics (that is, frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were used to summarise the patterns of online political participation. An independent samples t-test was used to test the gender difference in political participation online. The reason to apply the t-test was that the study was to compare the mean scores of two independent sets of respondents (male and female respondents) on different dimensions of online political participation. To more accurately determine if any differences that were found in the participation patterns were real and not due to chance, the t-test was used.

Table 2. Demographic Profile of Respondents by Gender (N=302)

The sample demographics are shown in Table 2. A majority of the participants were in the age group 21-25 years (36.8%), followed by 15-20 years (26.8%), 26-30 years (24.2%), and 31 years and above (12.3%), which are all young age groups. In regard to education, intermediate (36.1%) and bachelor's level (34.8%) education was the most common, followed by master's (21.9%), secondary (4.3%), PhD (2.6%), and primary (0.3%). As far as place of residence is concerned, 65.2% were from urban areas and 34.8% from rural areas. As regards status in employment, the maximum

percentage was students (49.0%), followed by employed persons (29.1%), and a lesser percentage was self-employed (6.6%), unemployed (6.6%), homemakers (4.6%), and others (4.0%). Overall, the sample is young, relatively educated, and digitally connected, and is appropriate to study online political engagement among the male and female respondents.

Table 3. Digital Access and Platform Use by Gender (N=302)

Statement	Gender	Never f (%)	Sometimes f (%)	Often / Daily f (%)	Mean	SD	Mode	Min	Max
Internet Access Frequency	Male	5 (3.3%)	12 (7.9%)	135 (88.8%)	1.14	.437	1	1	3
	Female	7 (4.7%)	12 (8.1%)	130 (87.2%)	1.17	.490	1	1	3
Smartphone Ownership	Male	0 (0.0%)	~	153 (100.0%)	1.00	.000	1	1	1
	Female	7 (4.7%)	~	142 (95.3%)	1.05	.212	1	1	2
WhatsApp	Male	~	~	21 (13.7%)	3.75	1.710	3	1	6
	Female	~	~	50 (33.6%)	3.03	1.903	1	1	6
Facebook	Male	~	~	16 (10.5%)	3.75	1.710	3	1	6
	Female	~	~	11 (7.4%)	3.03	1.903	1	1	6
Instagram	Male	~	~	38 (24.8%)	3.75	1.710	3	1	6
	Female	~	~	45 (30.2%)	3.03	1.903	1	1	6
X/Twitter	Male	~	~	17 (11.1%)	3.75	1.710	3	1	6
	Female	~	~	4 (2.7%)	3.03	1.903	1	1	6

Statement	Gender	Never f (%)	Sometimes f (%)	Often / Daily f (%)	Mean	SD	Mode	Min	Max
TikTok	Male	~	~	27 (17.6%)	3.75	1.710	3	1	6
	Female	~	~	6 (4.0%)	3.03	1.903	1	1	6
YouTube	Male	~	~	34 (22.2%)	3.75	1.710	3	1	6
	Female	~	~	33 (22.1%)	3.03	1.903	1	1	6

Table 3 shows that a very large proportion of men and women indicated that they use the Internet daily (88.2% of males and 87.2% of females). There were smaller percentages who used the Internet at least once a week (3.3% males, 4.7% females) and once a week (7.8% males, 8.1% females). Males (100%) and females (95.3%, 4.7% do not own a smartphone) had 100% and virtually 100% smartphone ownership. In terms of the most actively used platform, the most popular ones were the Instagram platform (among both males (24.8%) and females (30.2%)). Females used WhatsApp more than males (33.6% to 13.7%), and males used TikTok more than females (17.6% to 4.0%). About a fifth of both males and females (22.2% and 22.1%) were accessing YouTube.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Passive Political Consumption (N=302)

Statement	Gender	Never f (%)	Sometimes f (%)	Often/Very Often f (%)	Mean	SD	Mode	Min	Max
I read political news or updates online.	Male	2 (1.3%)	58 (37.9%)	68 (44.4%)	3.34	.897	3	1	5
	Female	10 (6.7%)	62 (41.6%)	53 (35.5%)	3.17	1.042	3	1	5
I follow political pages, accounts, or parties.	Male	36 (23.5%)	43 (28.1%)	35 (22.9%)	2.53	1.136	3	1	5
	Female	49 (32.9%)	38 (25.5%)	24 (16.1%)	2.30	1.190	1	1	5
I watch political	Male	11 (7.2%)	59 (38.6%)	60 (39.3%)	3.19	1.037	3	1	5

Statement	Gender	Never f (%)	Sometimes f (%)	Often/Very Often f (%)	Mean	SD	Mode	Min	Max
speeches or debates.	Female	28 (18.8%)	56 (37.6%)	30 (20.1%)	2.64	1.098	3	1	5
I searched online to verify information.	Male	15 (9.8%)	59 (38.6%)	41 (26.8%)	2.90	1.059	3	1	5
	Female	33 (22.1%)	49 (32.9%)	37 (24.8%)	2.69	1.230	3	1	5
I read political threads without commenting.	Male	10 (6.5%)	51 (33.3%)	70 (45.8%)	3.27	1.034	4	1	5
	Female	23 (15.4%)	52 (34.9%)	48 (32.3%)	2.92	1.165	3	1	5

Table 4 displays descriptive statistics of passive online political consumption involving reading, following, viewing, and silently observing content. The most common activity among males was reading political news, 37.9% of males reported that they sometimes read political news, and 35.9% of males reported that they sometimes read political news. Following political pages was less frequent, especially among females (32.9% never; M = 2.30, SD = 1.19) compared to males (23.5% never; M = 2.53, SD = 1.14). Watching political speeches showed moderate engagement among males (38.6% sometimes, 30.1% often; M = 3.19, SD = 1.04), but lower among females (18.8% never, 15.4% often; M = 2.64, SD = 1.10). In fact-checking of political information, males reported more engagement (38.6% sometimes; M = 2.90, SD = 1.06) than females, when 22.1% of females never checked the information (M = 2.69, SD = 1.23). In a similar trend, political conversations that were not commented on were a common occurrence, especially among males (36.6% often; M = 3.27, SD = 1.03), as compared to females (24.2% often; M = 2.92, SD = 1.17). In general, passive political consumption was moderately prevalent in both groups, but males were always more engaged.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for Items Measuring "Active Low-Effort Engagement" (N=302)

Statement	Gender	Never f (%)	Sometimes f (%)	Often/Very Often f (%)	Mean	SD	Mode	Min	Max
I react (like/emoji) to political posts.	Male	46 (30.1%)	54 (35.3%)	20 (13.1%)	2.34	1.095	3	1	5
	Female	78 (52.3%)	29 (19.5%)	13 (8.8%)	1.88	1.108	1	1	5
I share or repost	Male	50 (32.7%)	51 (33.3%)	12 (7.8%)	2.18	1.007	3	1	5

Statement	Gender	Never f (%)	Sometimes f (%)	Often/Very Often f (%)	Mean	SD	Mode	Min	Max
political content.	Female	72 (48.3%)	29 (19.5%)	11 (7.4%)	1.89	1.066	1	1	5
I comment on political posts or issues.	Male	65 (42.5%)	42 (27.5%)	9 (5.9%)	1.98	1.003	1	1	5
	Female	95 (63.8%)	26 (17.4%)	5 (3.3%)	1.62	.955	1	1	5
I post my own political opinion or story.	Male	56 (36.6%)	42 (27.5%)	17 (11.1%)	2.16	1.095	1	1	5
	Female	89 (59.7%)	27 (18.1%)	8 (5.4%)	1.70	.971	1	1	5
I participate in online political discussions.	Male	56 (36.6%)	48 (31.4%)	14 (9.2%)	2.18	1.119	1	1	5
	Female	91 (61.1%)	21 (14.1%)	8 (5.4%)	1.66	.978	1	1	5

This subscale reflects "liking, sharing, commenting" with minimal effort. Table 5 indicates a definite drop in active participation as opposed to passive consumption, more so among females. For reacting to political posts, over half of females (52.3%) never engaged, with only 19.5% sometimes (M = 1.88, SD = 1.11), whereas males reported higher activity (35.3% sometimes; M = 2.34, SD = 1.10). Sharing political content was also infrequent, particularly among females (48.3% never; M = 1.89, SD = 1.07), compared to males (32.7% never, 33.3% sometimes; M = 2.18, SD = 1.01). The least frequent was commenting, with 63.8% of females and 42.5% of males never commenting (M = 1.62 vs. 1.98). The low rates of posting personal political views were especially low for females (59.7% never; M = 2.16) compared to males (36.6% never; M = 2.16). There was also a limited participation in online political discourse, with 61.1% of the females and 36.6% of the males never participating (M = 1.66 vs. 2.18). These results have indicated a pronounced gender disparity, with females always reporting less of the low effort political engagement online.

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics for Items Measuring "Mobilization and Persuasion" (N=302)

Statement	Gender	Never f (%)	Sometimes f (%)	Often/Very Often f (%)	Mean	SD	Mode	Min	Max
I encourage friends/family to vote or take action.	Male	50 (32.7%)	47 (30.7%)	15 (9.8%)	2.18	1.001	1	1	4
	Female	61 (40.9%)	41 (27.5%)	14 (9.4%)	2.08	1.094	1	1	5
I share calls to action(e.g., contact officials).	Male	90 (58.8%)	19 (12.4%)	9 (5.9%)	1.66	.933	1	1	5
	Female	89 (59.7%)	26 (17.4%)	7 (4.7%)	1.68	.966	1	1	5
I try to persuade others about a political issue.	Male	85 (55.6%)	23 (15.0%)	10 (6.5%)	1.74	.985	1	1	5
	Female	84 (56.4%)	20 (13.4%)	9 (6.0%)	1.70	.962	1	1	5
I invite others to join political groups/pages.	Male	71 (46.4%)	34 (22.2%)	15 (9.8%)	1.97	1.088	1	1	5
	Female	100 (67.1%)	17 (11.4%)	8 (5.3%)	1.56	.940	1	1	5
I coordinate/organize political outreach online.	Male	106 (69.3%)	17 (11.1%)	8 (5.3%)	1.53	.911	1	1	5
	Female	105 (70.5%)	15 (10.1%)	5 (3.3%)	1.48	.859	1	1	5

This subscale looks at the mobilization actions that seek to influence others to act politically. From Table 6, it can be seen that these behaviours are typically not common for either sex. In order to persuade other people to vote or act, moderate answers of sometimes (M male = 2.18, SD = 1.00; M female = 2.08, SD = 1.09) resulted in 32.7 percent of the males and 40.9 percent of females reporting that they never did. Majorities of males (58.8%) and females (59.7%) also indicated that they never used being more specific and providing calls to action (M ≈ 1.66-1.68). Equally rare was the ability to persuade others online, with more than half of both the male (55.6) and female (56.4) never using it (M ≈ 1.701.74). It was also restricted to invite others to political groups; females in particular (67.1% never vs. 46.4% males). The least common behaviour was coordinating or organising political outreach, with 69.3% of males and 70.5% of females reporting 'never' (M_male = 1.53, SD = 0.91; M_female = 1.48, SD = 0.86). On the whole, there is very low online political mobilization among both groups, and there are minimal differences in gender.

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics for Items Measuring "Institutional Contact and Feedback" (N=302)

Statement	Gender	Never f (%)	Sometimes f (%)	Often/Very Often f (%)	Mean	SD	Mode	Min	Max
I message/email a politician or party.	Male	126 (82.4%)	11 (7.2%)	5 (3.3%)	1.33	.802	1	1	5
	Female	113 (75.8%)	11 (7.4%)	4 (2.7%)	1.37	.738	1	1	4
I tag public officials or institutions online.	Male	106 (69.3%)	17 (11.1%)	11 (7.2%)	1.56	.952	1	1	4
	Female	102 (68.5%)	21 (14.1%)	2 (1.3%)	1.48	.785	1	1	4
I submit complaints via an official portal.	Male	86 (56.2%)	26 (17.0%)	8 (5.3%)	1.72	.949	1	1	5
	Female	96 (64.4%)	20 (13.4%)	5 (3.4%)	1.56	.849	1	1	4
I participate in online feedback/consultations.	Male	68 (44.4%)	25 (16.3%)	13 (8.5%)	1.90	1.005	1	1	5
	Female	75 (50.3%)	33 (22.1%)	6 (4.1%)	1.81	.942	1	1	5

This subscale is an indicator of direct contact with political actors and institutions. The levels of engagement in these formal online activities (Table 7) are very low. Messaging or emailing politicians was rare, with 82.4% of males and 75.8% of females reporting "never" (M_male = 1.33, SD = 0.80; M_female = 1.37, SD = 0.74). It was also not very common to mark government officials (never: 69.3% males, 68.5% females). There was also a restriction on submitting complaints via official portals, with 56.2% of males and 64.4% of females reporting never (M male = 1.72, SD = 0.95; M female = 1.56, SD = 0.85). A low proportion of participants who never participated in an online consultation or online feedback (44.4% for males and 50.3% for

females). Overall, there is little direct digital interaction with political institutions for the two groups.

Table 8. Descriptive Statistics for Items Measuring "Collective Action and Advocacy" (N=302)

Statement	Gender	Never f (%)	Sometimes f (%)	Often/Very Often f (%)	Mean	SD	Mode	Min	Max
I sign or share online petitions	Male	107 (69.9%)	17 (11.1%)	4 (2.7%)	1.48	.867	1	1	5
	Female	90 (60.4%)	24 (16.1%)	5 (3.4%)	1.63	.896	1	1	5
I participate in hashtag campaigns.	Male	64 (41.8%)	42 (27.5%)	13 (8.5%)	2.03	1.035	1	1	5
	Female	79 (53.0%)	28 (18.8%)	10 (6.7%)	1.81	1.029	1	1	5
I join online advocacy groups or pages.	Male	68 (44.4%)	35 (22.9%)	19 (12.4%)	2.06	1.143	1	1	5
	Female	83 (55.7%)	27 (18.1%)	14 (9.4%)	1.83	1.093	1	1	5
I share campaign material for causes/rights.	Male	85 (55.6%)	30 (19.6%)	13 (8.5%)	1.83	1.081	1	1	5
	Female	85 (57.0%)	23 (15.4%)	10 (6.7%)	1.77	1.087	1	1	5
I participate in women's rights campaigns.	Male	48 (31.4%)	35 (22.9%)	23 (15.1%)	2.25	1.120	1	1	5
	Female	57 (38.3%)	45 (30.2%)	14 (9.4%)	2.14	1.103	1	1	5

This subscale has a focus on participation in online campaigns such as petitions, hashtags, advocacy groups, and sharing campaigns. As can be seen in Table 8, the engagement is generally

low. Signing or sharing petitions was infrequent, with 69.9% of males and 60.4% of females reporting "never" (M_male = 1.48, SD = 0.87; M_female = 1.63, SD = 0.90). Additionally, a low engagement in the hashtag campaigns was observed (M = 2.03 vs. 1.81). Being a member of advocacy groups was uncommon, with 44.4% of males and 55.7% of females reporting that they had never been members of advocacy groups (M = 1.83, SD = 1.09). Similarly, there was little sharing of campaign material, with more than half of both men (55.6%) and women (57.0%) reporting never (M = 1.83 vs. 1.77). The only slight exception to this was the involvement in the women's rights campaigns, which were slightly more engaged (M male = 2.25, SD = 1.12; M female = 2.14, SD = 1.10), but the most common response was never. As a whole, both groups have limited online collective action

Table 9. Descriptive Statistics for Items Measuring "Perceived Safety and Harassment" (N=302)

Statement	Gender	Never f (%)	Sometimes f (%)	Often/Very Often f (%)	Mean	SD	Mode	Min	Max
I avoid posting opinions due to fear of harassment.	Male	35 (22.9%)	40 (26.1%)	67 (43.8%)	3.16	1.475	3	1	5
	Female	56 (37.6%)	25 (16.8%)	50 (33.6%)	2.63	1.531	1	1	5
I feel safe expressing political views online.	Male	69 (45.1%)	22 (14.4%)	17 (11.1%)	1.95	1.114	1	1	5
	Female	69 (46.3%)	33 (22.1%)	19 (12.8%)	2.02	1.112	1	1	5
I have received unwanted or harassing messages.	Male	73 (47.7%)	39 (25.5%)	17 (11.1%)	2.03	1.169	1	1	5
	Female	106 (71.1%)	21 (14.1%)	11 (7.4%)	1.60	1.046	1	1	5

Among males, only 22.9% reported: "never," while 26.1% said, "sometimes," 18.3% "often," and 25.5% "very often" (M = 3.16, SD = 1.48). A lower, but still significant, degree of concern was reported by females, with 37.6% reporting "never" avoiding posting, while the rest reported at increasing frequencies (M = 2.63, SD = 1.53). In general, perceived safety was low. Almost half of males (45.1%) and females (46.3%) indicated that they never feel safe sharing their political opinions online, and others indicated "rarely" (M ≈ 1.95 males; 2.02 females). A minority said that they often felt safe. Harassment also occurred less frequently, but was still a problem. More males (25.5% of those who said "sometimes" and 7.8% said "often") than females (17.5% of those who said "sometimes" and 11.1% said "often") said they received harassing messages. A large proportion of males (25.5%) reported receiving harassing messages on a "sometimes" basis, as compared to 17.5% of females in the same category, and 7.8% of males reported receiving harassing messages "often" compared to 11.1% of females. Overall, the results suggest that fear of harassment and low

perceived safety cause restrictions on political expression online, especially among males.

Inferential Statistical Analysis

T-Test

The Independent Samples T-Test results for male and female respondents on each of the demographic, engagement, and safety variables are summarized below.

Table 10. Independent Samples T-Test Results by Gender (N=302)

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	SD	Levene's F	p-value (Levene)	t	df	p-value (t-test)	Mean Diff
Age	M / F	153/149	2.33 / 2.10	0.95 / 0.99	0.226	.635	2.079	300	**.038***	0.233
Education	M / F	153/149	3.82 / 3.81	0.90 / 0.96	2.833	.093	0.170	300	.865	0.018
Internet Access Freq.	M / F	152/149	1.14 / 1.17	0.44 / 0.49	1.250	.264	-0.557	299	.578	-0.030
Smartphone Ownership	M / F	153/149	1.00 / 1.05	0.00 / 0.21	33.158	**<.001**	-2.701	148 ^{a}	**.008***	-0.047
Employment Status	M / F	153/149	2.03 / 1.87	1.11 / 1.42	16.266	<.001	1.091	279.8	.276	0.160
Platform Use	M / F	153/149	3.75 / 3.03	1.71 / 1.90	0.085	.771	3.483	300	.001*	0.725
Read Political News	M / F	153/	3.34 / 3.17	0.90 /	0.577	.448	1.539	300	.125	0.172

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	SD	Levene's F	p-value (Levene)	t	df	p-value (t-test)	Mean Diff
		149		1.04						
Follow Political Pages	M / F	153/149	2.53 / 2.30	1.14 / 1.19	0.094	.759	1.699	300	.090	0.227
Watch Political Video	M / F	153/149	3.19 / 2.64	1.04 / 1.10	1.834	.177	4.492	300	<.001*	0.552
Fact-Checking	M / F	153/149	2.90 / 2.69	1.06 / 1.23	7.484	.007	1.544	291.1	.124	0.204
Passive Reading Threads	M / F	153/149	3.27 / 2.92	1.03 / 1.17	0.776	.379	2.802	300	.005*	0.355
Reacting (Liking)	M / F	153/149	2.34 / 1.88	1.10 / 1.11	0.231	.631	3.633	300	<.001*	0.461
Sharing Content	M / F	153/149	2.18 / 1.89	1.01 / 1.07	0.000	.982	2.379	300	.018*	0.284
Commenting	M / F	153/149	1.98 / 1.62	1.00 / 0.96	0.357	.551	3.159	300	.002*	0.356
Posting Opinion	M / F	153/149	2.16 / 1.70	1.10 / 0.97	2.148	.144	3.850	300	<.001*	0.459

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	SD	Levene's F	p-value (Levene)	t	df	p-value (t-test)	Mean Diff
Group Discussions	M / F	153/149	2.18 / 1.66	1.12 / 0.98	4.354	.038	4.293	296.6	<.001*	0.519
Inviting Others	M / F	153/149	1.97 / 1.56	1.09 / 0.94	4.890	.028	3.509	295.8	.001*	0.410
Avoidance (Fear)	M / F	153/149	3.16 / 2.63	1.48 / 1.53	2.638	.105	3.079	300	.002*	0.533
Received Harassment	M / F	151/149	2.03 / 1.60	1.17 / 1.05	5.336	.022	3.405	295.2	.001*	0.436

An independent samples t-test was used to compare the differences between the two groups (males and females) on each of the demographic, access-related, and online political engagement variables. The findings revealed that there were some variables that had a significant difference between male and female respondents. Demographic differences that were found were significant only for age ($t = 2.079$, $p = .038$), and males had slightly higher scores than females. No gender difference was found regarding level of education ($p = .865$) or employment status ($p = .276$), however. On digital access, there was a significant difference between the smartphone ownership of the two groups ($t = -2.701$, $p = .008$); however, there was almost no difference in ownership between the two groups. There was no significant difference between the frequency of use of the Internet between males and females ($p = .578$).

The use of platforms, however, was significantly more with males ($t = 3.483$, $p = .001$), which suggests that they engaged in the platform very differently and in more diverse or intense ways. There were no significant gender differences in passive political engagement (that is, reading political news ($p = .125$), following political pages ($p = .090$), or fact-checking ($p = .124$)). However, males were significantly more involved with watching political videos ($t = 4.492$, $p < .001$) and passively reading political discussion threads ($t = 2.802$, $p = .005$). The number of males who indicated they engaged with political content and shared content was significantly greater than the number of females who did, for an active low effort engagement ($t = 3.633$, $p < .001$; $t = 2.379$, $p = .018$, respectively). Similarly, in more demanding modes of involvement, males were found to be significantly more likely to comment ($t = 3.159$, $p = .002$), post opinions ($t = 3.850$, $p < .001$), join in group discussion ($t = 4.293$, $p < .001$), and invite others to participate ($t = 3.509$, $p = .001$).

Some significant gender differences in relation to negative experiences and disengagement patterns were also found. Avoiding expressing opinions out

of fear (t = 3.079, p = .002) and exposure to online harassment (t = 3.405, p = .001) were both significant for both males and females. The findings indicate that men are more politically involved than women online, both in terms of passive and active political involvement, and are more exposed to online politics-related risks like harassment.

Discussion and Findings

The results of the current study support and expand on the current theories regarding the differences between men and women in online political participation. The results of this study indicate that there is a significant difference between the level of active online political participation of males (M = 3.34) and females (M = 3.17) ($p < .05$), but there is no significant difference between the level of passive online political participation of males (M = 3.19) and females (M = 3.19) ($p > .05$). This is indicative of an "active–passive divide" – a divide by which women are visible as consumers of political content but less so as active contributors.

Men are much more likely to post opinions, share content, and engage in discussion, which aligns with prior research, which found that digital access alone does not affect participation gaps (Ruess et al., 2023). The differences may be understood with the help of Resource Theory and Gender Role Theory, which indicate that women's participation in the public arena is limited due to resource constraints, skills and confidence, and the societal expectations placed on women.

Mobilization and institutional engagement are low for both women and men (M = 1.33–1.37), suggesting that there is little institutionalization or formal engagement online, in line with Theocharis and van Deth (2018). However, women are more likely to be involved in women's rights issues, which is to say, digital spaces can serve as "counter-publics" for issue-specific involvement.

The safety issues become a significant obstacle, and almost half say that they do not feel safe voicing political opinions online. Increased reported harassment and avoidance suggest a hostile online environment that deters online participation for both genders (Naseer& Ashraf, 2022).

These findings support Social Capital Theory (Putnam, 2000), with low levels of institutional engagement being indicative of weak civic networks and trust, with restricted women's participation. The study reveals that, beyond access, resource inequalities, gendered norms, limited social capital, and safety concerns contribute to the gender gap in online political engagement.

The findings are important in the context of the wider literature as they show that the digital space, though easy to access, frames gender inequalities in new ways. They highlight the importance of interventions beyond access and towards a safer digital environment, inclusive networks, and a global platform for marginalised voices. This is crucial to establishing a more equitable and participatory online political space.

Conclusion

The research reveals that political life has moved online, which has resulted in a high level of political information access in Pakistan; however, the migration of political life online has not affected gender gaps in political active participation. Women are online and informed, but very few speak up or take part in discussions, compared to men. It's not that people aren't interested, it's that of the socio-cultural atmosphere and a harried, less safe, digital landscape. The study concludes that the digital sphere in Pakistan is rather one of reinforcing information than an inclusive platform for political discussions.

References

Bennett, W. L., &Segerberg, A. (2012). The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics. *Information, Communication & Society, 15*(5), 739–768. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2012.670661

Bode, L. (2017). Closing the gap: Gender parity in political engagement on social media. *Information, Communication & Society, 20*(4), 587–603.

Bossetta, M. (2018). The digital architectures of social media: Comparing political campaigning on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. *Journal of Communication, 68*(3), 471–496. https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqy012

Boulianne, S. (2015). *Social media use and participation: A meta-analysis. Information, Communication & Society, 18*(5), 524–538. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1008542

boyd, d. (2014). *It's complicated: The social lives of networked teens*. Yale University Press.

Castells, M. (2012). *Networks of outrage and hope: Social movements in the Internet age*. Polity Press.

Chadwick, A. (2017). *The hybrid media system: Politics and power* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

Cinelli, M., Morales, G. D. F., Galeazzi, A., Quattrociocchi, W., &Starnini, M. (2021). The echo chamber effect on social media. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 118*(9), e2023301118. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2023301118

Digital Rights Foundation. (2024). *Digital Security Helpline Annual Report 2024*.

Eagly, A. H., & Wood, W. (2012). Social role theory. In P. A. M. Van Lange, A. W. Kruglanski, & E. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of social psychology*, *2*, 458–476. Sage Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446249222.n49

Ekman, J., &Amnå, E. (2012). Political participation and civic engagement: Towards a new typology. *Human Affairs, 22*(3), 283–300.

Eveland, W. P., &Hively, M. H. (2009). Political discussion frequency, network size, and heterogeneity as predictors of political knowledge and participation. *Journal of Communication, 59*(2), 205–224.

Fox, J., & Tang, W. Y. (2017). Women's experiences with online harassment and their self-protective strategies. *Social Media + Society, 3*(3).

Freedom House. (2024). *Freedom on the Net 2024: The global internet freedom report*. https://freedomhouse.org

GSMA. (2024). *The mobile gender gap report 2024*. GSMA. GSMA Official Website

Halpern, D., & Gibbs, J. (2013). Social media as a catalyst for online deliberation? Exploring the affordances of Facebook and YouTube for political expression. *Computers in Human Behavior, 29*(3), 1159–1168. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2012.10.008

Hargittai, E., & Shaw, A. (2013). Mind the skills gap: Gender and digital participation. *Information, Communication & Society, 16*(3), 424–442.

International Telecommunication Union. (2024). *Facts and figures 2024: Measuring digital development*. https://www.itu.int

Iqbal, A. (2024). Social media and political behavior in Pakistan's 2024 general elections. *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*.

Iqbal, N., Mohd Nor, N. F., Shaari, A. H., &Azhar, K. A. (2026). Voices of resistance and solidarity: A feminist critical discourse analysis of #AuratMarch discourse on X. *Women's Studies International Forum*.

Jamil, S., & Shah, S. A. (2021). Social media usage and political participation among university students in Pakistan. *Journal of Social Sciences and Management Studies*.

Khan, S., &Gardezi, S. (2023). Gendered digital experiences and online harassment in Pakistan: Implications for civic participation. *Journal of South Asian Studies, 41*(2), 155–172.

Kim, Y., Hsu, S.-H., & de Zúñiga, H. G. (2013). Influence of social media use on political discussion and civic engagement. *Journal of Communication, 63*(3), 498–516.

Kreiss, D., & McGregor, S. C. (2019). Technology firms shape political communication: The work of Microsoft, Facebook, Twitter, and Google with campaigns during the 2016 U.S. presidential cycle. *Political Communication, 36*(2), 155–177.

https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2018.1478675

McDevitt, M., & Chaffee, S. H. (2002). Family political discussion and political socialization. *Political Communication, 19*(3), 281–301.

Naseer, S., & Ashraf, C. (2022). Gender-based violence in Pakistan's digital spaces. *Feminist Legal Studies, 30*, 29–50.

Oser, J., &Boulianne, S. (2020). Reinforcement effects between digital media use and political participation. *Political Communication, 37*(2), 197–220.

Pew Research Center. (2023). *News consumption across social media platforms*. https://www.pewresearch.org

Putnam, R. D. (1995). Bowling alone: America's declining social capital. *Journal of Democracy, 6*(1), 65–78. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.1995.0002

Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. Simon & Schuster.

Ruess, C., Hoffmann, C. P., Boulianne, S., &Heger, K. (2023). Online political participation: Conceptual developments. *Information, Communication & Society, 26*(8), 1495–1512.

Skoric, M. M., Zhu, Q., & Pang, N. (2016). Social media and political participation. *Asian Journal of Communication, 26*(3), 201–219.

Theocharis, Y., & van Deth, J. W. (2018). *Political participation: Concepts, measures, and meanings*. Oxford University Press.

Theocharis, Y., Barberá, P., Fazekas, Z., Popa, S. A., &Parnet, O. (2021). A bad workman blames his tweets: The consequences of citizens' uncivil Twitter use when interacting with party candidates. *Journal of Communication, 71*(4), 636–662. https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqab018

Valenzuela, S., Park, N., &Kee, K. F. (2009). Social capital in social network sites and civic engagement. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 14*(4), 875–901.

van Dijk, J. (2020). *The digital divide*. Polity Press.

Verba, S., Kay Lehman Schlozman, & Henry E. Brady. (1995). *Voice and equality: Civic voluntarism in American politics*. Harvard University Press.

Waeterloos, C., Walrave, M., &Ponnet, K. (2021). *The role of multi-platform news consumption in explaining civic participation during the COVID-19 pandemic: A communication mediation approach*. *New Media & Society, 26*(1), 271–291. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211058701

Warraich, N. F., & Akhtar, S. (2021). Information-seeking behavior of students in the digital age: A study of Pakistani university students. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science, 53*(2), 263–276. https://doi.org/10.1177/0961000620906139