Social media use for free time and political participation among young males

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ABSTRACT

In the context of today's socially-networked-society and the rise of social media applications like Facebook , new perspectives need to be considered. The present research explored social media by examining their potential as new venues for political participation. This research seeks how using social media (e.g Facebook) for free time affects political participation (in Chandigarh, Panchkula, Mohali and Zirakpur areas). A sample of 200 males who were staying with and away from their families in the age group of 19-23 years were administered scales of Facebook usage and political participation. Correlation and descriptive analysis were applied. Results revealed a negative correlation between Facebook usage for free time and political participation. Significant difference also emerged between the males staying with and staying away from families on using Facebook for free time.

Introduction

Social media has rapidly gained importance as a forum for political activism in its different forms. It has reshaped the structures and methods of contemporary political communication. Social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube provide new ways to stimulate citizen engagement in political life, where elections and electoral campaigns have a central role. However, the role of this phenomenon in increasing political engagement and electoral participation is neither clear nor simple. Social media brings political parties closer to their voters. It allows politicians to communicate faster and reach citizens in a more targeted manner (Karvelyte & Tenhunen, 2015). Messages posted to personal networks are multiplied when shared, which allow new audiences to be reached. Robertson et al. (2010) also revealed that the emergence of social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, as arenas for political communication has the potential to expand the possibilities for political talk among citizens.

According to the gratification theory of mass media effects, individuals use mass media with the specific intention of fulfilling different needs such as information, identification, integration or entertainment (Katz & Blumler, 1973; McQuail, 1987). The act of using specific media, therefore, may well be considered an investment at the individual level for a gain in gratifying resources.

According to cognitive vs. social resource approach, prior to considering the role of social resources within the link between media use and political participation, the relationship has been traditionally understood, that is, how well a particular medium serves as an informational source was considered a key factor in determining the extent to which individuals are politically engaged (Delli, Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Lemert, 1984).

In particular, social media may be conducive to greater political engagement in various ways: by providing information about political issues, by offering social cues that motivate citizens to take action, and by reducing the costs of collective action. Considering the growing influence of social media on political engagement, it is crucial to throw some light on the concept of political participation. The present study contribute to the existing research by exploring how using social networking sites like Facebook for free time influence political participation.

Political participation

Political participation is not static. It is a very dynamic and evolving social phenomenon. At various times, people are likely to be more or less politically active. Political participation as a basis of democratic citizenship has been traditionally understood as the result of rational choices made by individuals who are motivated, informed, and capable to participate.

Although there is no universally accepted definition in this particular research area (Uhlaner, 2001), political participation is often being referred to as "political engagement" or "public involvement in decision making". As Riley et al. (2010) have pointed out, political engagement has traditionally been thought of as "a set of rights and duties that involve formally organized civic and political activities (e.g., voting or joining a political party)".

Demographic variables in the research field of political participation, such as age, gender etc. also have a significant role. Political disengagement theory proposed to describe the relationship between political participation and age (Cumming & Henry, 1961). This theory asserts that the elderly tend to maintain lower involvement with the "outside world" (and this includes involvement across the political spectrum as well). Disengagement, of course, may be self-initiated or may be imposed on people through a mixture of societal factors. In broad terms, political disengagement theory suggests that there is a direct relationship between the elderly and "political atrophy"

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Some scholars argue that media has positive effects on political and civic participation like Hampton and Wellman (2003); Kavanaugh, Carroll, Rosson, Zin and Reese (2005) have concluded that computer- mediated interactions have had positive effects on community interaction, involvement, and social capital. Shah, Cho, Eveland and dan Kwak (2005) found that various types of online communication have positive impact on civic and political participation. Bode (2009) also supported this finding, particularly in significance of Facebook use in elevating political participation by the use of blog. The impact of social media in Lok Sabha and assembly elections in India was clearly visible and inspired from their outcomes more candidates contesting the election of zila parishad, block samiti and even sarpanch posts in Haryana are using Facebook and WhatsApp as a platform to seek votes in the elections (Hindustan times, 2016).

Considering the importance of role of social media in political participation, the present research focused on exploring whether spending one's free time on Facebook affects political involvement. Also, considering the present scenario, the young adults are moving away from their home towns for higher studies, jobs etc. So the effort is made to study whether staying away from one's family makes any difference in the relationship between social media use and political participation or not. Thus, the study was planned with the following hypotheses.

H1: It is expected that there will be a negative relationship between using Facebook for free time and political participation among young males.

H2: It is expected that this relationship will vary among young males staying with family and staying away from family.

H3: Males staying with their families are expected to differ from males staying away from their families in the usage of Facebook for free time.

Method

Participants

A survey was conducted on 400 male adults for screening out the participants who are using Facebook everyday for atleast one hour for pastone to twoyears. Out of this, a sample of 200 males was randomly selected with equal number of males staying with family and staying away from their family, in the age range of 19 to 23 years. The sample primarily consisted of students belonging to the areas of Chandigarh, Panchkula , Mohali and Zirakpur .

Inclusion criteria

Young adults:

1. Using Facebook everyday for atleast one hour for past 1-2 years.

2. Not employed anywhere.

Exclusion criteria

Young adults:

1. Not using Facebook.

2. Undergoing any psychological treatment.

3. Indulging exclusively in other types of social networking sites exclusively orkut, MySpace etc.

Measures

1. *Facebook Intensity Scale* (Ellision, Steinfield & Lampe,2007): This measure includes two self-reported assessments of Facebook behavior: the number of Facebook "friends" and the amount of time spent on Facebook on a typical day. It also consisted of 6 items measuring the attitude towards Facebook on 5 point Likert scale ,asking the respondents to indicate the degree of agreement or disagreement. (Rtt =.83)

2. Motives of Facebook uses (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007): This scale comprises of 14 items covering 5 motives for using Facebook, namely entertainment , information seeking, interaction with offline contacts, forming new contact, and perceived critical mass. A five-point likert scale (ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree) was used for the scale, asking the respondents to indicate their level of agreement/disagreement. (Rtt=.80)

3. Political Engagement Index (Andolina, Keeter, Zukin, & Jenkins, 2003): Respondent's political participation was gauged using a reduced form of the Index of Civic and Political Engagement developed by CIRCLE. It is a 5 item scale measuring the level of political participation of respondents. To reduce the social desirability bias implicit in a yes/no format, there were three response choices: 1 ("Yes, within the last 12 months"), 0.5 ("Yes, but not within the last 12 months") and 0 ("No, never"). (Rtt=.68)

Procedure

To analyze the relationship between social media use (i.e Facebook) and political participation among young male adults, a survey was conducted on 400 males to determine if the respondents are using Facebook everyday for atleast one hour. Also information regarding whether the participant is staying with their family or away from them is gathered using one item scale. Using the purposive sampling methods, 200 males were randomly selected with equal number of males staying with family and staying away from their family, in the age range of 19 to 23 years. Facebook intensity scale, motives of using facebook scale and political participation scale were administered. Data was obtained and statistical analyses were applied.

Results

Correlation, Mean, S.D and t-ratio was applied to the data. Results revealed that there is a negative correlation between using Facebook for free time and political participation among young male adults staying away from their family(r = -0.20, p <_0.05). However, results also revealed no significant correlation between using Facebook for free time and political participation among males staying with their family.

Further, t- ratio (Table1) indicated that there existed a significant difference between males staying with or away from their families on Facebook use for free time (t= 6.65, p<_ 0.05). Non-significant difference emerged between males staying with or away from their families on political participation.

Table 1. Mean, S.D and t-value of males staying away and staying with family.

Variable	MAF		MWF		
	M	SD	M	SD	t-ratio
FFT	6.46	2.19	7.08	1.973	6.65*
PP	1.39	1.385	1.36	1.425	0.151

FFT= Facebook for Free Time, MAF= Males staying away from family,

MWF= Males staying with family, PP= Political participation

Discussion

The aim of the present research was to explore the relationship between using Facebook for free time and political participation and whether this relationship will vary among males staying with their family or staying away from their family.

The results revealed the negative correlation between using Facebook for free time and political participation among young males who are staying away from their family.

No significant correlation was found between using Facebook for free time and political participation among males staying with their family. Thus, results support the hypotheses (H1& H2) that there exists a negative relationship between using Facebook for free time and political participation and it varies among males staying with or away from their family. It means foe males who are using Facebook for free time decreases political participation among them.

The findings of present study are in consistent with the existing research like Zhang et al. (2010) which showed that reliance on social networking sites was positively related to civic participation, but not to political participation. The time-replacement hypothesis also supports the results that the time people spend on social media or internet cannot be devoted to other activities. Nie and Erbring (2002) and Pasek et al. (2006) argued that all media use has a negative influence on social and political participation and cite three reasons in support of this finding. First, time spent on the internet or social media cannot be devoted to other, more social, leisure activities (i.e., time-replacement hypothesis). Second, online interaction does not involve the face-to-face contact necessary to build social trust, which can be instrumental in stimulating political participation (Putnam, 2000). Moreover, the more time people spend online (even with just 2 to 5 Internet hours a week), the more they lose contact with their social environment and the less time they spend phoning friends and family (Nie & Erbring, 2002; Quan-Haase & Wellman, 2002). Nie and Erbring (2002) argued that as the internet or social media is inherently an activity of the individual, it seems very unlikely that it would be able to increase any form of participation. The theoretical framework that provides explanation for this negative correlation is the "zero-sum game perspective" (Orlean and Laney, 2000). According to this perspective, the use of media and technology is more likely to reduce the opportunity for users to engage in existing personal relations and thus reduces person's social capital.

Moreover, the virtual communities are rather homogeneous, and therefore, discourage any diversification of contacts; online communities promote the interaction of only like-minded people. Although heterogeneous networks can stimulate people to participate politically and to change their opinions, participation in homogeneous networks leads to strengthening of the initial viewpoints and which will not lead to political participation (Druckman & Nelson, 2003; Mutz, 2002).The more tightly a network is knit, the more uniform the information source will be and the less likely people will be to participate politically (Teorell, 2003). In general, it has been argued by the time-replacement authors that greater media involvement leads to the reduction of social capital and generalized trust (Putnam, 2000).

Further, studies have supported the present findings that family ties do have an influence on political and civic participation. Alesina and Giuliano (2013) postulated that family ties have negative and highly significant effect on political and civic participation. Thus, those who are living away from their family have ample of free time and present result shows that spending their free time on Facebook negatively affect political participation among males. While for the other group of males staying with family, the results emerged out to be non-significant on political participation. It could be said that it does not matter where one reside as the need, curiosity of seeking information may remain the same. This notion was supported by uses and gratifications theory. This theory states that audiences actively select among media based on their ability to gratify their needs e.g. cognitive needs like for information, knowledge, and understanding of the environment.

Further, t-ratio analysis revealed that males staying away from family and males staying with their family are significantly different on the dimension of using Facebook for free time and hence, supported the hypothesis (H3). Means revealed that males staying with their family scored higher than males staying away from their family on the dimension of using Facebook for free time. It means there is a significant difference in Facebook usage in free time among males staying with their family and males staying away from their family. The reason behind it could be attributed to the fact that those staying with one's family prefer uses Facebook for entertainment purpose and to pass the time whereas those staying far from one's family , the motive of using Facebook is to interact with their family members online rather than for passing time (Pearce et al., 2013).

The present research has its limitations as the sample is representative of young male adults. So, this study lacks a gender comparison. Secondly, the study is done only on one type of social networking site that is, Facebook, so it cannot be generalised to all types of social media use. Thirdly, taken into consideration only one aspect of motive of using Facebook (i.e. for free time) limited the scope of study. Fourthly, data was collected during which no political movement like elections were going on which might be the reason for reduce political participations among the sample being studied.

The conclusion from this study has important implications for future research in this area. Can different motives of using social media have effect on political participation? Whether these results will vary with gender? Does social media attract new participants to politics? Does social media contribution changes during election times? With the growing use of social media in India, it is of the great importance for government, parties, organization and educational systems to better understand the interplaying dynamics of online and real life. The content analysis through activities on Facebook use is encouraged for future research.

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