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X'S POLITICAL PULSE: AWAKENING AWARENESS AMONG PAKISTANI YOUTH

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Abstract
The present study intended to explore the use of X among Pakistani undergraduate students and its connection to their political awareness. A questionnaire survey was conducted among 109 undergraduate students in different years and disciplines. A majority of respondents stated that they own an X account and frequently use the platform. The students achieved an average score of 3.53 out of six points during their brief political knowledge assessment. The users who operate X every day show superior performance compared to the group which avoids using X completely. Most participants reported that X showed them various political perspectives, but few said they encountered content which matched their existing beliefs. The study showed that students still use proxy applications to reach Twitter after the government dropped its ban during May 2025. The government ban seems to have affected how students interacted with the platform, according to available evidence. The research revealed that many students continue using proxy applications for accessing Twitter despite the lifting of the government's ban in May 2025. Thus, it may be assumed that the ban introduced by the government impacted students' usage of the platform. A majority of students follow parties on X instead of individual journalists or media outlets. The tendency is concerning since it may indicate that students see a single perspective on political events. Therefore, the study concluded that X can be viewed as an essential instrument allowing young people in Pakistan to get acquainted with politics. However, at the same time, it may become a platform enabling students to perceive only information aligning with their preconceptions. According to the findings, undergraduates should be instructed to analyze information posted in mass media carefully.

1. Introduction

Nowadays Social media platforms have completely changed how people access political information. Young people now depend on digital platforms for news and political discussion. Social media serves as the primary platform for political dialogue in Pakistan because the country experiences active political participation and its traditional media outlets encounter occasional restrictions. Twitter functions as an independent social media platform because it provides users with immediate access to its platform which enables politicians and journalists and activists to communicate with their followers.

Twitter use is the variable of this study; this covers the factors like having an X account, how often a person uses it, their purpose of using it, and the accounts they follow for political information, and how they use the platform. Additionally, political awareness is the dependent variable, this is assessed by using a short quiz about political leaders, political parties and recent events in Pakistan.

University students are an important group of students in this study. Because they are the future voters and leaders of the country. Their political awareness affects not only their own decisions but also the direction of the country. There has been a rising interest of the people of Pakistan in politics. In the previous election held in 2024, the number of young voters rose considerably due to the use of social media

Many researchers have conducted research about social media and politics in Pakistan in past years. Salam, Jamil and Muzaffar (2024) conducted a conducted a survey from 384 university students in Sialkot. The study found that social media really increases students' awareness; fewer took part in offline political activities. In research carried out in 2025, Suleman and Husnain (2025) investigated the usage of social media in getting information about politics, and it was found that 45.5% of the subjects interviewed utilized social media in accessing political information. Similarly, Abbasi and Shah (2024) looked into the usage of Facebook and Twitter in political participation by young people and established that social media has a very big influence on political discourse among youth.

However, Pakistan's digital environment has been complicated. Right after the general elections twitter got banned by the interior minister of Pakistan in February 2024. By addressing national security issues and the Scatter of misinformation and sensitive content on X. That led many users to take unconventional steps. People started using VPNs and proxy servers to access X (Twitter) so they could continue using the platform. This created a different environment among peoples of Pakistan either they use X with proxies or disconnected from the latest updates. During the ban, civil society organizations, journalists, and students criticized the ban as a violation of freedom of expression. But the most interesting thing is, during this period, various official government departments and state representatives continued to utilize X for updates, which creates more confusion and criticism on government.

On the other hand, when the government unbans twitter on May 7th,2025, a significant change occurred. Users all over Pakistan uses twitter without any VPN and proxy. For the first time since February 17, 2024. The reason behind the unban is a part of strategy to participate in narrative war amid tension with indI. The decision was made during a meeting of the Senate Standing Committee on Information Technology and Telecommunications, and the Chairman of the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) informed the committee about the restoration of the platform. Independent internet monitoring organization NetBlocks has confirmed the restoration of access to X in Pakistan. Analysts suggest that lifting ban From X is good move for government to restores its connection with public and international comity during this important period.

1.1 Significance of the Study

This study is significant for many important reasons that span theory, practice, policy, and methodology.

First, this study addresses a clear gap in academic literature. While many researchers have studied social media and politics in Pakistan, almost all of them have looked at multiple platforms together or focused on the general population. Very few have isolated Twitter as a single platform. Even fewer researchers have focused on undergraduate students. This is important because each platform has its own identity. Since Twitter is text-based, real-time, platform. The way Twitter affects what undergraduate students know about politics is probably very different, from the way Facebook does. Focusing only on Twitter and only on university students, this study gives a pure and precise answer that mixed-platform studies cannot provide.

Second, this study is important because of the recent Twitter ban. Government imposed baned

on twitter on February 2024 that lasted for over a year, and the ban lifted in May 2025. During this period no researcher studies how, it affected students' political awareness. Not many people have looked at the students. In a country like Pakistan where internet shutdowns and platform bans are very common, understanding their actual effects is urgent.

Third, this study has strong practical value for educators. The results show that many students trust political information on Twitter but do not verify it. Only a small percentage always checks other sources. Universities in Pakistan can use these findings to design media literacy courses that train students how to do factchecking, how to verify credible resources and how to check is that real or fake. Without such programs or courses, students may remain unaware of propaganda and misinformation.

Fourth, this study has direct implications for policy makers. The government has spent resources blocking Twitter, but this study shows that students simply use VPNs to get around the ban. Nearly a quarter of active users in this study accessed Twitter through VPN. This indicates that these bans are not enough to stop a determined user; they only push them to use it less but not stop them. This evidence may help the Policy makers reconsider their approach. Rather than banning the entire platforms, they could work to take down bad content while keeping the platform accessible for users. When government's lift the ban in May 2025 to participate in a "narrative war" with India shows the importance of this platform. This study reinforces that this should stay open for people to discuss and share their views.

Fifth, this study is significant for civil society organizations and political parties. The results show that students follow political parties more than any other source for political information. This means parties have enormous influence over young voters. Civil society groups that want to promote values and things like fact-based debate and tolerance need to get this. These findings help them to make campaigns that reach students through channels they trust. Political parties themselves can use the findings to realize their responsibility. If students are getting most of their information directly from parties, then parties have a duty to share accurate and balanced information.

Sixth, this study is important for its methodological significance. It provides a survey instrument that future researchers to easily study things. The six-item political knowledge quiz covers current, information about Pakistan. The Likert-scale items on trust, how much people are exposed to information and factchecking are clear and easy to understand. Other researchers studying social media and political awareness in South Asia can use this instrument, which saves their time and allows for comparison across studies.

Seventh, this study also provides theoretical insight. It Uses and Gratifications Theory and Selective Exposure Theory to a new context: Undergraduates of Pakistan uses Twitter during the ban period shows that students do use Twitter to satisfy their need for political information, which supports Uses and Gratifications Theory. At the same time, about 30 % of users feel they mostly see views they already agree with supports Selective Exposure Theory. By testing these theories in a new cultural and political setting, the study strengthens their generalizability.

1.2 Rationale of the Study

The main reason behind doing this study comes from the lack of focused research on Twitter and political awareness among Pakistani undergraduates. Also, many researchers have focused on social media in general; Only few have separated Twitter from other social media platforms. Additionally, the latest Twitter ban, which lasted for over a year, presented a special circumstance that hasn't been studied well. To understand how students face such bans and whether it affects their political awareness is important for both academic knowledge and practical policy. This study fills that gap.

1.3 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study were as follows:

1. To describe how Pakistani undergraduate students use Twitter for political information.

2. To measure the level of political awareness among these students,
3. To compare political awareness between daily Twitter users and non-users. To examine trust in political information on Twitter and perceptions of exposure to diverse views.
4. To understand how students accessed Twitter in the context of the ban.

2. Literature Review

Many study have looked at the relationship between social media and political awareness in Pakistan. The study conducted by Salam, Jamil, and Muzaffar (2024), which was quantitative in nature, involved 384 university students from Sialkot. In their findings, the researchers highlighted the fact that the social media is very effective in raising awareness amongst these students regarding politics, yet this awareness does not translate into joining any particular political group or participating in political activities such as demonstrations.

In their study of 233 Pakistani youth aged between 18-35 years, Suleman and Husnain (2025) determined that 45.5% of respondents use social media for political purposes. Many young people used these platforms for education, work, and entertainment as well as politics. The study concluded that social media has a positive but moderate effect on political awareness.

Abassi and Shah (2024) have conducted research focused on youth political engagement in Pakistan through the mediums of Facebook and Twitter. Political polarization was the topic of their research and it has been found out that both platforms significantly contribute to youth political engagement. Moreover, Twitter's real-time communication feature makes this platform more influential in case of politics. This is the reason why Twitter influences youth engagement in politics more than Facebook.

Island Policy Research Institute's findings after conducting research on how social media impacts political polarisation in Pakistan in 2025 have shown that social media doesn't create division in society but people do this themselves using social media to communicate only with people who have similar views on various issues. Social media has allowed for echo chambers, fake information and people talking only to those who share similar ideology. Digital literacy should be taught at schools in order to combat fake news and other negative effects. Fact-checking mechanisms are advised too.

Haq (2025) collected the data from 350 students who were voting in 2018 and 2024 election. The study found that TikTok is popular with students, but Facebook is used more by older students. Political polarisation was especially that people who support Imran khan. Social media users generally feel that young voters who use these platforms often feel like they are around people who think like them.

Ashraf, Gondal and Ahmed (2025) analyzed the role of online platforms in shaping public opinion. They found that four things are connected. These are exposure, echo chambers, algorithmic bias, and affective polarization. They all work together to shape how people interact with politics online. These mechanisms lead to increased in-group identities and hostility against contrary opinions.

However, it is important to clearly understand the timeline of the ban on X. twitter (X) Got restrictions just after the election in 2024, upon the recommendation of interior minister of Pakistan. The government mentioned security concerns, and the spreading of misinformation are the reasons behind it. In time of restriction's, Majority of users had to use VPNs or proxy services to access the platform. The ban was widely criticized by journalists, students, and international organizations as a violation of freedom of expression.

X remained banned for over a year. However, the ban lifted by Government on May 7, 2025. From the morning of that day, users throughout Pakistan were able to access the platform without facing any problem. The decision was confirmed by the Chairman of the PTA during a meeting of the Senate Standing Committee on Information Technology and Telecommunications. Also, it is a part of its strategy to actively participate in the "narrative war" during the war period with India.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is supported by two main theories. The first theory is Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch, 1973). This theory tells that people actively choose media to satisfy their needs, such as getting information, social interaction, or entertainment. In the context of Pakistani students, Twitter may serve as a tool for fulfilling political information needs. They prefer X as a top priority because it gives them real time information about ongoing situations about politics.

The second is the Selective Exposure Theory (Stroud, 2010). This theory says that people search for things that fit well with their already beliefs and avoid things that challenge their existing beliefs. This can lead to echo chambers, where people only see opinions, they already agree with. This theory helps explain why some students in this study felt they mostly see views they already agree with.

2.2 Research Questions

Based on the research objectives, the following research questions guided this study.

RQ1. How do Pakistani undergraduate students use Twitter to access political information?

RQ2. What is the current level of political awareness among Pakistani undergraduate students? Is there a difference in political awareness between daily Twitter users and non-daily users?

RQ3. How much do students trust political information on Twitter, and do they feel exposed to a diverse range of political views?

RQ4. How do students access Twitter given the government ban that was in place?

3. Research Methodology

This study used a survey to collect data on how people use Twitter. The survey was done online using Google Forms. It asked questions about Twitter usage, trust in information on politics, and awareness of politics. The people who took part in the study were students from universities in Pakistan. A convenience sampling strategy was used to select participants. The survey link was shared in university WhatsApp groups with classmates and on university WhatsApp channels. It took three weeks to collect data. 109 Complete responses were received. No incomplete responses were included in the study

3.1 Research Design

A cross-sectional quantitative survey design was employed in this study. A structured questionnaire was developed to collect data on Twitter usage patterns, trust in political information, perceptions of viewpoint diversity, and political awareness. The survey was administered online via Google Forms.

3.2 Participants

The participants were undergraduate students enrolled in universities in Pakistan. A convenience sampling strategy was used. The survey link was distributed through university WhatsApp groups, class forums, and social media channels over a period of three weeks. A total of 109 complete responses were collected. No incomplete responses were included in the analysis.

3.3 Instrument

The survey instrument consisted of four sections.

Section A: Asked for demographic information of participants, which includes age, gender, and year of study.

Section B: Asked about Twitter use, including having a twitter account, if yes then how they use, what they use it for.

Section C: Tested the participants' level of trust and their perception via a Likert Scale of Strongly Disagree through to Strongly Agree. These included questions relating to trust towards political information on Twitter, exposure to various viewpoints politically on Twitter, encountering any information contradicting their point of view, the significance of Twitter to political information, and having shared political information on Twitter in the previous one month. Frequency of verifying political information by looking up other sources for information was asked about as well; responses ranged from 'never' to 'always'.

D section: Consisted with a six-question quiz aimed at testing knowledge of current affairs.

These questions were about the Prime Minister of Pakistan, the political party that holds the highest number of seats in the National Assembly, and the current Chief Justice of Pakistan.

3.4 Data Analysis

Following the data collection phase, data was transferred to Microsoft Excel for analysis. Frequencies, percentages, mean, and standard deviation were computed. This research study involved comparing the scores in knowledge between individuals who use Twitter daily and those who do not.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Voluntary participation was the case here. The respondents were made aware that their responses were only to be used for research purposes, and that they could withdraw at any point during the process.

4. Results

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	64	58.7
	Female	42	41.2
Year of study	1st year	9	8.3
	2nd year	18	16.5
	3rd year	62	56.9
	4th year/final year	20	18.3

The table shows that the majority of participants were male (58.7 %) and in their third year of study (56.9 %). The average age of participants was 21.8 years, ranging from 17 to 26.

Table 2: Twitter Account Ownership and Frequency of Use

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Have a Twitter account	Yes	66	60.6
	No	43	39.4
Frequency of use among account holders (n=66)	Daily or almost daily	26	39.4
	3-5 days per week	10	15.2
	1-2 days per week	12	18.2
	Less than once a week	12	18.2
	Not at all	6	9.1

The table shows that (60.6%) of students have a Twitter account. Among those who have an account, (39.4%) use it daily or almost daily. This finding is consistent with Iftikhar, Rahman, Khan and Rahman (2024), who found a significant and positive association between Twitter use and political interest.

Table 3: Time Spent on Twitter Among Active Users

Time per day	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Less than 10 minutes	23	38.3
10-30 minutes	18	30.0
31-60 minutes	8	13.3
1-2 hours	9	15.0
More than 2 hours	2	3.3

The table shows that most active users (68.3%) spend 30 minutes or less on Twitter per day.

Table 4: Purposes of Twitter Use (Multiple Selections Allowed)

Purpose	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
News and current events	37	56.1
Entertainment	32	48.5
Following politicians/journalists	28	42.4
Following friends/peers	16	24.2
Academic/professional	3	4.5

The table shows that news and current events is the most common reason for using Twitter, followed by entertainment. Sultana, Batool and Ibrahim (2024) similarly found that students use social media to stay informed about political events and voice their beliefs.

Table 5: Sources of Political Information on Twitter (Multiple Selections Allowed)

Source	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Political parties	51	77.3
Journalists or news media	36	54.5
Individual politicians	27	40.9
Political analysts	20	30.3
Friends or peers	9	13.6
Civil society organizations	6	9.1
Do not follow any political accounts	10	15.2

The table shows that political parties are the most followed source for political information on Twitter. This fnding aligns with Rehan, Aamir and Khan (2024), who noted that Twitter allows users to directly interact with political messages and politicians.

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Table 6: Method of Accessing Twitter

Access method	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Without VPN (directly)	36	54.5
With VPN	16	24.2
I do not use Twitter in Pakistan	8	12.1
Other	6	9.1

The table shows that more than half of users access Twitter directly without VPN, but nearly a quarter use VPN. Haq (2025) noted that Twitter is technically blocked in Pakistan but can be accessed via VPN, which is consistent with this finding.

Table 7: Trust and Perceptions (Mean Scores on a 5-point Scale)

Statement	Mean	SD
I trust the political information I see on Twitter.	3.48	1.15
Twitter exposes me to a wide range of political perspectives.	3.41	1.08
I often see political content that challenges my own views.	3.23	1.26
Twitter is an important source of political news for me.	3.47	1.13
I have shared or retweeted political content in the past month.	3.30	1.22

The table shows that all mean scores are around the midpoint of 3, indicating moderate agreement. Ashraf, Gondal and Ahmed (2025) found that social media is not a neutral communication site but rather a dynamic mediator of political sense-making, which influences both cognitively and emotionally the political identity.

Table 8: Verification of Political Information

Frequency	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Never	8	12.1
Rarely	14	21.2
Sometimes	30	45.5
Often	9	13.6
Always	5	7.6

The table shows that most users (45.5%) only sometimes verify political information by checking other sources. Ashraf, Gondal and Ahmed (2025) found that participants raised issues including perceived manipulation in algorithmic curation and a decrease in trust in digital political information.

Table 9: Political Knowledge Scores

User Group	n	Mean Score (out of 6)	SD
Daily Twitter users	26	3.83	1.59
Non-daily Twitter users	40	3.35	1.68
All Twitter users	66	3.53	1.65
Non-Twitter users	43	3.24	1.69

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The table shows that daily Twitter users had the highest average political knowledge score (3.83), followed by all Twitter users (3.53), non-daily users (3.35), and non-Twitter users (3.24). This finding is consistent with Ahmad, Bajwa and Yousaf (2024), who concluded that there is a positive association between political knowledge and social media (Twitter and Facebook). Zeib and Tahir (2022) also found that an increase in the use of Twitter enhances political awareness.

5. Discussion

The findings show several important patterns.

First, Twitter is widely used among students despite the ban. More than 60 percent of students have an account, and nearly 40 percent of those use it daily. The fact that nearly a quarter of user's access Twitter through VPN during the ban shows that the ban has not stopped motivated students; they find ways around it.This is what the Digital Rights Foundation said in their 2025 report. They found out that people who use Twitter a lot in Pakistan they use Private Networks or VPNs a lot. Second, the research finds a positive connection between Twitter use and political awareness. Since in a quiz, Daily Twitter users scored 3.83, while non-users scored 3.24. The difference of 0.59 points clear that using twitter increases political awareness a bit as compared to those who are not. However, the difference is not big, which leads to other factors like, politics interest, family discussions and usage of other platforms. This finding is similar to what Salam, Jamil and Muzaffar (2024) study.

Third, trust in political information on Twitter is moderate. 53% of users agreed that they trust the

information. But 23% disagreed or strongly disagreed. This mixed result reflects the reality that Twitter contains both trustworthy and not trustworthy information. The verification behavior is also concerning. Only 7.65 students always check other sources, while 45.5% only sometimes do. This suggests that many students may come across false information without realizing it. The IPRI (2025) study warned that social media spreads misinformation and amplifies existing divisions.

Fourth, the study exposes that people don't agree on how much they are exposed to different views. 48.5 % of users feel Twitter introduces them to a wide range of perspectives; however, the average score for feeling challenged by opposing views was only 3.23 out of 5. Around 30% did not feel exposed to many perspectives. This suits well with Selective Exposure Theory (Stroud, 2010), which says that people consume information that agrees with their existing beliefs. Haq (2025) found similar results among young Pakistani voters. Ashraf, Gondal and Ahmed (2025) also found that selective exposure and echo chambers lead to increased hostility toward different opinions.

One finding stood out above all others: 77 % of our respondents follow political parties directly on Twitter and getting political news straight from the source the parties themselves, not journalists, not independent analysts, not neutral observers. This could mean that students are only seeing one side of the story. political Parties control their own messages, which are often biased. They only show the positive thing on thier social media handle and ignore negative thing. This needs to be highlighted for media literacy education that teaches students to seek out multiple sources.

6. Conclusion

The current research was initiated by a question about how Pakistani undergraduate students use Twitter and whether it influences their level of political awareness (Sultana, Batool & Ibrahim, 2024). In order to address this issue, the study included a survey of 109 university students. These students were asked about their frequency of using Twitter, level of trust towards the political information available on this platform and their political knowledge regarding Pakistan's contemporary affairs.

In particular, our survey results show that most of the students in our sample are active Twitter users. About 61% of the participants reported owning a personal Twitter account. Out of this group, almost 40% access Twitter on a daily basis. At the same time, news and current affairs are considered the main purposes of Twitter, and entertainment comes second. Additionally, Twitter is used for accessing information from political parties. Thus, parties have a direct connection with the students, and they can communicate directly without intermediation (Rehan, Aamir & Khan, 2024).

Importantly, students who used Twitter everyday scored much higher compared to those who have never used Twitter. The average score of political knowledge among everyday users is 3.83, while non-users received only 3.24 on average. This shows that using Twitter is positively correlated with political knowledge. However, the gap between these two averages is not very big. It suggests that although Twitter can be effective, it is far from the only variable that can help students join rallies or political demonstrations. There are other variables, including discussion with family members, reading newspapers, or interest in politics, which influence the motivation.

Most people did not trust the information they see on twitter. Only a little over half of the users said they trust what they see. More importantly, very few students actually verify the information they read. Only 7% always check other sources. Most people only sometimes do. This is an issue because it means students consume or see lot of political content every day, but they do fact cheak it. which means They are exposed to false information, propaganda, and one sided narratives. Ashraf, Gondal and Ahmed (2025) found similar problems in their study. People felt there was manipulation in how information is shown to them and they lost trust in digital political information.

Many students feel trapped in echo chambers. About thirty percent said they mostly see views they already agree with. The mean value for being challenged by opposing opinions was very low, amounting to 3.23 on a scale from 1 to 5. These

results correspond to the findings made by previous researchers who found that people search for information that confirms their beliefs while avoiding contradictory information. Thus, over time, their beliefs become even more strong and radical.

Despite the Twitter ban which came into effect in February 2024 and ended in May 2025, there was no hindrance in the use of the website among students. Over a quarter of the total active users used Twitter using a VPN. Even when the ban was revoked, many students kept on using a VPN. This shows that blanket bans do not work. They do not stop determined users. Furthermore, they only push them to less regulated digital spaces. The government itself realized this when it lifted the ban to participate in a narrative war with India. They understood that Twitter is too important to block.

For teachers and universities, the message is clear. Students should be taught media literacy. They must learn how to recognize fake news, how to seek various perspectives on issues, and how to confirm whatever they come across. Otherwise, they will always remain vulnerable to propaganda.

For policy makers, banning social media platforms does not work. A better approach is to work with platforms to remove harmful content while keeping the platform open for everyone. For political parties, students follow parties more than any other source. That means parties have a huge influence and they should use that influence to share accurate and balanced information. For students themselves, the message is simple. Do not believe everything you read on Twitter. Take a few seconds to check if the information is true.

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