

THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL ACCESS AND CIVIC KNOWLEDGE ON POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AMONG WOMEN

DR. FAKHARA SHAHID¹, DR. ARFAN LATIF^{2*}, DR. HAFIZ ABDUL RAFAH RAZZAQ³

¹LECTURER, DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, UNIVERSITY OF OKARA, fakhara.shahid@uo.edu.pk

²ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF OKARA, arfanlatif9292@uo.edu.pk

³IPFP FELLOW, DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF OKARA, dr.rafah@uo.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

Women's political participation is an important area of discussion and research among social scientists. Efforts have been made by the researcher to find out various factors regarding this. Existing literature also pointed out the same. The current study is an attempt to find out the role of Information Communication Technology and Civic Knowledge to determine the Political Participation among women. The current study used quantitative research technique and explanatory research design find out and meet the objectives of the study. a sample of 384 was selected and standardized tool were used to measure the independent and dependent variables of the study. the researcher applied regression analysis and found a positive and signification relationship between ICT, Civic Knowledge and political participation. however, role ICT was more than that of Civic Knowledge. The study also found that urban area women have higher political participation as compared to the rural area women.

Keywords: ICT, Civic Knowledge, Political Participation

INTRODUCTION:

BACKGROUND

Political participation is an important tool to ensure the smooth running of the democracy and democratic values in any society. Both male and female are required to equally participate in the democratic process for better governance and equal representation of all the segments of the society. It is very important for the smooth functioning of the society and running democracy in a very compact manner that all the segments of the society take part in the political decision making. Historically it has been observed that male have a higher level of political participation while women are always subject to discrimination in terms of political participation. This trend of lack of women's political participation is visible not only in underdeveloped countries but also in the developed countries where women have less political participation opportunities as compared with other male.

Numerous factors are responsible for lack of women's political participation at various levels. There are numerous theories that explain this trend globally that how women are way behind in their political participation as compared with the men. Biological, social, psychological and economic factors are very important in determining the lack of women's political participation. However, recently the advent of Information Communication Technology (ICT) has changed the way women's educational aspiration, economic opportunities and other domains. ICT platforms such as Social Media in the name of Facebook, Whats App and YouTube has changed the way women's role were seen historically. On the same token the women's political participation has also taken a shift due to ICT and women's political knowledge has also risen. Therefore, access to information communication technology is an important factor that explain the women's political participation.

Not only the Information Commination Technology alone increase the political participation among women but it also trigger the civic knowledge among women which eventually increase the political participation among women. Hence, the interplay between Information Communication Technology and Civic knowledge is jointly responsible for increased level of political participation among women. Information Communication Technology enhance women's civic knowledge by delimiting the boundaries of the women set by the social fabrics. Hence, it is important to understand how both Information Communication Technology and Civic Knowledge play their role in incassating the women's political participation.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Women's political participation is an important aspect of ensuring democratic values in the society and foster the good governance. Across the globe women's political participation reflect the way society sees the women's roles in the society and ensuring gender equality. According to IPU, 2023 there are 26.5% women's in parliaments across the globe which is slightly on rise as it was only 10 to 12% during the 1990s. However, women's political participation differ with regard to varying geographical locations such America, Africa, Europe and Asia. Nordic countries show higher level of women's political participation. Iceland, Finland, Norway and Sweden has women's in the parliament at 40% which is higher as compared to the global trend. Rwanda is the highest level with 61% of the women are in the Parliament (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). New Zealand is also offering women equal opportunity to participate in the politics and Prime Minister Jacinda Arden offered policies that enhance women's role in the political sphere. During the 2020 time period women's participation in the cabinet also increased ensuring gender equality at the political level. On the same token women's political participation in USA congress also reached at the highest level of 27% during the 2023 and Kamala Harris became first vice president of the country to hold this position. Therefore, quite variation is found in terms of women's political participation however, there is rise in the women's political participation historically. Most of the countries offer policies that foster women's political participation at the highest level by increasing the number of parliamentarians as women. When women hold the seats at the highest level of the country this automatically ensure women's participation in the decision-making process at the lower level.

STATUS OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN PAKISTAN

The status of women's political participation in Pakistan covers a wide range of factors such as cultural and religious background, economic conditions and overall social fabric of the country. There is a long history of women's political participation in Pakistan during the independence movement before 1947 which largely determine the overall women's political participation in Pakistan. Despite the fact that constitution and legal framework provide strong commitment regarding the women's political participation the overall situation is not encouraging in Pakistan as most of the women face multiple hindrance during their political participation and involvement in the political decision making.

Historically speaking during the independence movement women's like Fatima Jinnah, begum Raana Liaqut Ali Khan and many others contributed to the greater extent which laid a strong foundation of women's political participation. Later on in the constitution of 1973 ensured better legal frame work and facilities for the women's political participation. Article 25 of the constitution states that there should be no discrimination in terms of political participation on the basis of gender, socio-economic status and other demographic factors. Similarly, Article 34 of the constitution direct the state to make it possible in each and every way that women take equal participation in the political processes of the country. These provisions are very strong and show greater commitment for better political participation of the women but overall situation remained stagnant in terms of increased women's political participation. During the Pervez Musharraf era in line with Legal Framework Ordinance the 17% quota was a major breakthrough that helped in enhancing the women's political participation in the country. Hence, stronger commitment on part of different political regimes was visible throughout the history of the country.

Currently the status of women's political participation at the National level is quite good and encouraging. According to Inter-Parliamentary Union. 2023 women hold 20.2% of the seats at the National Assembly and 17% in the senate. This shows that due to quota system the women's political participation has increased significantly. However, the provincial variabilities are found as Punjab and Sindh show better women's political participation as compared with Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Women in those provinces face hurdles due to cultural stereotypes and male dominance in economic and educational sphere. Hence, despite many legal commitments and constitutional provisions women in Pakistan face hurdles in achieving their goal of participation in the politics and political decision making.

When we talk about the hurdles of women's political participation in Pakistan there numerous factors that restrict their political participation and involvement in political decision making. The most important and obvious issue curtailing the women's political participation and civic engagement the cultural and social norms. Social norms of the country and cultural patterns restrict women's mobility, public speaking and even attaining the education. Hence, all such things collectivity hurt and hinder the participation of women in political processes of the country (Khan & Naqvi, 2020).

Women's need to be economically independent in an order to excel in various walks of life including involvement in the political decision making. Overall the economic conditions of the women in Pakistan are not encouraging or up to mark which restrict their political participation. On the same token the educational level of women is also less as compared to the male counterpart again limiting their political participation. Women lack of education and lack of economic independence are interlinked with each other and eventually hurt the women's political participation (Zia, 2021). Last but not the least the political violence and intimidation in prevailing in the landscape of the country is important factor that limits the women's

involvement in the political processes of the country. Violent behavior of the public in general and specifically against women is a big hurdle in their political participation (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Overall structural of the society and hierarchy of the political parties is also an important factor of lower level of women's political participation.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Women's political participation is social problem and phenomenon that is multifaceted and varies across culture and societies. Different socio-economic and cultural factors interplay to overall form the nature and extent of the women's political participation in the world. Although certain areas of the world have higher level of women's political participation but despite that there are certain factors that remain constant in this regard and influence the women's political participation in the global perspective or specific areas. Therefore, it is very important to identify the factors that influence the women's political participation.

In the first place and obvious is the patriarchal and social norms that restrict women's in different fields of life including politics. Areas such as South Asia, Middle East and Africa have certain societal norms and patriarchal structure that is the major reason behind women's lack of political participation (Krook, 2020). Social norms are also driven by the strong religious beliefs which is also an important factor to hinder the political participation among women. So in a way social norms and religious tendencies go hand in hand to restrict the women's political participation (Chowdhury, 2022). On the same token lack of educational attainment is also associated with the lower level of political participation among women. However, it is pertinent to not that lack of women's political participation is interlinked with lack of educational level and social norms. In the first instance social norms restrict women's educational level and it further hurts their political participation as increase in women's level of education increases their level of political participation (Inglehart & Norris, 2002).

Apart from socio-cultural issues the economic factors are also very significant in determine the women's political participation. There is need of huge amount of funds and other such facilities to meet the expenses of the election campaign and other things. There is a huge economic gap between male and female which also creates a gap in terms of their political participation. Economic disparity is the major cause behind the lower level of women's political participation (Verge & Claveria, 2020). On the same token there is lack of employment and workforce opportunities for the women which hinder their economic well-being and eventually end their political participation. Here, again things are interlinked with each other i.e. lower economic opportunities create a gender gap in terms of economic equality which ultimately limit the women's political participation (Paxton & Hughes, 2017).

BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

As it has been established that across the globe gender equality in terms of Education Health Economic Opportunities and political participation has risen. But still there are a lot more needs to be done in terms of increasing women's political participation as there are various socio-cultural norms economic disparities and structural barriers that restrict women's political participation in developed as well as developing countries. In many societies such as Pakistani societies women are perceptive vote bank and consider to be lower level of leadership qualities and not able to perform their political duties in true spirit. Structural and cultural norms also restrict women's mobility outside the home which significantly restricts their critical participation and political exposure (Bari, 2005). In addition to the societal and cultural norms women also face institutional barriers and structural constraints that restricts their involvement in decision making processes. electoral system and political culture of political parties and society significantly heard women's political participation in local government system and also at higher level in Pakistan and other eastern societies (Goetz, 2003). According to Naz, Chaudry & Saeed, 2012 also explored the role of socio-cultural norms in restricting the political participation among women. Women face significant barriers in terms of economic freedom which is directly related with their political participation. Women's over reliance and dependence on men for their economic and financial task also restricts women in participating in the politics at various levels. Women face hurdles as voters, as candidates and as representative (Inglehart & Norris, 2003). Empirical research also show that women are facing at the hands of patriarchal setup of the society which hurt their political participation.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Women constitute the most important segment of the society and also constitute the major chunk of the population of any country. Same is the case with Pakistan where more than half of the population of the country is women. Their equal participation in walks of the life is very significant in ensuring the smooth functioning of the society. In the same essence women's participation in the politics and political process of the country is important in ensuring good governance and democracy. In an ideal situation all the segment of the society must strive together for betterment of the society including the political decision making. However, it is evident that women's political participation suffers a lot at global as well as national level. Women's are unable to equally participate in the politics and their energies are not adequately utilized in the

political decision making. On the same token there is need to understand and unpack the factors that hinder the political participation of the women. Traditionally, socio-economic, political and cultural factors hinder the political participation of the women. But the modern era of Information Communication Technology and changing trends of the women's political participation also need consideration. Women across the globe utilize modern technologies to adapt to the changing trend of the society and increase their political participation.

Therefore, current study is an attempt to find out how the use of modern technologies in the form of Information Communication Technology enhance the political participation of the women. The rise in the use of modern Information Communication Technology has changed the way of women's political participation. Therefore, current study tries to analyze this trend. The study also incorporate how civic knowledge of the women helps in the increasing their political participation.

RESEARCH INQUIRY

In the first place it is important to mention and explain the type of research inquiry applied in the current study. As the topic of the study is directed towards finding out the relationship between two variables that is civic knowledge with critical participation research inquiry for such topics is mostly applied in the form of quantitative research. The objective of the quantitative research inquiry is to quantify and objectively treat a social phenomenon which is exact the essence of the current study where researcher tries to find out how civic knowledge and information communication technologies play a role in determining and explaining the political participation among women. So that is such a keeping in view the objectives of the current studies applied quantitative research inquiry.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design is basically an outline or framework of entire research process and blueprint of the research with which entire research process revolves around. Different research designs are being used in social sciences based on the type of inquiry and research objectives. In most of the researches exploratory, explanatory and descriptive research designs are used. However, as the topic of the current study is to find out the relationship between the variables hence, explanatory research design is appropriate in the current study and researcher adopted this research design. Therefore, keeping in view the objectives of the current study explanatory research design is adopted for the current study.

RESEARCH METHOD

Under the broader umbrella of quantitative research inquiry and explanatory results design it is important to select and apply a research method. Different research enquiries and research design apply different research methods. Quality research inquiry uses a research method. As the current study is using quantitative research technique therefore under this product umbrella researcher in the current study is using survey research method. When the objective of the research is to find out the data and observe a social phenomenon from a larger population survey research method is the most suited and appropriate research method. As in the current study the objective of the researcher is to find out how civic knowledge and information communication technologies are helping women in increasing their critical participation and researcher in an order to understand this social phenomenon need to get information from a larger set of population hence survey research method is best and appropriate research method. Survey research method in the current study enabled the researcher to collect information on a wide range of topics that includes both independent and dependent variable and that too from a larger set of population which truly is the essence of the current study hence keeping in view the objective of the current study and aligned with broader research technique i.e. quantitative research survey method is best suited.

POPULATION OF THE STUDY

Determination of a population is very important for the progression of research. As the topic of the current study revolves around the idea of finding out how information communication technology and civic knowledge is associated with women's political participation hence women in district para are the population of current study. However, to be more pertinent and specific it is important for the researcher to select a and definite population an inclusion criterion was formulated by the reception. Therefore, following guard some of the key inclusion criterion for the current study.

- In the first-place women should be the permanent resident of District Okara with valid national identity card.
- The woman to be selected in the current study needs to be within the age bracket of sixteen to 40 five years age which constitute the most suitable age bracket for determination of critical participation.
- The woman to be selected for the credit study also require to have a minimum level of Education of matriculation. This was done since understanding of information communication technology and

critical participation requires some knowledge about these gadgets and these phenomena therefore a literal woman for at least minimum matriculation should be the qualification.

According to the latest available sensors in Pakistan the total population of District Okara is 3,515,490 with 1,725,411 females are female. Similarly, the literacy rate of is 60.25% and female literacy rate at 53.71%. Show by breaking this down the total female population of women in district Okara according to the above criteria are approximately 1,725,411.

SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

In social science research it is difficult to examine the data from entire population hence it is imperative to select a sample size from which findings can be generalized to the larger population. Therefore, social science research adopts a technique from which a definite sample size needs to be collected from a larger population which is called sampling technique (Creswell, 2012).

Hence in an order to determine the sample and reach the desired population multistage sampling technique was used in the current study with following different stages.

- In the first stage of multistage sampling technique researcher formulated a list of all the population selected in the above section i.e. 1,725,411.
- In the second stage of the sampling technique a researcher distributed the total number of populations into 3 major sub district level of district Okara.
- In the third stage researcher applied proportionate sampling technique to identify the respondents by dividing total number of populations to the selected sample size.

SIMPLE SIZE

Determining the sample size in any social science research is very important and it needs to be on firm and scientific grounds. Different formulas and statistical procedures are available to finalize the sample size however researcher in the current study used research advisor's formula to finalize the sample size following is the detail of sample size based on research advisors table.

$$n = \frac{X^2 * N * P * (1-P)}{(ME^2 * (N-1)) + (X^2 * P * (1-P))}$$

Where :

n = sample size

X^2 = Chi – square for the specified confidence level at 1 degree of freedom

N = Population Size

P = population proportion (.50 in this table)

ME = desired Margin of Error (expressed as a proportion)

A sample of 384 was selected by adjusting confidence interval of 95% and 5% margin of error.

MEASUREMENT OF THE VARIABLES

As the current study is being conducted under the broader of quantitative research and using explanatory research design hence it is very important and imperative for the progression of the research to clearly define variables of the study that is independent and dependent variables used in the current study to establish the relationship between them.

Independent variable

Access and usage of information communication technologies and civic knowledge have been treated as independent variable in the current study. for the measurement of Access and usage of ICT researcher used 24 items Ding et al. 2023 scale. Similarly, for the measurement of civic knowledge researcher used 9 item sub category of Civic competency scale developed by Bryony, Ernsto & Daniel, 2008.

Dependent variable

Dependent variable in the current study is political participation of women which was measured by the scale developed by Verma & Gopal, 2017. This scale is based on 18 items Likert scale.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

The following chapter presents the analysis and findings of the current study to find out how access to information and communication technology along with civic knowledge impacts the critical participation among women. View the topic of the study and research design applied in the current study the data analysis is based on two major dimensions,

- In the first-place frequency distribution of all the question asked in terms of independent and dependent variables are presented to show how respondents responded to the questions.

- Secondly the attacker analysis presents inferential statistics based on regression analysis to find out the predictive relationship between the variables of the study.

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHICS

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Rural	94	24.7	24.7	24.7
	Urban	286	75.3	75.3	100.0
	Total	380	100.0	100.0	

The rural and urban distribution of the participants of the current study. Above table shows that in 94 respondents which constitute 24.7% of the total population were from rural background while 286 respondents that constitutes 75.3% of the total population were from urban background. This shows that most of the population of the current study were urban based.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Below Matric	44	11.6	11.6	11.6
	Matric	39	10.3	10.3	21.8
	intermediate	54	14.2	14.2	36.1
	B.A/Bsc/14 Years	85	22.4	22.4	58.4
	MA/Msc/BS/ 16 Years	141	37.1	37.1	95.5
	Mphil/phd	17	4.5	4.5	100.0
	Total	380	100.0	100.0	

The above table shows the level of education of the respondents of the current study. And the above table shows that 44 respondents which constitute 11.6% of the total population were below metric. Thirty-nine respondents were having an education of matriculation. Addition to that the above table shows that 54 respondents which constitute 14.2% of the total population were having an education of intermediate. The above table shows that 85 respondents were having 14 years of education while a vast majority of the respondents were having 16 years of education. The above table further shows that 17 respondents which constitute 4.5% of the total population were having M Phil and PhD degrees.

INFERENTIAL STATISTICS

In financial statistics in the form of regression analysis has been applied in the current study to find out the casual relationship between independent variable and dependent variable of the current study in the first instance model summary in the following table is presented. Before applying the regression, analysis researcher tried to fulfill all the assumptions of the regression analysis. Following is some of the brief understanding of how different assumptions of the regression analysis has been used in the current study.

- In the first-place normality of the dependent variable was checked and it has been found that the overall data of the dependent variable is normally distribution hence is suited for the application of the regression analysis.
- Durban Watson statistics to check the heteroscedastic of the model has also been checked.
- Multi culinary diagnosis were also applied and it was also found to be aligned with the overall model used in the crunch study

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.898 ^a	.807	.806	.23747	.807	787.767	2	377	.000	2.048

a. Predictors: (Constant), Civic Knowledge , Access to ICT
 b. Dependent Variable: Political Participation

The above model represents multiple statistics regarding to the statistical operation applied in the crunch study. In the first place the value of R which is 0.898 shows the simple correlation between the study variables and it shows a strong relationship between the independent and dependent variable. Secondly R Square is presented in the table which shows variance in the dependent variable on account of the independent variable. Value .806% in dependent variable is caused by the independent variable in the current study i.e. the relationship between access to ICT, Civic Knowledge with political participation among women. In addition to that above table illustrates that P-value is less than .05 showing the overall significance of the model.

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	88.844	2	44.422	787.767	.000 ^b
	Residual	21.259	377	.056		
	Total	110.103	379			
a. Dependent Variable: Political Participation						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Civic Knowledge, Access to ICT						

The above table also shows the overall significance of the model used in the current study to predict the relationship between usage/access to ICT, civic knowledge and political participation. The last column of the table shows the significant value which is 0.000 hence which is less than oh point oh five showing the overall significance of the model. In addition to that that the value of F statistics in the above table also shows the overall good fit of the model used in the current study to predict the relationship usage/access to ICT, civic knowledge and political participation.

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficient	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	.398	.025		16.063	.000		
	Access to ICT	.415	.030	.500	13.695	.000	.385	2.598
	Civic Knowledge	.356	.029	.451	12.375	.000	.385	2.598
a. Dependent Variable: Political Participation								

The above table which presents the coefficients of the study is very important in explaining the predictive relationship between independent and dependent variable in the current study. In the first place the significant value of the model is less than 0.05 which shows that the overall model and the relationship used in the current study is significant in predicting the relationship between the both the variables i.e. access to ICT, civic knowledge and political participation. The table further presents collinearity tolerance and collinearity statistics which is less than 10 showing that there is no issue of multicollinearity in the current study. The table also illustrates the unstandardized coefficients to show the relationship between both variables. The coefficient value of .415 shows that one unit increase in the access to ICT will increase political participation by .415 times. The next value of .356 indicates that one unit increase in civic knowledge will increase the political participation by .356 times. This shows that the overall model used in the current study and the values of the coefficient shows that political participation among women is directly associated with access to ICT and Civic knowledge this further emphasizes that increase in job burnout decreases the job performance in the current study. Hence, it shows that the role of access to information communication technology is greater than civic knowledge in predicting the political participation which is the dependent variable in the current study.

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	.5413	2.7125	1.2528	.48417	380
Residual	-.61687	.57066	.00000	.23684	380
Std. Predicted Value	-1.470	3.015	.000	1.000	380
Std. Residual	-2.598	2.403	.000	.997	380
a. Dependent Variable: Political Participation					

The residuals were approximately normally distributed with a mean of 0 (SD = 1.10), and most standardized residuals fell within the acceptable ± 2 range, with one or two potential outliers above ± 3 . The model appears to produce reasonably accurate and unbiased predictions of Job Performance

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Political Participation	Equal variances assumed	.145	.703	4.644	378	.000	.3966	.0854	.2286	.5645
	Equal variances not assumed			4.387	1497	.000	.3966	.0904	.2179	.5752

The results of the independent samples t-test indicate that there is a statistically significant difference in political participation between the two groups being compared. Levene's Test for Equality of Variances was non-significant ($F = 0.145$, $p = 0.703$), indicating that the assumption of equal variances was met and the equal variances assumed results should be used. The t-test revealed a significant difference in mean political participation scores, $t(378) = 4.644$, $p < .001$, with a mean difference of 0.397. This suggests that one group demonstrated significantly higher levels of political participation than the other.

CONCLUSIONS

This section of the study presents conclusion of the study based on findings of the study. The findings of this study illustrate that with the increase in the level of Education political participation among female also increases. Findings also support that participants of the urban area have higher level of political participation as compared to the rural area women. furthermore, findings of the study show a positive and significant relationship between both the variables. the study further illustrates that one unit increase in the ICT will increase political participation by .415 times. The study concludes that there is a positive and significant relationship between both the variables and one unit increase in civic knowledge will increase the political participation by .356 times.

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