

FROM X (TWITTER) TO REALITY: A STUDY EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP OF ONLINE INTERACTIONS AND OFFLINE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between online political engagement on X (formerly Twitter) and offline political participation in Pakistan, focusing on how dialogic interaction, Twitter use time, and network size influence institutional and extra-institutional forms of political activity. Employing a cross-sectional survey design with a sample of 410 Twitter users in Pakistan, the research investigated the extent to which citizens use Twitter for political purposes and whether online engagement translates into offline political participation. The findings reveal that a majority of respondents (60.7%) use Twitter for political purposes, confirming the platform's significance as a contemporary public sphere for political discourse in Pakistan. Regression analysis demonstrated that dialogic interaction and Twitter use time were positively associated with both institutional and extra-institutional offline political participation, while Twitter network size was significantly related only to institutional participation. These findings provide empirical support for Cyber-democracy Theory and Public Sphere Theory, challenging critiques that dismiss online political engagement as superficial. The study contributes to understanding how social media facilitates democratic participation in developing democracies, with implications for policymakers, political parties, and civil society organizations seeking to leverage digital platforms for political mobilization and civic engagement.

KEYWORDS: Twitter, Political Participation, Dialogic Interaction, Social Media, Pakistan, Cyber-Democracy

1. INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of social media platforms has fundamentally transformed how citizens engage with political processes worldwide. In the contemporary digital age, platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X formerly known as Twitter have become integral to political discourse, enabling unprecedented levels of information dissemination, public debate, and civic mobilization (Masroor et al., 2019). This digital transformation has given rise to what scholars describe as digital democracy, wherein online spaces serve as contemporary public spheres for political deliberation and engagement (Coleman & Blumler, 2009). The growth of social media has significantly enhanced political socialization processes, allowing individuals to express their social and political rights more freely than ever before. Khan and Shahbaz (2015) observed that social networking platforms have encouraged citizens to consider social and political issues, thereby motivating their political participation. In developing democracies like Pakistan, where traditional media landscapes may be constrained by various factors, social media platforms offer alternative avenues for political expression and engagement (Eijaz, 2013). The interactive nature of these platforms has democratized access to political information, enabling citizens who were previously marginalized from mainstream political discourse to participate in meaningful political conversations. Furthermore, the immediacy and accessibility of social media have reduced barriers to political engagement, allowing individuals to express their political views without the gatekeeping mechanisms inherent in traditional media (Newman, 2010).

Online political engagement encompasses a wide range of activities, from consuming political content and following political figures to actively participating in discussions, sharing opinions, and mobilizing others around specific causes. Research has demonstrated that social media platforms facilitate both expressive and participatory forms of political engagement, creating new pathways for citizens to influence political processes (Zúñiga et al.,

2012). Citizens can now engage in political activities without leaving their homes, participating in online petitions, sharing political content, and engaging in debates with fellow citizens and political representatives. However, the extent to which these online activities translate into offline political participation remains a subject of scholarly debate (Bimber, 1999; Davis, 1999; Morris, 2001). Some scholars argue that online political engagement represents a form of slacktivism that does not lead to meaningful offline action, while others contend that digital participation can serve as a gateway to more substantive forms of political involvement (Valenzuela et al., 2012). This ongoing scholarly debate underscores the need for empirical research that examines the specific mechanisms through which online engagement translates into offline political participation. This study addresses this critical gap by examining the relationship between online political interactions on X formerly known as Twitter and offline political participation among Pakistani citizens.

Since its launch in 2006, Twitter has revolutionized the sharing and consumption of information through its unique microblogging format that limits posts to concise messages. With over 330 million monthly active users as of 2023, the platform allows users to instantly broadcast concise messages to a broad audience, creating opportunities for real-time political communication and dialogue (Ruby, 2023). The platform's immediacy and the ability to interact directly with politicians, media outlets, and other public figures make Twitter a particularly powerful tool for political engagement. Unlike traditional media, Twitter enables direct two-way communication between citizens and political leaders, fostering a more interactive form of political discourse (Coleman & Blumler, 2009). The platform's hashtag functionality allows users to organize discussions around specific issues, facilitating collective action and issue-based mobilization. Twitter has significantly shaped political discourse, mobilized social movements, and influenced public opinion globally. Its impact has been extensively documented in events such as the Arab Spring, the Black Lives Matter movement, and various election campaigns across democratic societies (Newman, 2010). In Western democracies, politicians use Twitter to reach large audiences and provide real-time updates, bridging the gap between citizens and their representatives. Research has demonstrated that Twitter can serve as a barometer of public opinion, with politicians and media organizations increasingly relying on the platform to gauge public sentiment on political issues (Masroor et al., 2019).

In the Pakistani context, Twitter has emerged as a significant platform for political communication and mobilization, playing an increasingly important role in the country's evolving political landscape. Politicians like Imran Khan have extensively used Twitter for public relations and political engagement, particularly during election campaigns (Ahmed & Skoric, 2013; Ejaz, 2013). During political protests, Twitter has served as a coordinating platform for movements and activities, with citizens participating politically through episodic framing and expressing their views widely (Ashfaq et al., 2022). The platform has also been used to express political participation and national sentiments, as evidenced by Pakistani citizens' use of Twitter during the Jammu and Kashmir conflict (Gabel et al., 2022). Twitter has provided Pakistani citizens with a platform to voice their opinions on sensitive political issues, circumventing traditional media constraints and government censorship. Badil et al. (2021) investigated Twitter's role in informing citizens about the Panama Leaks, finding that participants engaged in economic and political discussions and understood related terms through their political participation on Twitter. These studies collectively demonstrate that Twitter has become an indispensable tool for political communication, activism, and civic engagement in Pakistan, warranting systematic investigation of its effects on political participation. The evolving political landscape of Pakistan makes it crucial to understand how the general public uses Twitter for political purposes and its impact on their offline political participation (Khan & Shahbaz, 2015).

The potential for social media to enhance democratic participation has generated significant scholarly interest, particularly regarding whether online political engagement translates into meaningful offline activities. This study investigates Twitter's role as a political tool and its influence on offline political activities in Pakistan. By focusing on the Pakistani context, this research contributes to a growing body of literature on social media and politics in developing democracies, where the dynamics of online and offline political engagement may differ significantly from those in Western contexts. Understanding the extent to which the general public is involved in political activities on Twitter offers insights into the platform's role as a contemporary public sphere (Coleman & Blumler, 2009). By investigating Twitter use time, network size, and dialogic interactions, this study intends to explain how online political engagement in Pakistan converts into offline political activities. This understanding can advise policymakers, activists, and researchers about the potential of social media to boost democratic participation and address political apathy in developing democracies where traditional forms of political mobilization have historically been constrained (Zúñiga et al., 2012). The findings from this research may inform strategies for leveraging digital platforms to strengthen democratic processes and civic engagement in Pakistan and similar contexts.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The emergence of social media platforms has fundamentally transformed the landscape of political participation, offering citizens unprecedented opportunities to engage with political processes, express opinions, and mobilize around issues of collective concern. Scholars have observed that the growth of social networking sites has

enhanced political socialization processes, allowing individuals to articulate their social and political rights more freely than traditional media channels permit (Khan & Shahbaz, 2015). These researchers found that many Pakistani citizens believe Twitter has encouraged them to consider social and political issues, thereby motivating their political participation. However, the relationship between social media use and political participation remains intensely contested within academic discourse. Early scholarship produced skeptical findings, with Bimber (1999) discovering no significant relationship between political engagement and internet use, suggesting that digital platforms may not necessarily translate into meaningful political activity. Davis (1999) similarly argued that electronic media did not affect power structures or facilitate political participation in substantive ways, while Morris (2001) criticized the internet for failing to bring changes in offline political participation despite facilitating online engagement. More recent scholarship has provided nuanced perspectives that challenge these earlier conclusions, with Zúñiga et al. (2012) finding that seeking information through social network sites predicted social capital and political participation both online and offline. Valenzuela et al. (2012) demonstrated that commenting and discussing political content on social media predicted offline political participation, suggesting that active engagement rather than passive consumption of content is key to translating online activities into offline participation. These contrasting findings underscore the need for context-specific investigations that examine how different forms of social media engagement influence political participation across diverse sociopolitical settings. Twitter has emerged as a particularly significant platform for political engagement globally, with its microblogging format enabling users to instantly broadcast messages to broad audiences in ways that are especially suitable for political communication and mobilization (Newman, 2010). Studies have extensively documented Twitter's role in various political contexts, including the Arab Spring, Black Lives Matter movement, and numerous election campaigns across democratic societies. In Western democracies, politicians use Twitter extensively to reach large audiences and provide real-time updates on political developments (Coleman & Blumler, 2009). The platform facilitates connections between the public and influential figures, enabling interactive communication that was previously difficult to achieve through traditional media channels. With over 6,000 tweets per second, Twitter plays a crucial role in political communication and election campaigns globally (Ruby, 2023). In the Pakistani context, Twitter has emerged as a significant political communication tool with distinctive characteristics shaped by the country's unique political environment. Politicians like Imran Khan have extensively used Twitter for public relations and political engagement, particularly during election campaigns (Ahmed & Skoric, 2013). Survey participants in Khan and Shahbaz's (2015) study indicated increased political exposure and a growing reliance on Twitter for political engagement, with campaign messages influencing their voting decisions. During political protests, Twitter serves as a coordinating platform for political participation, with Ashfaq et al. (2022) analyzing tweets during protests in Pakistan and finding that Twitter effectively coordinated movements and activities. Citizens participated politically through episodic framing, expressing their views widely through the platform. Gabel et al. (2022) analyzed tweets about the conflict in Jammu and Kashmir, finding that Pakistani citizens used Twitter to express political participation and antagonism towards India, while Badil et al. (2021) investigated Twitter's role in informing citizens about the Panama Leaks, finding that participants engaged in economic and political discussions through their political participation on Twitter. Dialogic interaction on social media refers to mutual engagement through features such as replies, mentions, retweets, and direct messages, fostering dialogue, relationship-building, and participation in public discourse (Lee & Ma, 2012). The quality and nature of these interactions may be particularly important for understanding how online engagement translates into offline participation. Lee and Ma (2012) found that dialogic interaction on social media, specifically expressing opinions and being heard, was positively associated with offline political participation. Similarly, Zúñiga et al. (2012) and Valenzuela et al. (2012) found that commenting and discussing political content on social media predicted offline political participation, suggesting that active participation in dialogues on Twitter correlates with higher offline political activity. However, skeptics continue to argue that dialogic interactions on social media may not lead to meaningful offline engagement, contending that online political engagement results in low-effort actions that do not translate into substantive offline participation (Bimber, 1999; Davis, 1999). The relationship between time spent on social media and political participation has been examined by several scholars, with Zúñiga and Valenzuela (2012) finding that seeking information through social network sites predicted social capital and political participation both online and offline. Hopke et al. (2016) found that mobile Twitter users were more likely to engage in political activities online and offline, while Skoric and Poor (2013) showed a favorable association between social media use and traditional political activities. However, critics argue that time spent on social media may not necessarily lead to meaningful political engagement if it is not accompanied by active participation in political discussions (Bimber, 1999; Davis, 1999). Twitter network size, referring to the total number of followers and accounts followed by a user, has also been examined, with some scholars suggesting that larger networks expose users to more diverse perspectives and information (Zúñiga et al., 2012), while others argue that network size may not significantly impact political engagement as the quality of connections matters more than sheer numbers (Valenzuela et al., 2012). Despite the growing body of literature on social media and political participation, significant gaps remain in understanding the relationship between online political engagement and offline political participation in developing democracies like Pakistan. While numerous studies have examined political expression on Twitter

(Masroor et al., 2019; Ashfaq et al., 2022), limited empirical evidence exists regarding whether online political interactions translate into tangible offline political activities in the Pakistani context. Existing research has yielded contradictory findings regarding the efficacy of social media in promoting offline political engagement, with some scholars arguing that online political engagement does not necessarily translate into meaningful offline participation (Bimber, 1999; Davis, 1999; Morris, 2001), while others contend that digital platforms facilitate and enhance traditional political activities (Lee & Ma, 2012). Ahmed et al. (2019) specifically concluded that online political activities did not transform real-life political participation among university students in rural Pakistan, suggesting the need for further investigation across diverse populations and contexts. This study addresses this critical gap by examining how specific aspects of Twitter engagement, including dialogic interaction, network size, and time spent on the platform, influence offline political participation in Pakistan. By investigating these relationships, this research contributes to understanding social media's potential to enhance democratic participation and address political apathy in developing democracies where traditional forms of political mobilization have historically faced significant constraints. The findings from this investigation may inform strategies for leveraging digital platforms to strengthen democratic processes and civic engagement in Pakistan and similar contexts where social media increasingly shapes political discourse and participation patterns (Khan & Shahbaz, 2015; Eijaz, 2013).

3. Research Objectives

1. To investigate the extent to which the general public in Pakistan uses Twitter for political purposes
2. To examine the relationship between online Twitter engagement, including dialogic interaction, use time, and network size, and offline political participation among Pakistani citizens
3. To explain how online Twitter engagement converts into offline political participation in the Pakistani context

4. Research Questions

1. To what extent does the general public in Pakistan use Twitter for political purposes?
2. How do dialogic interaction, Twitter use time, and network size relate to offline political participation among Pakistani citizens?
3. Through what mechanisms does online Twitter engagement translate into offline political participation in the Pakistani context?

5. Hypotheses

H1: The general public in Pakistan uses Twitter for political purposes.

H2: There is a positive relationship between online Twitter engagement, including dialogic interaction, use time, and network size, and offline political participation among Pakistani citizens.

H3: Online Twitter engagement translates into offline political participation through mechanisms of dialogic interaction and sustained platform use in the Pakistani context.

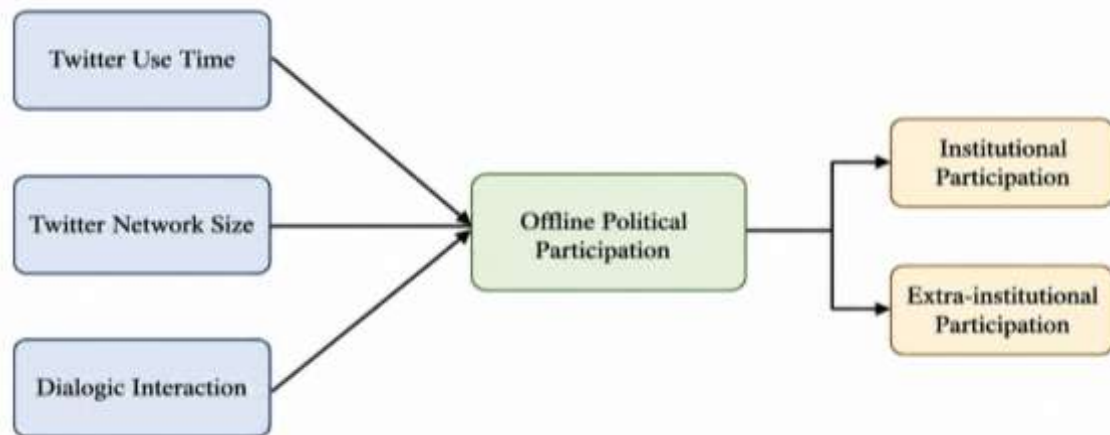
6. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical foundation of this study integrates Cyber-democracy Theory and Public Sphere Theory to explain the relationship between online political engagement on Twitter and offline political participation in Pakistan. Cyber-democracy Theory posits that digital technologies enhance democratic participation by enabling citizens to engage directly with political processes and representatives, bridging the gap between citizens and politicians through interactive communication (Coleman & Blumler, 2009). This perspective suggests that social media engagement constitutes meaningful political behavior rather than superficial activity. Complementing this, Public Sphere Theory as conceptualized by Habermas describes spaces where citizens freely discuss issues of public concern, forming public opinion that influences political decision-making (Masroor et al., 2019). Social media platforms like Twitter function as contemporary public spheres, providing spaces for political discourse, information sharing, and collective mobilization. Together, these frameworks provide a theoretical lens for understanding how online engagement on Twitter translates into offline political participation.

Building on these theoretical foundations, this study proposes a conceptual framework examining the relationship between three independent variables and offline political participation. Twitter use time captures the intensity of platform engagement, reflecting how duration and frequency of use influence political awareness and mobilization. Twitter network size represents the breadth of one's digital political connections, potentially exposing users to diverse perspectives and information. Dialogic interaction measures the quality of political discourse through mutual engagement via replies, mentions, retweets, and direct messages (Lee & Ma, 2012). These three dimensions of Twitter engagement are hypothesized to collectively influence offline political participation, which is categorized into institutional activities and extra-institutional activities (Ulbig & Funk, 1999). The framework posits that dialogic interaction and sustained platform use serve as primary mechanisms through which online engagement converts into offline political action.

The conceptual framework illustrates how Twitter use time, Twitter network size, and dialogic interaction function as independent variables that predict offline political participation as the dependent variable. The framework posits that Twitter engagement influences political participation through mechanisms of political socialization, public opinion formation, and collective mobilization (Khan & Shahbaz, 2015). The dialogic interactions facilitated by Twitter contribute to the formation of public opinion, while sustained platform use enhances political awareness and efficacy. Although network size may have weaker effects compared to dialogic interaction and use time, it remains relevant for understanding how digital connections expose citizens to political content and mobilization opportunities. This integrated framework provides a systematic approach for examining how online engagement on Twitter converts into offline political participation in the Pakistani context.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Independent Variables: Twitter Use Time, Twitter Network Size, Dialogic Interaction
Dependent Variable: Offline Political Participation (Institutional and Extra-institutional)

7. METHODOLOGY

7.1 Research Design

This study employs a cross-sectional survey research design to examine the relationship between online interactions on X (Twitter) and offline political participation in Pakistan. The quantitative approach enables the systematic collection and analysis of data from a representative sample of Twitter users, allowing for statistical testing of the proposed hypotheses.

7.2 Population

The target population for this study comprises Twitter users in Pakistan who are over 18 years old and eligible to vote. With approximately 4.65 million Pakistanis using Twitter in 2023, this population represents a significant segment of the country's digitally engaged citizenry.

7.3 Sampling

Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who actively use Twitter and are eligible to vote in Pakistan. This non-probability sampling technique was appropriate for targeting the specific population of interest Twitter users who may engage in political activities on the platform. Using Yamane's formula with a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error, a sample size of 410 was determined from the population of approximately 4.65 million Twitter users in Pakistan. The study collected 450 responses, excluding 40 due to incomplete data, resulting in a final sample size of 410 respondents.

7.4 Data Collection

An online survey was distributed via various platforms, including Facebook, WhatsApp, and email, targeting general internet users in Pakistan. The online distribution method was appropriate for reaching the target population of Twitter users, who are by definition active internet users. The survey was designed to collect comprehensive data on respondents' Twitter usage patterns, dialogic interactions, and offline political participation.

7.5 Variables and Measurements

The study examined four main variables, operationalized as follows:

Table 1: Variables and Measurements

Variable	Items	Source	Scale
Dialogic Interaction	10	Lee & Ma (2012)	5-point Likert
Twitter Use Time	3	Developed	5-point Likert
Network Size	2	Developed	Continuous

Offline Political Participation	12	Zúñiga et al. (2012); Ulbig & Funk (1999)	5-point Likert
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7.6 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize respondent demographics, Twitter usage patterns, and the purpose of Twitter use. Regression analysis was conducted to test the hypothesized relationships between the independent variables (dialogic interaction, Twitter use time, and network size) and the dependent variable (offline political participation). The regression analysis allowed for the examination of each variable's unique contribution to predicting offline political participation while controlling for other variables.

8. RESULTS

8.1 Respondent Profile

The study collected data from 410 respondents who actively use Twitter in Pakistan. The respondent profile reveals the demographic characteristics and Twitter usage patterns of the sample, providing context for understanding the relationship between online engagement and offline political participation. Respondents reported varied Twitter usage patterns, with 46.1% using Twitter for more than 90 minutes daily, indicating substantial engagement with the platform. Most respondents reported having a network of over 200 followers, suggesting active participation in the Twitter ecosystem.

8.2 Political Purpose of Twitter Use

The researcher examined the extent to which the general public in Pakistan uses X (Twitter) for political purposes. Table 2 provides information about the purpose of using Twitter among respondents, along with the corresponding frequency and percentage breakdown.

Table 2: Purpose of Using Twitter

Purpose of Using Twitter	Frequency	Percentage
Political purpose	249	60.7%
Entertainment	103	25%
Advertisement	17	4.14%
Socialization	19	4.6%
Others	22	5.36%
Total	410	100%

Results show that 249 respondents (60.7%) use Twitter for political purposes, suggesting that a majority of participants use Twitter for discussing political topics, sharing opinions, or following political figures. Entertainment purposes were reported by 103 respondents (25%), while advertisement, socialization, and other purposes accounted for smaller proportions. These results clearly demonstrate that people primarily use Twitter for political purposes in Pakistan, supporting H1.

8.3 Regression Analysis

Regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between online dialogic interaction, Twitter use time, Twitter network size, and offline political participation. The analysis examined both institutional and extra-institutional forms of political participation.

Table 3: Regression Analyses Predicting Political Participation

Predictor Variables	Extra-institutional Political Participation			Institutional Political Participation		
	B	t	p	B	t	p
Dialogic Interaction	0.078	3.180	0.040	0.199	3.881	<0.001
Twitter Use Time	0.116	1.879	0.048	0.181	3.221	0.001
Twitter Network Size	0.056	0.974	0.330	0.123	2.811	0.003
R²	0.043			0.031		

Among the three independent variables, dialogic interaction and Twitter use time were statistically significant in predicting extra-institutional political participation. Dialogic interaction showed a beta coefficient of 0.078, t-value of 3.18, and p-value of 0.04 for extra-institutional participation. Twitter use time showed a beta coefficient of 0.116, t-value of 1.879, and p-value of 0.048 for extra-institutional participation. However, Twitter network

size did not produce substantial results for extra-institutional participation, with a p-value of 0.330. For institutional political participation, there was a statistically significant association with all three independent variables. Dialogic interaction showed a beta coefficient of 0.199, t-value of 3.881, and p-value of 0.000. Twitter use time showed a beta coefficient of 0.181, t-value of 3.221, and p-value of 0.001. Twitter network size showed a beta coefficient of 0.123, t-value of 2.811, and p-value of 0.003.

The R-squared values indicate that the predictor variables explain 4.3% of the variation in extra-institutional political participation and 3.1% of the variation in institutional political participation. These modest effect sizes are consistent with the complexity of political participation, which is influenced by numerous factors beyond social media engagement.

8.4 Summary of Hypotheses Testing:

- H1 (Political use of Twitter): Supported - 60.7% of respondents use Twitter for political purposes.
- H2-a (Dialogic interaction → offline participation): Supported - Significant positive relationship found for both institutional ($p < .001$) and extra-institutional ($p < .05$) participation.
- H2-b (Twitter use time → offline participation): Supported - Significant positive relationship found for both institutional ($p < .01$) and extra-institutional ($p < .05$) participation.
- H2-c (Twitter network size → offline participation): Partially supported - Significant for institutional participation ($p < .01$), but not significant for extra-institutional participation ($p > .05$).

9. DISCUSSION

The finding that a majority of respondents use Twitter for political purposes confirms the platform's significance for political engagement in Pakistan. This aligns with research demonstrating that social media contributes to political participation by enabling information access and promoting discussion (Moroojo et al., 2024). The platform serves as a contemporary public sphere where citizens engage in political discourse, consistent with observations that Pakistani politicians use Twitter extensively for public relations during election campaigns (Eijaz, 2013). The platform's role in political mobilization during protests and national conflicts further underscores its political significance (Ashfaq et al., 2022). Research demonstrates that users who follow opinion leaders and actively engage with political content show higher levels of political participation, including voting intention (Lee, 2024). The prevalence of political use among Pakistani Twitter users suggests the platform functions as a space for political discourse that contributes to public opinion formation.

The significant positive relationship between dialogic interaction on Twitter and offline political participation provides empirical support for theoretical frameworks linking online engagement to real-world political action. Research demonstrates that dialogic interactions via social networking sites can revive political participation and assist citizens in becoming involved in real-world politics (Chun, 2013). People who perceive their virtual friendships as more dialogic are more likely to be active in extra-institutional political participation, and those who engage in political activity via social media are more likely to participate offline (Chun, 2013). Active participation through tweeting, retweeting, replying, and commenting correlates with higher offline political activity, with stronger relationships to institutional participation suggesting dialogic interaction is particularly effective for formal political engagement. Research on Twitter opinion leadership finds that individuals engaging in frequent tweeting demonstrate significant positive associations with civic participation, with opinion leadership being more strongly associated with online network size than offline network size (The tweet goes on, 2017). These dialogic interactions facilitate political learning and can serve as gateway behaviors to mobilization for high-effort offline activities (Tweeting, talking, or doing politics, 2024).

The significant positive relationship between Twitter use time and offline political participation reinforces the importance of sustained platform engagement for political mobilization. Research shows that Twitter use enhances social political participation, with information consumption through Twitter being particularly effective in boosting participatory behaviors (Park, 2025). Studies demonstrate that Twitter users show higher levels of political discussion participation compared to non-users, with those spending more time on the platform showing higher levels of political engagement (Lee, 2024). Higher exposure to political content may increase political awareness and motivation to participate offline, supporting theoretical perspectives that sustained engagement in political discourse on social media can influence political action. However, research indicates that while frequent Twitter use enhances online political engagement, it may be associated with disengagement from offline participation depending on specific activities performed (Tweeting, talking, or doing politics, 2024). The finding that time spent on Twitter is conducive to formal political engagement aligns with observations of a favorable association between social media use and traditional political activities (Skoric & Poor, 2013).

The finding that Twitter network size significantly related to institutional political participation but not extra-institutional participation provides nuanced insights into network characteristics and engagement forms. Research demonstrates that Twitter users with more followers who make more tweets show higher levels of political participation, including voting intention (Lee, 2024). Twitter opinion leadership is significantly associated with online civic participation, characterized by frequent posting and retweeting behaviors (The tweet goes on, 2017). The weaker influence of network size on extra-institutional participation suggests that the quality of connections

matters more than sheer numbers for political participation. Research shows that bridging social capital formed through Twitter networks influences offline political participation, while bonding social capital primarily affects online political engagement (Kim & Lim, 2025). The differential effects of dialogic interaction, use time, and network size on institutional versus extra-institutional participation suggest different forms of online engagement have varying effects on different forms of offline participation, contributing to understanding how social media engagement translates into offline political participation in developing democracies.

10. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the relationship between online political engagement on Twitter and offline political participation in Pakistan, examining how dialogic interaction, Twitter use time, and network size influence institutional and extra-institutional forms of political activity. The findings reveal that a majority of Pakistani Twitter users engage with the platform for political purposes, confirming its significance as a contemporary public sphere where citizens participate in political discourse and opinion formation. The research demonstrates that dialogic interaction and sustained Twitter use are positively associated with offline political participation, providing empirical support for Cyber-democracy Theory and Public Sphere Theory. These findings challenge scholarly critiques that dismiss online political engagement as superficial or inconsequential, showing instead that active participation in political dialogues on Twitter translates into meaningful offline political action. The stronger relationship between dialogic interaction and institutional participation suggests that online discourse is particularly effective in encouraging formal political engagement such as voting and campaign work.

The study contributes to understanding how social media facilitates democratic participation in developing democracies, where traditional forms of political mobilization have historically faced constraints. The differential effects of dialogic interaction, use time, and network size on institutional versus extra-institutional participation reveal that different forms of online engagement influence varying types of offline political activity. While network size demonstrated weaker effects on extra-institutional participation, dialogic interaction and sustained platform use emerged as primary mechanisms through which online engagement converts into offline political action. These findings have significant practical implications for policymakers, political parties, and civil society organizations seeking to leverage social media for democratic participation. The research also highlights contextual factors that may constrain offline political participation in Pakistan, including political violence, economic restrictions, and social barriers facing minority groups. Future research should employ longitudinal designs and comparative platform analyses to further elucidate the mechanisms through which online engagement translates into offline political participation. Ultimately, as social media continues to reshape political communication landscapes worldwide, understanding its influence on offline political activities remains essential for nurturing engaged and participatory democracies.

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