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Echo Chambers and Partisan Divide: Investigating Political Polarization of Youth in the Cyber Sphere

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the phenomenon of Echo Chambers and Partisan Divide: Investigating Political Polarization of Youth in the cyber Sphere. This study examines the relationship between various factors, including social media political expression, partisanship affective polarization and ideological polarization among youth. For this quantitative survey study, the data was collected from the youth of Faisalabad, mainly students of different universities through simple random sampling. Pre-made questionnaire comprises 33 items was employed for this purpose. A sample of 397 participants and employing a 5-point Likert scale to measure the variables. To investigate these correlations, we ran a number of regression studies. The study's theoretical foundation was provided by Schmitt's partisan theory as well as Henri Tajfel and John Turner's Social Identity Theory within the framework of Political Identity Theory. The data was analyzed through SPSS. While political expression on social media did not significantly associate with ideological polarization, our findings show a significant positive association between affective polarization and political expression on social media, suggesting that other factors may be more crucial in determining ideological divisions. A significant portion of the diversity in affective polarization cannot be explained by partisanship. The absence of a meaningful correlation shows how complicated ideological polarization is and implies that partisanship is not a sufficient explanation. There are suggestions made for more research.

Introduction

Social media has altered the landscape of contemporary communication. In terms of politics, it has produced numerous new avenues for citizens to interact with one another, participate in political rallies, and communicate outside of the traditional media (newspapers, television). Information can be posted, found, commented on, and discussed by any user who want to use social networks. Young people particularly use social media to voice their opinions. They observe political celebrities and political parties, disseminate news, and publish comments on a variety of subjects. In such a political setting, young people converse with one another on both contentious and non-controversial subjects in addition to exchanging opinions. However, the new techniques have been criticized due to the growing popularity of such a politically divisive weapon.

The social media effect is complicated because it can lead to ideological isolation as well as open people's minds to various political viewpoints. People, in particular, frequently select information that supports their opinions, and they can engage with like-minded people on social media. Echo chambers, selective exposure, and filter bubbles are some of the terms used to describe this phenomenon. According to Levy and Razin (2019), an echo chamber is a place where people are exclusively exposed to their

own perspectives, confirming their preexisting beliefs. The filter-bubble hypothesis, on the other hand, contends that people in the digital age are surrounded by carefully chosen material that supports their opinions (Samuels, 2012).

In Pakistani culture today, the younger generation mainly relies on the information found on social media pages, especially those with large fan bases. The widespread expansion and usage of this platform has brought people from different parts of the world closer together. Additionally, it has given various advocacy groups such as lobbyists and social media activists the ability to mold their opinions on certain problems pertaining to daily life. However, because political hate speech and support are used, these arguments are typically founded on misrepresented facts and data. The online social networking industry has been greatly affected by the millions of users who keep visiting sites like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and LinkedIn. But Twitter and Facebook's administrators have voiced concerns about news feed hijacking and content that is primarily manipulated by social media activists who, because of their shared interests, try to influence social media content by feeding and circulating it into various social media platforms (Rehmat & Manzoor, 2023).

When social identity is involved, the problem of political communication becomes extremely pertinent. People's political inclinations may be related to both their social identities and their opinions on policy issues. Many people may come to identify with political parties and candidates, therefore partisanship may have an impact on how they interpret political information and view their rivals. Party identification, according to Campbell et al. (1980), is a psychological phenomenon that emphasizes how people view politics and their attitudes toward them. Nonetheless, Green et al. (2002) draw attention to how party identity affects how people view and feel about political actors.

Another viewpoint is social identity theory, which was put forth by Tajfel and Turner. This method holds that people categorize themselves and other people into various social groups, and they consistently see members of their own category (in-group) more favorably than those who belong to other social groupings (out-group). People who hold similar opinions about political matters are inclined to see political opponents more harshly than members of their own group because political identification is seen as a particular kind of social identity. Therefore, interpersonal and intergroup conflicts necessarily arise when political disagreement becomes socially relevant. To put it another way, people often develop animosity toward others and positive sentiments for their own political group. Iyengar et al. (2012) came to the conclusion that it is no longer possible to overlook the psychological processes that lead to ideological conflicts in political discourse.

This gap between intellectual and affective polarization is especially pertinent to the present investigation. While affective polarization concentrates on emotional assessments of political groups, ideological polarization refers to differences in political viewpoints, beliefs, and policy preferences. While affective polarization refers to favorable sentiments toward one's own political group and unfavorable sentiments toward political opponents, ideological polarization is associated with the extent to which individuals or groups adopt increasingly divergent political positions (Garzia et al., 2025; Torcal & Harteveld, 2024). The distinction is especially important when political parties elicit strong emotional bonds from their supporters despite not being clearly distinguished by very consistent intellectual programs.

Online political participation may have a favorable impact on civic life, according to earlier study. Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2014) observed that social media expression is associated with political engagement. Calenda and Meijer (2009) reach the same conclusion, stating that youth who utilize the internet have more opportunity to participate in politics. Halim et al. (2021) investigate Malaysian democracy and discover that young people utilize social media for political purposes because of the quality of the content, their curiosity, and their political expertise. These studies demonstrate that the use of social media for political communication is more than just a source of polarization.

The political communication environment, however, has the potential to further polarize the situation. Bakshy et al. (2015) showed that both algorithmic rank and individual preferences influenced the exposure to ideologically varied news on Facebook. Barberá (2020) addressed Facebook networks, echo chambers, and the problem of ideological polarization. As social media has become more widely used over the past 20 years, people's beliefs have become more rigid and polarizing. People's political ideas are being influenced by social conversations on social media, which can lead to partisan extremism. Individuals who share similar political beliefs are considerably more probable to follow other users on Twitter and develop close friendships with them. Although Facebook's algorithms have an impact on the news feed, people ultimately decide what is displayed in it by choosing what to read and share with their friends. Individuals often admit that their buddies have stronger ideas than they do (Kubin & Von Sikorski, 2021).

Social media is now a crucial platform for political communication, according to research on Pakistan. Siddique et al. (2020) looked at social media users connected to the PML-N and PTI and discovered indications of partisan information environments and divisive political viewpoints. Sarwar et al. (2020) investigated political polarization in Pakistani television news and discovered that perceptions of media trustworthiness may be adversely affected by political differences. Algorithmic bias, echo chambers, affective polarization, and selective exposure were shown to be important elements of online political behavior in a more recent study by Ashraf et al. (2025) that specifically looked at social media and polarization among Pakistani youth.

Nevertheless, empirical research distinguishing between ideological and emotional polarization among Pakistani youth is still required. The majority of research that looks at the phenomena of polarization either links it to the political setting of the West or views it as a homogenous occurrence. In order to solve this problem, the current study examines two aspects of polarization and relates them to partisanship and political debate on social media.

Therefore, the study focuses on investigating whether political expression and partisanship on social media lead to affective and ideological polarization in young people. 397 university students from Faisalabad City made up the sample for the study. The ultimate purpose of the study is to advance knowledge of political communication processes, especially in developing democracies. The investigation has been guided by social identity theory and partisan theory.

Research Objectives

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- To analyze the phenomenon of polarization in the context of democratic structure of Pakistan.
- To explore the phenomenon how social media political expression encouraging polarization.
- To examine the role of echo chambers in shaping political attitudes among youth.
- To explore how political identity formation influences youth polarization in digital spaces.
- To investigate the mediating role of political expression between social media use and polarization.

Research Questions

The study addressed the following research questions:

- **RQ 1:** How does the presence of a democratic structure in Pakistan contribute to the phenomenon of polarization within its society?
- **RQ 2:** How does the expression of political views on social media contribute to the polarization of society?
- **RQ 3:** What is the association between partisanship and affective polarization among youth?
- **RQ 4:** How does partisanship influence ideological polarization among youth?

Hypotheses

- **H1:** Political expression on social media is significantly associated with affective polarization among youth.
- **H2:** Political expression on social media is significantly associated with ideological polarization among youth.
- **H3:** Partisanship is significantly associated with affective polarization among youth.
- **H4:** Partisanship is significantly associated with ideological polarization among youth.

Literature Review

Social internet has given young people new ways to engage in politics. The internet enables people to simultaneously produce and receive political information, in contrast to traditional media. Young people can join groups, engage in group activities, post political updates, comment on political events, and communicate with political figures.

This study examined how political polarization affects young people in Pakistan from a social media perspective. A survey study design was used to gather information from social media users around Pakistan in order to find out what one hundred regular university students thought about social media usage for political news. Following the informed permission process, the research purposive sampling was used to choose the participants. The majority of college students, according to the study, used social

media an average of 5.35 hours every day. They were searching for and studying the most recent political developments in the country. They also shared political content they came across on social media with others and followed political individuals or parties they belonged to. However, most of them asserted that nothing they saw on social media, especially from the numerous political pages they followed, had ever caused them to change their political affiliation. They claimed to visit the official social media pages of several political parties in order to become more informed and connected to the parties (Rehmat & Manzoor, 2023).

Calenda and Meijer (2009) found that youth political participation can be increased through Internet use. This study challenges the widespread perception that youth are politically apathetic, but it also shows how online platforms can offer more opportunities for political participation. Similarly, Anduiza et al. (2009) claim that participation in politics on the internet is always an addition to traditional political participation.

Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2014) studied the media as a venue for political opinion sharing. They discovered that people can get more involved in politics when they voice their ideas online. This type of political expression is important since it does more than just allow individuals to voice their opinions. It can assist someone in becoming an active participant in politics instead of just an observer.

Young people are particularly affected by this shift. Social media lowers barriers to political expression by facilitating communication without requiring connection to traditional media firms. Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik (2019) shown how young people utilise the platforms' features and memetic forms to jointly communicate their political opinions. Thus, it is possible to integrate political communication with regular internet activity.

According to Lane and Neubaum (2025), social media political expression is a motivational process that encourages people to voice their political opinions online. According to Velasquez and Rojas (2017), political speech is seen via the prism of success, communication skill, and result.

Echo chambers are places where people are solely exposed to concepts and viewpoints that align with their preexisting beliefs. According to Levy and Razin (2019), people may be more likely to associate with like-minded people since it strengthens their opinions and reduces conflict.

One of the primary causes of this is selective exposure, since people tend to select information sources that support their preferences. Specifically, according to Bakshy et al. (2015), "both algorithmic curation and behavioral preferences play a role in limiting Facebook users' exposure to ideologically diverse information sources".

An algorithm also supports the filter-bubble notion. Users' past behavior can be used by personalized digital systems to suggest information that suits their interests. The user's exposure to political dispute may be reduced by this personalization. According to Ohme's (2020) research, the application of algorithms in social networks can strengthen preexisting political beliefs.

However, the echo-chamber argument should not be applied universally. According to Dubois and Blank (2018), media diversity and political involvement can reduce the chance of becoming trapped. Their findings demonstrated that those with greater political interest might obtain more varied information by using a variety of sources.

It is implied by partisanship that one has a psychological bond or affinity with a specific political party. While Campbell et al. (1980) showed that party identification had a significant impact on political behavior, Green et al. (2002) claimed that partisan attachment had psychological and emotional components.

Such procedures might be made easier by the digital environment. Koironen et al. (2020) claim that political party preferences and particular ideological inclinations appear to affect how citizens use social media. Individuals who hold particular partisan beliefs may interact with material that reflects their ideological inclinations and use social media in different ways.

Emotions between political groupings are the subject of affective polarization. It focuses on attitudes toward political supporters and opponents rather than just policy differences.

According to Iyengar et al. (2012), identity and emotions are more important in today's political polarization than concepts. People may despise members of other political groupings while liking those of their own.

Garzia et al. (2025) focus on positive assessments of one's own group and negative assessments of other groups, although they share a similar concept of emotional polarization. According to Torcal and Harteveld (2024), negative views toward political opponents may be a component of affective polarization.

In his research on Pakistani political memes, Khan (2024) discovered that the discourse included themes of DE legitimization, dehumanization, labelling, and "us versus them" thinking all significant components of a politically divisive meme discourse. These memes enable the conversation to go beyond simply disagreeing on decisions and policies to criticizing the opponent's character and disproving their viewpoint.

Kubin and von Sikorski's (2021) systematic review discusses the intricacy of social media's influence on polarization and points out that different definitions and metrics of ideological and emotional polarization have been used in different studies.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in **Partisan Theory and Social Identity Theory**. Partisan theory explains how political affiliations and identities influence individuals' political views, behaviors, attitudes, and interpretation of information. In particular, **partisan identification**, defined as an emotional bond with a political party, can shape young people's political views and online interactions. Strong partisan identification may encourage selective exposure, whereby individuals seek information that confirms their beliefs and avoid opposing ideas. In digital environments, social media platforms can strengthen these tendencies by creating partisan echo chambers and filter bubbles that expose users to content consistent with their political beliefs, thereby reinforcing in-group favoritism and contributing to political polarization (Schmitt & Miller, 2020).

Social Identity Theory, developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, explains how individuals derive a sense of self from their membership in social groups. Political parties can function as significant groups that shape individuals' identities and relationships with others. Strong identification with a political group may produce favorable evaluations of the **in-group** and negative evaluations of the **out-group**, reinforcing intergroup bias, prejudice, and hostility (Khan, 2024).

Partisan Theory emphasizes the role of political affiliation and selective exposure, while Social Identity Theory explains how political group identification can produce in-group favoritism and out-group hostility.

Research Gap

Existing research demonstrates that social media has changed political participation and communication, but important gaps remain.

First, much of the literature has focused on Western democracies, particularly the United States and European countries. Comparatively less empirical research has examined how social media political expression interacts with political identity and polarization among youth in Pakistan.

Second, many studies examine political polarization as a single construct. The distinction between affective and ideological polarization is important because political disagreement and political hostility are not necessarily the same phenomenon.

Third, research has often focused on social media use generally rather than political expression specifically. Simply using social media does not necessarily mean that individuals actively communicate political views. Political expression represents a more direct form of political communication.

Fourth, partisanship requires greater attention in understanding youth polarization. Individuals may become emotionally polarized because political affiliation has become a significant part of their social identity, even when ideological differences between political parties are relatively unclear.

Finally, Pakistan's political environment provides a distinct context in which political parties can be associated with strong personalities, leadership attachments, regional identities, and emotional political narratives. These contextual features make it necessary to examine whether polarization among Pakistani youth is more emotional than ideological.

The present study addresses these gaps by examining social media political expression and partisanship simultaneously in relation to affective and ideological polarization among university youth in Faisalabad.

Materials and Methods

This study employed quantitative methodology, the research design deals with the overarching plan selected to logically combine the many study components. It guarantees that the research challenge is successfully handled in terms of gathering, measuring, and analyzing data.

The main area of interest for this study is quantitative analysis. The research study employed a survey research methodology to gather data from selected population. Studies that aim to establish cause-and-effect correlations between variables or generalize findings to larger groups are best suited for the quantitative research design (Sreekumar, 2026). To produce highly generalizable conclusions, the entire study is based on quantitative research methods.

This study aims to explore the Echo Chambers and Partisan Divide: Investigating Political Polarization of Youth in the cyber Sphere.

The Social media political expression and partisanship act as Independent variables

Tool

Structured questionnaire was used to collect data from the population of the research. Creating a well-designed questionnaire that fits the study's objectives and hypotheses was the first stage.

Population

The population of the study was the youth. The population is likely be politically active or engaged youth who are active users of digital technology and platforms. Data was obtained from the list of HEC recognized Faisalabad universities (n.d.-a).

Every 2nd Nth number universities of Faisalabad from HEC recognized universities have been selected.

Sampling Technique

To gather relevant data, male and female students from every 2nd HEC recognized university of Faisalabad were selected as the study participants(*Universities Recognised Universities*, n.d.-b).

The technique that was used to select the sample of study was simple random sampling. Because of its simplicity and objectivity, simple random sampling is frequently used in research. Participants have an equal and fair chance of being chosen via a simple random sampling.

Sample Size

For this research, every 2nd number universities of Faisalabad from HEC recognized universities were selected. The list of students of GCUF (*Statistics* | *GCUF*, n.d.) valued 25789 and list of students of NTU (*NTU Annual Reports - National Textile University Faisalabad* | *NTU*, n.d.) valued 4131 and list of students of UAF (*University of Agriculture Faisalabad (UAF)*, n.d., n.d.) valued 13232 were collected. A Total population of N = 43152 from 397respondents, by using sample size formula researcher concluded size of the sample from the population (Yamane, 1967) After getting sample size from (Yamane,1967) sample size was divided into 3 categories using formula.

Data Collection process

Survey method was used for the research. Survey analysis is a quantitative method for collecting information from a number of respondents using a set of survey questions.

DATE: I have collected the primary data on 8 May to 29 May, 2026.

Construction of Questionnaire

A well-developed questionnaire consists of 27 thoughtful, probing items was organized into 5 sections as:

- i. Social Media Political Expression
- ii. Partisanship
- iii. Affective Polarization

- iv. Ideological Polarization
- v. Political Interest

5 point Likert scale was used. A psychometric technique called the Likert scale with five points makes it simple for participants to reply to questions and express how much they agree (Mazurek et al., 2021).

Data Analysis

Table 1: Regression analysis b/w Social Media Political Expression and Affective Polarization

Variable	B	Std. Error	β (Beta)	T	p-value	R	R ²	F
Social Media Political Expression → Affective Polarization	0.323	0.045	0.338	7.137	0	0.338	0.114	50.939

Table 1 shows that affective polarization is significantly positively predicted by social media political expression ($B = 0.323$, $SE = 0.045$, $\beta = 0.338$, $t = 7.137$, $p < .05$). The R value of 0.338 indicates a moderately positive association between the variables, and the whole model is statistically significant ($F = 50.939$). Therefore, the findings support the hypothesis that political expression on social media is significantly associated with affective polarization among youth.

Table 2: Regression analysis b/w Social Media Political Expression and Ideological Polarization

Variable	B	Std. Error	β (Beta)	T	p-value	R	R ²	F
Social Media Political Expression → Ideological Polarization	0.195	0.041	0.23	4.706	0	0.23	0.053	22.147

The results in Table 2 indicate that social media political expression significantly predicts ideological polarization ($\beta = 0.230$, $t = 4.706$, $p < .05$).

The model is considered statistically significant ($F = 22.147$, $p < .05$), indicating that the predictor consistently accounts for variation related to the dependent variable.

While the R² value of 0.053 suggests that social media political expression accounts for about 5.3% of the variance in ideological polarization, the R value of 0.230 indicates a positive association. According to the unrestricted coefficient ($B = 0.195$), ideological polarization increases by 0.195 for each additional unit in social network political expression. These findings support the hypothesis that increasing political expression on social media is associated with increased levels of ideological divide among youth.

Table 3: Regression analysis b/w Partisanship and Affective Polarization

Variable	B	Std. Error	β (Beta)	T	p-value	R	R ²	F
Partisanship → Affective Polarization	0.652	0.049	0.557	13.315	0	0.557	0.31	177.296

According to Table 3's findings, partisanship and emotional polarization have a somewhat favorable association ($R = 0.557$). Partisanship accounts for around 31% of the variance in affective polarization, according to the R² value of 0.310, indicating a significant explanatory power. The total regression model is significantly correlated ($F = 177.296$, $p < .05$), according to the ANOVA findings, suggesting that the model fits the data well. The coefficients table shows that **partisanship significantly predicts affective polarization** ($B = 0.652$, $\beta = 0.557$, $t = 13.315$, $p < .05$). This indicates that affective polarization rises by 0.652 units for every unit increase in partisanship.

Table 4: Regression analysis b/w Partisanship and Ideological Polarization

Variable	B	Std. Error	β (Beta)	T	p-value	R	R ²	F
Partisanship → Ideological Polarization	0.287	0.05	0.277	5.729	0	0.277	0.077	32.82

According to Table 4, partisanship is a significant predictor of ideological polarization ($F = 32.820$, $p < .05$). A small but significant association is suggested by the model's explanation of 7.7% of the variance in ideological polarization ($R^2 = .077$). Higher levels of

partisanship are linked to greater levels of ideological division among young people, according to the coefficient of regression for partisanship ($B = 0.287$, $\beta = 0.277$, $t = 5.729$, $p < .05$). The association is nonetheless statistically significant despite the model's very poor explanatory power.

Discussion

Social Media Political Expression and Affective Polarization

The initial goal investigated how youth emotional polarization and political expression on social media are linked. The study found that political expression on social media predicts affective polarization in a positive and substantial way. ($R^2 = 0.114$, $B = 0.323$, $\beta = 0.338$, $p < .05$). To put it another way, persons who frequently publish, comment on, or share political content on social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook are more likely to harbor hostility toward opposing parties and have greater emotional links to their own party.

This result validates Hypothesis 1 and is consistent with recent research demonstrating that social media increases polarization rather than being the only factor, and that exposure to partisan signs online enhances partisan anger (Settle, 2018). The virility of ethical anger and bad messages, which spread rapidly through algorithmic newsfeeds, might worsen affective polarization. Sharing political opinions on social media can strengthen group identification and create animosity among political opponents in Pakistan, where political debates are sometimes personalized and violent. The strong internal coherence of the social media political expression scale ($\alpha = 0.773$) and the acceptable reliability of the affective polarization scale ($\alpha = 0.619$) increase assurance in this result.

Online political expression serves as a signal of group membership from the standpoint of social identity theory. Young individuals participate in self-categorization and strengthen their feeling of group identity when they openly endorse their favorite political party or leader. Favoritism inside the group and animosity toward the outside group are encouraged by this increased identification.

According to partisan theory, people filter information and view events via a political lens after they identify with a certain party. Therefore, social media posts may well generate emotional polarization by transforming conceptualized political identities into human identities. The results of the study also provide an explanation for the observation in local media that young people in Pakistan frequently use social media to condemn political opponents and promote their preferred parties, creating echo chambers in which supporters reply with further negative posts.

This important connection highlights the emotional fallout from political expression in a digital setting.

Social Media Political Expression and Ideological Polarization

The second objective investigated whether ideological polarization differences in policy views and ideological beliefs are predicted by social media political expression. Regression analysis revealed a positive association ($B = 0.195$, $\beta = 0.230$, $p < .05$). However, only about 5% of the variation was explained by the small effect ($R^2 = 0.053$). This suggests that online political communication does not have a significant impact, even though it is linked to a stronger ideological viewpoint. Weak evidence supports the assumption (H2). Furthermore, the ideological polarization measure's low reliability ($\alpha = 0.479$) cautions against over-interpreting.

The thesis abstract, which argued that political information on social media was not significantly correlated with ideological polarization, can support the idea that other factors could better explain the discrepancy in the ideological perspectives of young people.

This weak relationship can be explained by the fact that the majority of scholars believe that social media has a limited impact on people's ideologies and only triggers polarization due to the strong socialization, education, and economic factors that shape a person's mind. In Pakistan, political conflicts are more likely to be personal and based on patronage than programmed on ideological confrontation, which makes social media a poor tool for ideological indoctrination. Moreover, an online public sphere promotes populism and emotional opinions rather than rational and ideological ones.

Ideological polarization may consequently be more inclined by offline factors such as family, religious authority, and traditional media, rather than online discussion. Further research is needed to assess ideological polarization more accurately and to assess the role of political knowledge, critical thinking skills, and selective exposure.

Partisanship and Affective Polarization

The third objective examined the relationship between partisanship and affective polarization. The regression results were enthralling: partisanship strongly anticipated affective polarization ($B = 0.652$, $\beta = 0.557$, $p < .05$), with an R^2 of 0.310 demonstrating that party affiliation accounted for about one-third of the difference in emotional polarization.

Thus, hypothesis 3 is validated. Young individuals who identify more strongly with a political party and see it as reflecting their circumstances and opinions show much higher favorable sentiments toward their own party and negative sentiments toward opponents. This supports partisan and social identity theories, which contend that political identities serve as potent social identities that incite hatred and love among groups.

Contact with partisan signals on social media increases emotional polarization, according to the Brookings evaluation of literature, and the current study demonstrates that such cues are most potent among ardent partisans.

Partisanship in Pakistan is frequently associated with charismatic leaders and familial or regional allegiances. Emotional appeals play a major role in political campaigns, and media coverage is sometimes divisive. When young people strongly identify with political parties such as Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf (PTI) or Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML N), their political and personal identities become entwined. This blending of identities increases hostility toward other groups and exacerbates negative responses to criticism. Affective polarization on social media was more predicted by partisanship than political speech, suggesting that associations defined by identities are more influential than interactions centered on ideas, but digital platforms can amplify these connections by highlighting content that provokes moral outrage and polarization.

Partisanship and Ideological Polarization

The last objective aimed looked at how partisanship affects ideological polarization. Results showed a significant yet subdued positive relationship ($B = 0.287$, $\beta = 0.277$, $p < .05$), with an R^2 of 0.077. Therefore, hypothesis 4 is validated even though its capacity for explanation is limited. Higher partisan identification is associated with more prominent ideological viewpoints, even though not as strongly as affective polarization. This implies that younger people who are politically active might adhere to their party's platform on loyalty basis, rather than out of intellectual conviction. The abstract also shows that a decent amount of variance in ideological preferences is unexplained, which implies that other factors such as media consumption habits, religion, economic interests, and various socio-cultural variables also play a role in shaping political ideologies.

Comparative literature supports this view, however, research on multipartite systems conducted previously demonstrated that affective polarization rarely leads to intellectual polarization if there is no substantial divergence in the ideologies of the involved parties (Torcal & Comellas, 2022).

Similar populist rhetoric is often employed by the majority of political groups in Pakistan on matters relating to corruption and growth, therefore diluting the differences in ideologies. The poor reliability of the Ideological polarization measure perhaps explains the weak relationship that was found, as it captured a wide range of views on the subject. Further research should attempt to operationalize the effect of learning about specific issues, as well as political learning and civic engagement, on youth's ideological perspectives and utilize more reliable measures.

Limitations

A number of restrictions limit how broadly these results can be applied. The study's initial focus is on youth from three institutions in Faisalabad. Even though the sample size ($N = 397$) is enough for regression analysis, geographic and institution-level reach limits application to other regions within Pakistan or to unstudied populations. Young people who are not enrolled in higher education or who reside in rural areas may hold diverse political opinions.

Second, because the cross-sectional survey approach observes relationships at a specific point in time, it does not provide causal inferences. Longitudinal research is necessary to determine whether polarization is caused by social media expression or whether polarized individuals are more active online.

Third, data was collected using self-reported questionnaires. Participants may have over reported their political participation or neglected to disclose polarizing behaviors due to bias related to social desirability.

Fourth of all, there are extremely few postgraduate or PhD students in the sample, with the bulk (88.7%) being BS level students. This combination may lead to results that are less varied in terms of age and maturity and more in line with undergraduate experiences.

Fifth, the ideological polarization scale lacked internal consistency, although the measures of partisanship and political speech on social media were reliable. This measurement mistake could weaken identified associations and indicate that scale has to be improved.

Sixth, the study did not examine particular platforms or content categories; instead, it used a single aggregated measure of social media political speech. Different platforms have different user cultures and affordances; for instance, Facebook's automated curating may be very different from Twitter's open timelines.

Seventh, neither qualitative insights into how young people understand and navigate political identities nor underlying causes for polarization were included in the survey.

Lastly, political polarization is a complex process that is impacted by a variety of factors outside of social media and partisanship, such as peer networks, familial socialization, exposure to conventional media, economic complaints, and current events. These factors were not measured in the study; therefore, their effects are yet unknown.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies should expand the scope and analytical techniques in order to overcome these constraints. Regional variations in young polarization would be revealed by comparative research conducted across many Pakistani cities and institutions. A study that focuses on both urban and rural populations and seeks to include young people who are not studying would be more representative. A longitudinal design would help to determine critical incidents or periods that could exacerbate polarization and would allow for establishing causal relationships by analyzing changes in mainstream discourse and polarization over time.

Focus groups, interviews, and digital ethnography are examples of qualitative and mixed methods approaches that are crucial for comprehending the emotions, motivations, and social influences that underlie online political behavior. These methods can help answer how young people are exposed to partisan information and why they tend to avoid extremes when on the internet. Researchers should also aim to improve and validate measurement instruments, such as for ideological polarization, and focus on achieving internal validity. Experimental studies can be conducted to test possible interventions that could reduce polarization, such as encouraging exposure to cross-cutting information or using certain deliberative platforms. In addition, there is a need to analyze the role of specific platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok, in polarization, as well as compare the phenomenon in different countries to see if there are similarities between Pakistan and other developing democracies.

Researchers may also investigate how polarization is shaped by the interaction between online activity and offline variables like socioeconomic status, religion, and ethnicity. Lastly, research may look at how civic education and media literacy initiatives can help young people become less polarizing and more democratic.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine the connection between social media political expression and partisanship identification and affective and intellectual polarization among university students in Faisalabad.

According to social identity theory, public displays of group commitment foster interpersonal affection and antipathy towards other collective. The outcomes show that a significant portion of affective polarization is driven by political communicative interactions online. Moreover, expressive reactions have a lesser connection to ideological polarization, suggesting that social media interactions elicit emotion rather than conviction.

The research findings identified partisanship as the most significant determinant of citizens' affective polarization, highlighting the role of ideological leanings in fueling the sentiments of the younger generation. The polarization level was low within party ranks, which shows the personalized and condescending nature of Pakistan's party-state system, and the fact that ideological differences emanate from various other factors.

The debate presented in the article is based on the intricate interplay of the concepts of communication, identity, and context. Specifically, the article incorporates findings of the study in the framework of social identities and partisan theories, thus

providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of polarization. The research adds to the existing literature on political discourse by providing empirical evidence from an emerging democracy and highlighting the difference between the ideological and affective aspects of the discussion.

In practice, the results can help facilitate deeper digital literacy, more meaningful political engagement, and changes to platform analytics and political communication strategies.

The awareness of the study's limitations encourages caution in interpretation, but at the same time, it leaves room for future, more comprehensive, and varied research.

In the end, creating environments that encourage empathy, critical thinking, and intercultural conversation is just as crucial to helping young people build democratic resilience as comprehending the problems that separate them.

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