

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL EFFECTS OF POLITICAL ACTIVISM THROUGH ICTS AMONG THE STUDENTS OF UOS, SARGODHA AND BZU, MULTAN.

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Abstract

This study investigates the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) among university students in Pakistan, focusing on their perceptions, usage patterns, and the impact of ICTs on political activism. A total of 300 students from the University of Sargodha (UOS) and Bahauddin Zakariya University (BZU) Multan participated in the survey, providing insights into demographic characteristics, gender differences, and the challenges faced in utilizing ICTs for political purposes.

The findings reveal a generally positive perception of ICTs as tools for political engagement, with significant differences observed in the reliance on ICTs for political developments based on gender. Female students demonstrated a higher reliance on ICTs compared to their male counterparts. Analysis of ICT usage patterns indicated that while both groups engage in similar levels of political participation and sharing of political content, students from BZU exhibited a more purposeful engagement with ICTs for various political activities.

Correlation analyses further highlighted complex relationships among key variables, suggesting that students' expression of political opinion does not necessarily correlate with an increase in political knowledge. Despite acknowledging the empowering role of ICTs, significant challenges remain, including concerns about trust in online content and fear of repercussions for expressing political views.

Overall, this study contributes to the understanding of ICTs in the context of political activism among youth in Pakistan and emphasizes the need for targeted interventions to enhance students' engagement with digital platforms for political purposes.

Keywords Political Activism, ICTs, Social Media, Digital Media, New Media Effects

1. Introduction

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have become pivotal in shaping political discourse and activism, particularly among youth. The global expansion of the internet, social media platforms, and mobile technologies has transformed traditional political participation, providing young individuals with unprecedented access to information and opportunities to engage in political activities (Norris, 2001). The digital space has not only amplified voices but also allowed students, who are typically seen as politically active, to participate in ways that were previously unimaginable (Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2014). This shift is particularly significant in countries like Pakistan, where political activism has historically played a crucial

role in shaping the nation's political landscape (Shafqat, 2013). With a large segment of the population being young and increasingly tech-savvy, understanding how ICTs influence their political engagement is essential (Ahmad, 2019).

This research aims to analyze and compare the political activism of students through the use of ICTs at two major universities in Pakistan: The University of Sargodha (UOS) and Bahauddin Zakariya University (BZU) in Multan. The choice of these universities provides an interesting juxtaposition. Both institutions represent different regions of Punjab, the most populous province of Pakistan, and both serve large student populations with varying socio-economic and political backgrounds. This study focuses on understanding how students at these institutions use digital platforms, including social media, online news portals, and other communication technologies, to participate in political activities. It examines the extent of their engagement, the tools they use, and the impact of these technologies on their political awareness, mobilization, and activism.

Political activism in Pakistan has historically been shaped by socio-political and religious factors, often involving physical protests, rallies, and other forms of on-ground mobilization (Shafqat, 1998). However, the rapid growth of the internet and mobile technology has added a new dimension to political activism. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp are not just means of social interaction but have become important tools for political communication and activism (Amin, 2020). Young people, particularly students, have been quick to adopt these technologies to voice their political opinions, participate in debates, and even organize protests (Qazi, 2019). In recent years, movements like the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) political rise have heavily relied on the use of digital platforms to mobilize youth, making it clear that ICTs play a crucial role in the political engagement of the younger generation (Zaidi, 2021).

In this context, it becomes important to study how ICTs are influencing political participation among university students in Pakistan. These students represent a critical demographic, not just as future leaders and professionals but also as active participants in current political movements (Awan, 2017). The youth, particularly university students, have historically been at the forefront of political activism in Pakistan. From the student movements of the 1960s and 1970s to the more recent political movements, students have played a vital role in shaping public opinion and political outcomes (Ali, 2003). In the current digital age, the nature of this activism has evolved, with ICTs providing new avenues for political participation and expression (Mahmood & Shabir, 2020).

This study is particularly relevant in the case of Pakistan, where political instability, economic challenges, and social issues often drive youth towards political engagement (Jahangir, 2019). With nearly 65% of the population under the age of 30, understanding the ways in which ICTs influence political activism among students is crucial for grasping the broader political dynamics of the country (Kugelman, 2020). While previous research has explored the impact of ICTs on political participation globally (Norris, 2001), there is limited scholarship focused specifically on Pakistan and even less on the comparative analysis of students in different regional and socio-economic contexts (Ahmed, 2018). By focusing on the students of UOS, Sargodha, and BZU,

Multan, this study aims to fill this gap by providing insights into the similarities and differences in the ways students from these two universities engage in political activism through ICTs.

The comparative aspect of this research is significant because it highlights how regional differences, access to technology, and socio-political environments can influence the nature and extent of political activism among students. While both UOS and BZU serve large student populations, the socio-economic conditions, political cultures, and technological infrastructures of Sargodha and Multan differ in various ways. By examining these differences, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how ICTs are used for political engagement in different contexts within Pakistan.

In summary, this research seeks to explore the relationship between ICTs and political activism among university students in Pakistan. By comparing the experiences of students from UOS, Sargodha, and BZU, Multan, the study aims to provide valuable insights into how digital technologies are shaping political engagement and activism in the country. The findings of this research could have broader implications for understanding the role of ICTs in political mobilization, not just in Pakistan but in other developing countries with similar socio-political dynamics.

1.1 Research Objectives

- To compare the patterns of ICT-driven political activism between students at UOS, Sargodha, and BZU, Multan.
- To analyze the role of ICTs in facilitating political engagement among university students in Pakistan.
- To compare the patterns of ICT-driven political activism between students at UOS, Sargodha, and BZU, Multan.
- To examine the challenges and limitations faced by university students in using ICTs for political activism in Pakistan.

2. Literature Review

The intersection of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and political activism has been extensively studied, particularly with the advent of social media and digital platforms. Scholars around the world have explored how ICTs impact political engagement, activism, and mobilization, with special attention given to youth and students who are often at the forefront of political movements. This review will explore the global and local scholarship on political activism through ICTs, with particular focus on studies conducted in Pakistan to contextualize the findings in relation to local socio-political realities.

2.1 Theoretical Perspectives on ICTs and Political Activism

Political activism traditionally refers to the methods and actions undertaken to promote political causes, ranging from peaceful protests to more radical actions. ICTs have fundamentally transformed the landscape of activism by providing new avenues for participation and communication. **Castells' (2007)** concept of the “network society” argues that digital networks,

particularly the internet, play a critical role in reshaping the political landscape by decentralizing communication and empowering individuals to mobilize and collaborate on a global scale. Similarly, **Shirky (2011)** contends that social media platforms democratize the flow of information, making it easier for marginalized groups to access political discourse and organize political actions.

The **Digital Divide Theory** is another relevant framework that emphasizes the inequalities in access to ICTs. According to this theory, individuals in developed countries or affluent regions within developing countries are more likely to benefit from ICTs than those in underprivileged areas (Norris, 2001). This framework is particularly relevant in the context of Pakistan, where access to the internet and digital platforms varies significantly by region, income level, and gender (Warschauer, 2003). In Pakistan, rural areas and lower-income groups face significant barriers to accessing ICTs, while urban and affluent populations have better access and are more likely to leverage digital platforms for political and social engagement (Ali & Javed, 2017).

2.2 ICTs and Political Activism among Youth

Globally, research has shown that youth are among the most active users of ICTs for political engagement. Studies by **Loader et al. (2014)** and **Xenos, Vromen, & Loader (2014)** emphasize that young people are more likely to engage in political activities through digital platforms than through traditional political processes. Social media, in particular, has been found to lower the barriers to political participation by allowing individuals to engage in discussions, sign petitions, and organize protests without the need for formal political structures.

In Pakistan, youth political activism has a long history, but the role of ICTs in this activism is a relatively recent phenomenon. **Rauf (2019)** highlights that the rise of mobile phones and social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp has significantly impacted how young Pakistanis engage with politics. These platforms provide youth with access to political information, enabling them to participate in discussions and movements that may be geographically distant or politically sensitive.

2.3 ICTs and Political Mobilization in Pakistan

Several studies have explored the role of ICTs in political mobilization in Pakistan. **Khan and Ullah (2017)** argue that social media has become an essential tool for political parties and movements to mobilize support, particularly among urban youth. The rise of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party under the leadership of Imran Khan is often cited as a key example of how ICTs can be leveraged to build political movements. PTI's social media campaigns in the 2013 and 2018 elections focused heavily on youth, using platforms like Facebook and Twitter to disseminate political messages and organize rallies.

Hussain and Siraj (2018) examine the role of ICTs in political protests, noting that platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp have been used extensively to coordinate political protests in Pakistan. The study highlights how these platforms enable decentralized coordination, allowing

protesters to organize without relying on formal leadership structures. This is particularly relevant in a country like Pakistan, where traditional political structures are often seen as corrupt or ineffective.

2.4 Political Activism through Social Media

Globally, social media has been seen as a powerful tool for political activism, particularly in authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes where traditional forms of political expression may be suppressed. **Tufekci (2017)** argues that social media provides a platform for "weak-tie" activism, where individuals who may not be directly involved in political organizations can still participate in movements by sharing information, posting comments, or joining online petitions. In Pakistan, **Ali et al. (2019)** find that social media has become an essential tool for political engagement, especially among the youth. Their study shows that platforms like Twitter and Facebook are used not only for political discussions but also for organizing political protests and movements. However, they also highlight the challenges of "slacktivism," where online activism may not necessarily translate into real-world political change. While many young people are active on social media, the study argues that this does not always lead to participation in more traditional forms of political activism such as voting or protesting.

2.5 Gender and Political Activism through ICTs

The role of gender in political activism through ICTs has also been the subject of several studies. Globally, research by **Van Zoonen (2006)** and **McRobbie (2009)** has shown that while ICTs can empower women by providing them with new avenues for political participation, they can also reinforce existing gender inequalities. Women often face greater challenges in accessing ICTs, and when they do, they may be subject to online harassment or marginalization.

Haider and Shah (2016) highlight the gendered dimensions of ICT access, noting that women are often excluded from political discussions on social media due to cultural norms and restrictions on their mobility. However, the study also finds that when women do engage in political activism through ICTs, they are able to challenge traditional gender roles and assert their political agency.

Kamran (2020) also explores how social media has provided Pakistani women with a platform to participate in political movements like Aurat March, where they can voice their concerns and organize protests on gender-related issues.

2.6 ICTs and Political Engagement in Educational Institutions

The role of ICTs in political activism within educational institutions is of particular interest in this study. Globally, university students have often been at the forefront of political movements, and ICTs have further amplified their ability to organize and mobilize. **Gerodimos (2012)** argues that social media provides students with a platform to engage in "bottom-up" activism, where they can challenge university administrations, political leaders, and broader societal issues.

In Pakistan, universities have historically been centers of political activism, with student organizations playing a significant role in national politics. However, **Saeed et al. (2018)** argue that the nature of student activism has changed with the advent of ICTs. While student unions were once the primary means of political mobilization on campuses, social media platforms now play a crucial role in organizing political discussions and protests. The authors note that students use platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp to discuss political issues, organize protests, and even coordinate with student organizations in other cities or countries.

2.7 Challenges and Criticism of ICT-based Activism

While ICTs have undoubtedly transformed political activism, there are also several challenges associated with their use. **Morozov (2011)** is critical of the idea that social media automatically leads to more democratic participation. He argues that while platforms like Facebook and Twitter can help organize protests, they can also be used by authoritarian regimes to surveil and suppress dissent. This is particularly relevant in countries like Pakistan, where the government has occasionally restricted access to social media during times of political unrest.

Zubair (2019) also highlights the challenges of digital literacy in Pakistan, noting that while access to mobile phones and the internet has increased, many young people lack the skills to critically engage with political information online. This can lead to the spread of misinformation, which undermines the potential of ICTs to promote informed political participation.

3. Methodology

This study is a **descriptive research design** aimed at exploring the patterns, behaviors, and factors influencing political participation through Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) among university students in Pakistan. Descriptive research is well-suited for this type of inquiry as it seeks to provide a detailed portrayal of how students at UOS, Sargodha, and BZU, Multan, engage in political activism via digital platforms. By focusing on understanding "what is happening" rather than testing hypotheses or causal relationships, descriptive research allows for an in-depth examination of the phenomena in question (Babbie, 2010).

To collect the necessary data, this study employed a **survey method**, which is widely regarded as an effective tool for gathering information about individuals' attitudes, experiences, and behaviors across a large population (Groves et al., 2009). Surveys are particularly well-suited for descriptive studies as they allow researchers to collect standardized data from a broad group of respondents, enabling comparisons across different demographic or socio-economic groups (Fowler, 2014). Given the focus of this research on comparing the use of ICTs for political activism between two universities, the survey method provides a robust framework for collecting quantifiable data on students' engagement levels, digital behaviors, and the challenges they face in accessing and utilizing ICTs for political purposes.

By employing the survey method, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how university students in different socio-economic and regional contexts use ICTs for political

activism, offering valuable insights into the broader implications of digital participation in Pakistan's political landscape.

3.1 Sampling Method

The population for this study consisted of students from two universities: UOS, Sargodha, and BZU, Multan. A total of **300 students** were selected as participants, with **150 students from each university**. The sample from each university was evenly divided between **75 male students** and **75 female students**, ensuring gender representation.

The study employed a **Simple Random Sampling (SRS) technique**, a probabilistic sampling method where each individual in the population has an equal chance of being selected (Bryman, 2016). This method was chosen to minimize bias and ensure the representativeness of the sample. Random sampling allows for generalizing the findings to the broader student population of the two universities, making it an effective approach for this research.

3.2 Data Collection Instrument

The primary data collection instrument was a **structured questionnaire**, developed specifically for this study. The questionnaire consisted of **closed-ended questions** designed to gather information on students' use of ICTs for political activism. The questions were based on previous studies in the field of ICTs and political participation, ensuring content validity.

The questionnaire was divided into three main sections:

Demographic Information: This section collected basic demographic details of the respondents, such as age, gender, university, and program of study.

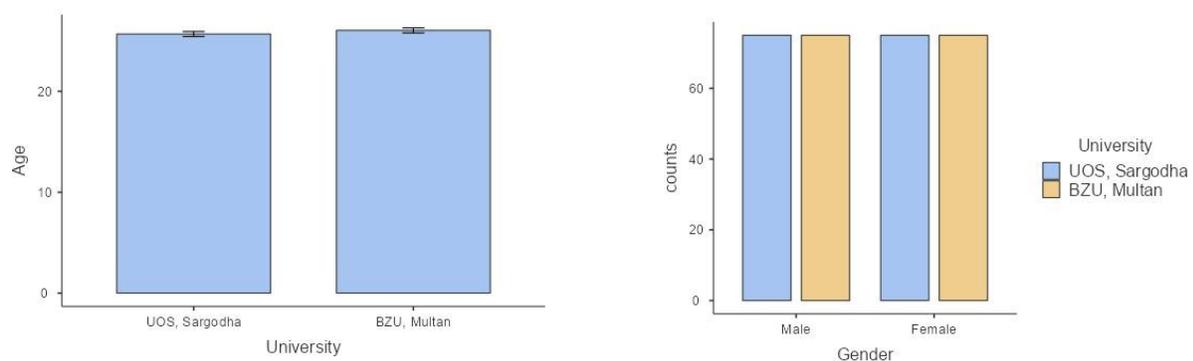
Use of ICTs: This section focused on students' access to and use of ICTs, including social media platforms, mobile technologies, and online news sources, with specific questions on the frequency of use and types of activities engaged in for political purposes.

Political Activism: This section measured students' engagement in political activism, including attending protests, joining online political discussions, signing petitions, and supporting political movements via digital platforms.

4. Findings

This section presents the findings of the study on the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) among university students in Pakistan, specifically focusing on their perceptions, usage patterns, and the impact of ICTs on political activism. The analysis includes demographic information, comparisons of ICT usage between students from the University of Sargodha (UOS) and Bahauddin Zakariya University (BZU), and the challenges students face in utilizing ICTs for political purposes.

4.1 Demographic Data



The study surveyed 300 students, evenly divided between UOS and BZU, comprising 150 participants from each university. Among the respondents, the gender distribution was balanced, with 75 male and 75 female students from each institution. Age distribution varied across the universities, with some differences observed in education levels.

4.2 Gender-Based Analysis

This section explores how gender influences the perceived impact of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) on political engagement among university students. Specifically, it examines the following variables: **Increase in Political Knowledge, Rely on ICTs for Political Developments, Expression of Political Opinion, and Ease of Participation in Politics**. Understanding these differences is crucial in assessing the role of gender in shaping students' interactions with ICTs and their political activism.

One-Way ANOVA (Welch's)	F	df1	df2	p
Increase In Political Knowledge	0.9590	1	296	0.328
Rely On ICTs For Political Developments	10.4868	1	297	0.001
Expression Of Political Opinion	0.8000	1	295	0.372
Ease Of Participation In Politics	0.0134	1	292	0.908

Group Descriptives	Gender	N	Mean	SD	SE
Increase In Political Knowledge	Male	150	1.24	0.429	0.0350
	Female	150	1.19	0.396	0.0324
Rely On ICTs For Political Developments	Male	150	2.35	1.332	0.1087
	Female	150	2.87	1.413	0.1153
Expression Of Political Opinion	Male	150	2.36	1.194	0.0975
	Female	148	2.48	1.116	0.0917
Ease Of Participation In Politics	Male	150	2.35	1.100	0.0898
	Female	149	2.37	1.254	0.1027

4.2.1 Increase in Political Knowledge:

$F(1, 296) = 0.959, p = 0.328$: The analysis reveals no significant difference in the perceived increase in political knowledge between male (Mean = 1.24, SD = 0.429) and female (Mean = 1.19, SD = 0.396) students. This suggests that both genders perceive similar levels of enhancement in their political knowledge through ICT usage.

4.2.2 Reliance on ICTs for Political Developments:

$F(1, 297) = 10.486, p = 0.001$: A significant difference is observed in the reliance on ICTs for political developments, with male students (Mean = 2.35, SD = 1.332) reporting lower reliance compared to female students (Mean = 2.87, SD = 1.413). This indicates that female students are more likely to depend on ICTs for staying informed about political developments, suggesting a potential gender disparity in engagement with political content through digital platforms.

4.2.3 Expression of Political Opinion:

$F(1, 295) = 0.800, p = 0.372$: There is no significant difference in the expression of political opinions between male (Mean = 2.36, SD = 1.194) and female (Mean = 2.48, SD = 1.116) students. Both genders appear to express their political opinions at similar levels, indicating that ICTs provide an equal platform for opinion expression regardless of gender.

4.2.4 Ease of Participation in Politics:

$F(1, 292) = 0.013, p = 0.908$: The results show no significant difference in the ease of participating in politics, with male (Mean = 2.35, SD = 1.100) and female (Mean = 2.37, SD = 1.254) students reporting similar levels of perceived ease. This suggests that both genders feel equally capable of participating in political activities facilitated by ICTs.

4.3 ICTs Usage and Political Engagement

This section investigates the differences in ICT usage and political engagement between students from the University of Sargodha (UOS) and Bahauddin Zakariya University (BZU). The analysis focuses on several key areas: the purpose of ICT usage, political participation, sharing political content, participation in online discussions, signing online petitions, and attending online political events. Understanding these differences is vital for assessing how students engage with ICTs in the context of political activism.

Independent Samples T-Test Results

Variable	Statistic's t	df	p-value	Mean Difference	SE Difference
Purpose of Use	-4.123	295	< 0.001	-0.4857	0.1178
Political Participation	-0.569	298	0.570	-0.0267	0.0469
Sharing Political Content	1.167	298	0.244	0.1000	0.0857
Participation in Online Discussion	2.648 ^a	298	0.009	0.1467	0.0554
Signing Online Petitions	0.446	287	0.656	0.0231	0.0518
Attending Online Political Events	1.601 ^a	296	0.110	0.0891	0.0556

4.3.1 Purpose of Use

$t(295) = -4.123, p < 0.001$: The results indicate a **significant difference** in the purposes for which students use ICTs, with students from UOS reporting lower levels of purpose-driven usage (Mean difference = -0.4857). This suggests that students at BZU are more likely to engage with ICTs for a variety of purposes, emphasizing a more active role in using technology for political engagement.

4.3.2 Political Participation

$t(298) = -0.569, p = 0.570$: There is **no significant difference** in political participation between students from UOS and BZU. This indicates that both groups engage in political activities at similar rates, with minimal variation in their willingness to participate.

4.3.3 Sharing Political Content

$t(298) = 1.167, p = 0.244$: The analysis shows no significant difference in the sharing of political content between the two universities. This finding suggests that both UOS and BZU students are similarly engaged in sharing political information through ICT platforms.

4.3.4 Participation in Online Discussion:

t(298) = 2.648, p = 0.009: A significant difference was found in participation in online discussions, with students from BZU participating more actively (Mean difference = 0.1467). This indicates that BZU students are more inclined to engage in political discussions online compared to their counterparts at UOS.

4.3.5 Signing Online Petitions:

t(287) = 0.446, p = 0.656: There is no significant difference in the signing of online petitions between the two universities. Both UOS and BZU students show comparable levels of engagement in this activity.

4.3.6 Attending Online Political Events:

t(296) = 1.601, p = 0.110: The results indicate no significant difference in attendance at online political events. This finding suggests that students from both universities are equally likely to participate in such events.

4.4 Reliance on ICTs for Political Activism

This section presents the results of the correlation analysis conducted to explore the relationships between reliance on Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for political developments, ease of participation in politics, expression of political opinion, and increase in political knowledge among university students. Understanding these correlations provides insights into how students engage with ICTs and their impact on political activism.

Variables	RelyOnICTsForPoliticalDevelopments	EaseOfParticipationInPolitics	ExpressionOfPoliticalOpinion	IncreaseInPoliticalKnowledge	ImportanceOfICTsforPoliticalActivism
RelyOnICTsForPoliticalDevelopments	-	0.073	0.004	-0.010	0.037
EaseOfParticipationInPolitics	0.073	-	0.094	-0.017	-0.125
ExpressionOfPoliticalOpinion	0.004	0.094	-	-0.204	0.042
IncreaseInPoliticalKnowledge	-0.010	-0.017	-0.204	-	-0.061
ImportanceOfICTsforPoliticalActivism	0.037	-0.125	0.042	-0.061	-

4.4.1 Rely on ICTs for Political Developments:

There is a weak positive correlation with **Ease of Participation in Politics** (r = 0.073, p = 0.206), indicating no significant relationship. This suggests that reliance on ICTs does not substantially influence students' perceived ease of participating in political activities.

4.4.2 Ease of Participation in Politics:

A weak positive correlation with **Expression of Political Opinion** ($r = 0.094, p = 0.107$) indicates no significant relationship. The data suggests that the ease with which students feel they can participate politically does not directly relate to their willingness to express their opinions.

4.4.3 Expression of Political Opinion:

There is no significant correlation with **Increase in Political Knowledge** ($r = -0.204, p < 0.001$), indicating a significant negative relationship. This result implies that while students may express political opinions, this does not necessarily correlate with their perceived increase in political knowledge.

4.4.4 Importance of ICTs for Political Activism:

Correlation analysis indicates a weak positive correlation with **Ease of Participation in Politics** ($r = -0.125, p = 0.031$), suggesting a significant negative relationship. This indicates that as students perceive ICTs to be more important for political activism, they may feel less ease in participating politically.

4.4.5 Increase in Political Knowledge:

The correlation with **Importance of ICTs for Political Activism** ($r = -0.061, p = 0.295$) shows no significant relationship, suggesting that students' beliefs about the importance of ICTs do not strongly relate to their perceptions of knowledge gain.

4.5 Perceptions of ICTs on The Political Environment of Pakistan

This section examines the statistical distribution of students' perceptions regarding the role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the political environment in Pakistan. The analysis focuses on the overall mean perception scores and the frequency of various response categories from students at the University of Sargodha (UOS) and Bahauddin Zakariya University (BZU). Understanding these perceptions is essential for evaluating the role of ICTs in political engagement among youth.

4.5.1. Mean Perception Scores:

The mean perception score indicates the general sentiment towards the impact of ICTs:

University	Mean	Std Dev
UOS, Sargodha	1.50	0.50
BZU, Multan	2.92	0.89

4.5.2. Frequency Distribution of Perceptions about ICTs on Political Environment

The table below summarizes the frequency and percentage of students' perceptions regarding the role of ICTs:

Perception	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Negative impact	22	7.3%	7.3%
No impact	65	21.7%	29.0%
Somewhat positive impact	125	41.7%	70.7%
Very positive impact	84	28.0%	100.0%
Total	296	100.0%	

A significant portion, 125 respondents (41.7%), view ICTs as having a somewhat positive impact. This group forms the largest segment of the respondents, indicating that many students recognize some benefits of ICTs while still being cautious about their overall implications. 84 respondents (28.0%) feel that ICTs have a very positive impact. This indicates a substantial subset of students who believe in the transformative potential of ICTs for promoting engagement, communication, and possibly environmental awareness.

4.5.3 Challenges Faced Using ICTs

This section presents the results of the Chi-square tests conducted to analyze the challenges youth face when using these technologies for political activism. Understanding these relationships is crucial for evaluating the barriers and facilitators of political engagement through ICTs among university students.

Challenge	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Lack of trust in online political content	51	75.00	-24.00
Fear of repercussions for expressing political views	65	75.00	-10.00
Accessibility issues (internet, devices, etc.)	91	75.00	16.00
Overload of political information	124	75.00	49.00
Total	300		

Test	Chi-square	df	Asymp. Sig.
Challenges Faced Using ICTs	65.52	3	.000

The distribution of responses shows that overload of political information (124) is a major concern, with the highest observed count exceeding the expected count by a significant margin. This finding highlights that students are often overwhelmed by the volume of political content available online. Conversely, the perceived lack of trust in online political content (51) is the least reported challenge, suggesting that while it is a concern, it may not be as prevalent as the others. The other challenges, such as fear of repercussions and accessibility issues, reflect moderate concern among students, with each being close to the expected count.

4.5.4 Comparison of ICTs vs Traditional Methods

ICTs are Better than Traditional Media (Values)	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Strongly Agree	49	65.00	-16.00
Agree	158	158.00	0.00
Not Sure	60	65.00	-5.00
Disagree	17	12.00	5.00

Total	300		
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Test	Chi-square	df	Asymp. Sig.
ICTs vs Traditional Methods	141.04	3	.000

The majority of students (158) agree that ICTs have a more positive impact compared to traditional methods of political engagement. The chi-square statistic of 141.04 with an asymptotic significance of .000 indicates a strong association, affirming that students recognize the advantages of ICTs over traditional methods. The residuals indicate that while most students are aligned with the positive view, a few are uncertain or disagree.

5. Discussion and Recommendations

The findings of this study highlight the multifaceted role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in shaping political engagement among university students in Pakistan. The results reveal a significant divergence in perceptions of ICTs between students at the two universities studied, with those from BZU, Multan, viewing ICTs as having a more positive impact compared to their counterparts at UOS, Sargodha. This disparity suggests that the socio-economic context and institutional environment play critical roles in shaping students' views and experiences with digital platforms. Notably, while the mean perception score for BZU students was 2.92, indicating a generally positive sentiment, UOS students had a mean score of only 1.50, revealing a more critical stance towards the impact of ICTs on political engagement. This difference raises important questions about the underlying factors that contribute to students' perceptions, potentially pointing to variations in access to resources, exposure to political discourse, and the effectiveness of ICT utilization within different institutional frameworks.

A considerable portion of students, specifically 41.7%, expressed that ICTs have a somewhat positive impact, while 7.3% indicated a negative impact. This juxtaposition highlights the necessity for a nuanced understanding of how these technologies are integrated into political discourse and the varying experiences of students across different contexts. Additionally, the chi-square analysis revealed strong associations between the perceived empowerment of students and their reliance on ICTs for political developments. This suggests that students who actively engage with digital platforms are more likely to feel empowered in their political expressions and actions. However, the challenges faced by students in utilizing these technologies cannot be overlooked, as evidenced by the significant numbers reporting issues such as information overload, lack of trust in online political content, and accessibility problems. These challenges may serve as barriers to effective political engagement and underscore the need for targeted interventions to enhance digital literacy and foster trust in online resources.

The findings regarding the reliance on ICTs for political developments further indicate that students increasingly view digital platforms as essential tools for staying informed and

mobilizing around political issues. With a mean score of 2.87 for reliance on ICTs among BZU students compared to 2.35 among UOS students, it is clear that access to these technologies plays a pivotal role in shaping students' political engagement. The ability to quickly disseminate information, organize protests, and engage in discussions online has become indispensable, particularly in a country where traditional forms of political activism have been challenged. However, the data also indicates a troubling trend of fear of repercussions for expressing political views, which may deter students from fully leveraging ICTs for political participation. This finding emphasizes the importance of creating safe online spaces where students can express their opinions without fear of backlash.

In light of these findings, several recommendations emerge. First, educational institutions should incorporate digital literacy programs into their curricula to equip students with the skills needed to critically assess online political content and navigate the vast amount of information available. This initiative could involve workshops, seminars, and collaborations with digital platforms to enhance students' understanding of responsible online engagement. Additionally, universities could foster environments that encourage healthy discussions around political topics on digital platforms, creating safe spaces for students to express their views without fear of repercussions. Furthermore, policymakers should consider addressing infrastructural disparities that limit access to ICTs, especially in underprivileged regions, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to engage in online activities through digital means. This could involve investing in better internet connectivity and providing subsidized access to digital devices for students from low-income backgrounds. Finally, there is a need for further research focusing on the comparative analysis of students' experiences with ICTs in different socio-economic contexts within Pakistan, which could provide deeper insights into the complexities of digital political engagement in the country. In conclusion, while ICTs present significant opportunities for political engagement among university students in Pakistan, addressing the challenges and disparities revealed by this study is essential for maximizing their potential as tools for empowerment and activism. By fostering a supportive environment for digital engagement and enhancing students' digital literacy, the potential for ICTs to contribute positively to political participation and activism can be realized.

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