Use of Social Media for Political Participation - The Pakistani Students' Perspective

Project Work 2010

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Abstract

Since after 11th September 2001, many countries of the world including Pakistan have seen political instability. Although democracy is still in a fragile state in Pakistan, a lot of eParticipation has been observed in the recent past because of the accessibility to ICTs. Since young people especially students are more familiar with ICTs, mostly the youth in Pakistan is at the forefront in using social media for eParticipation. This study ventures to find out what are the views and attitudes of students in higher education institutes in Pakistan regarding the use and effects of social media for political participation. For this qualitative study, literature was studied and interviews were conducted. It was found that they have a wide range of perceptions and to some extent seem to use social media not only for social networking but also for political participation especially after a sudden critical event happens in the country. They expect their voice to be heard but think it will take time before it can impact government’s decision making since more people need access to internet, be politically educated and more focused towards using social media for political participation than just for socializing before it could have a long lasting effect on the state of democracy.

Key words: Social media, students, government, eParticipation, political instability, perceptions, Pakistan
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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Thomas Jefferson said “That government is the strongest of which every man feels himself a part.” It seems that Jefferson knew the importance of people engagement and participation in a system but the truth is, he was only stating what was to become an even bigger and indispensible phenomenon three centuries later with the advent of information and communication technologies (ICTs), which paved the way for taking the control of power from the governments, to the real owners of governments, The People.

‘The Internet is adding a new chapter to the history of democracy. At no other time has humanity had more opportunities to express opinions than today thanks to computer-based communication technology. We are witnessing, and some of us are helping to deliver, the birth of a new electronic form of associated life, where old shackles binding and shaping social relationships are cast off.’(Kelly & Etling, 2008) So the internet has made the world smaller by bringing people closer and transcending boundaries.

Since the advent of 11th September 2001, many countries of the world have seen political instability. Although democracy has not been able to take roots in these countries in the true sense of the word, a lot of eParticipation has been observed because of the accessibility to ICTs like mobile phones, internet, and social media that is present in these countries. The examples of such countries are Iran and Pakistan. In most of the unstable democracies, people do not have trust in the system, but eParticipation is giving them a platform to still use their democratic rights of freedom of expression and participate in political debates despite the constraints. They realize the importance of speaking out and participating as Sanoff (2002) says that ‘those who are most affected by a decision should have the greatest voice in the decision’.

In the aftermath of 9-11 and the ensuing war on terror, Pakistan’s status as an ally on this war plunged it into political instability and uncertainty. Although Former President Parvez Musharraf’s 8 year dictatorship is now a thing of the past, since he left office after General Elections took place on 18th February 2008, democracy is still in a fragile state.

According to the CIA World Factbook(2009), the median age of Pakistan is 20.8 years. Since young people especially the students are more familiar with ICTs, the youth seems to be quite active in using different social media in Pakistan for eParticipation as was observed during some events in the recent past. These critical events from the recent past were used as a reference while engaging with the informants during this study. These events are: The earthquake that hit the Northern areas of Pakistan in October 2005; the deposing and then restoration of the Chief Justice of Pakistan in March 2007 and March 2009 respectively; and the assassination of ex-Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto on 27th December 2007. These events were chosen as one is a sudden calamity affecting the economy and people of the country, the second is an event that instigated tension between judiciary and the former President Parvez Musharraf who was still in power at the time and this event got a tremendous reaction from the people and the third event led to a sudden political crisis as it happened just before the general elections of 2008. All these events saw a reaction from the Pakistani people be it on the streets or on social media sites. Especially the young people and students were seen commenting and participating online.
eParticipation can be defined as ‘the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to broaden and deepen political participation by enabling citizens to connect with one another and with their elected representatives’. (Macintosh, 2006) This definition shows that to flourish, eParticipation needs democracy. Democracy can be defined as ‘a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation’ but more simply ‘Democracy means majority rule’ (Curran & Nichols, 2005). Hansen and Reinau (2006) state that equal opportunities to express opinions and an open debate between people are the basic foundation for democracy.

The opportunities that eparticipation gives include most importantly a platform for people to voice their opinions and express themselves and hence have an impact on the overall situation of the country. This is because governments cannot let citizens’ voices go unheard for too long as new technologies give them opportunity to express themselves freely without any barriers besides it is hard to be controlled by the governments since the international community is getting to know what the people of a country want from their government and it is not being delivered properly. ICT tools are the medium through which this eparticipation is made possible. Democratic rights here refer to freedom of expression and citizens being able to have a say in the decision making process of the government. In recent times, Iran’s Presidential Election of 2009 is an example of the impact eparticipation can have on the political situation of a country as the Iranian election protestors used Twitter and Facebook to organize protests, and used YouTube to let the world know what was actually happening. Since Pakistan has seen a tremendous increase in people making use of blogs, online discussion forums and social networking utilities to have political debates, the objective here is to see what the perceptions of students are regarding the use and effects of social media for political participation. The soar in eparticipation by the people seems to have been instigated by the unstable situation that prevails there.

Social media includes social networking utilities which can be defined as internet or mobile based social spaces designed to support communication, collaboration, and content sharing across networks of contacts (Digizen). In this study the term social media has been used to refer to social networking utilities like Facebook, Twitter etc. and also online discussion forums and blogs.

Blogs are a more dynamic version of a personal website regularly updated with minimal to no external editing, basically providing online commentary, periodically updated and presented in reverse chronological order, with hyperlinks to other online sources. (Touri, 2009)

1.2 Research Question

This study is targeted at Pakistani students, so the research question posed here is to find out ‘What are the views and attitudes of students in higher education institutes in Pakistan regarding the use and effects of social media for political participation?’

The focus here is on social media as a tool for participation in Pakistan and on the students’ perceptions regarding how it would influence democracy and not how it actually influences democracy.
1.3 Limitation:
Limitation of this study is that social media is used by students all over Pakistan, but the results of this study do not reflect the views of the whole student population. Future research can be conducted with larger sample size, and more universities in different cities. Furthermore, future work can be done to study this phenomenon by targeting not just students but Pakistani citizens of different age groups and different professions since students were chosen for this study as they are more familiar with ICTs but this was also a limitation in this study.

2. Literature Review

Governance consists of the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised. This includes the process by which governments are selected, monitored and replaced; the capacity of the government to effectively formulate and implement sound policies; and the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them. (World Bank, 2009)

Citizens live their lives, vote in elections and form special interest groups to influence decisions. So, the role of a government is to create a society that presents for the individual citizen a possibility to live this kind of life. Therefore, communication between a government and the individual member of society is indispensable, because this interaction and engagement is the only way to develop a society that gives the individual citizens a basis on which to live out their dreams. (Hansen, Reinau, 2006)

By recognizing the need for engaging the social intelligence of citizens, governments will be able to govern more effectively and credibly. The field of public participation has been recently enhanced with the adoption of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) thus leading to electronic participation (eParticipation). (Tambouris, Liotas, Kaliviotis, Tarabanis, 2007)

Electronic participation in politics is now a reality in many countries, at least among the relatively privileged citizens of most democratic states. More and more citizens are grasping the opportunities offered by the information age to discuss and self-organize across traditional geography and political boundaries to hold their political leaders accountable and to exert influence upon them (Pratchett, 2007).

The internet has proved to be the most revolutionary organizing and engaging tool in history since its availability to the common public in 1992. Because of the internet, political campaigning has taken on a new meaning and social networking utilities, blogs and discussion forums have enabled like-minded individuals more than ever before to connect with one other, engage and participate in every kind of political and non-political activity. (Bittle, Haller, Kadlec, 2009)

If the citizens of a country want to embrace the Internet as a tool for democracy, it will happen but it will not be sustained if the users do not see positive results of their actions. Internet has proved to have the potential of being a strong medium for involving the citizens in decision-making.
making because democracy is nothing without citizen engagement. They also say that the most promising element of e-Government is improved decision making. (Hansen & Reinau, 2006)

Internet could be viewed as an opportunity to bridge the gap between governors and governees since in many places citizens not only want to be informed about major issues, but also want to express their opinions in a way that can affect decision making. There are, and should be, mechanisms enabling more substantive implementations of democratic ideals, further involving the public in societal decision making. It is about citizens helping to shape options, sharing perspectives, discussing and evaluating pros and cons, and facing up to uncertainty and generating ideas by reaching conclusions. (Insua, 2008)

As both influence and engagement increases, edemocracy develops towards an interactive and strategic environment where citizens can engage and influence government one way this can be done is through the use of social networking software that allows web services users to contribute share and access information through the use of blogs and wikis. (Miah, Gammack, Greenfield, 2009)

About the power of blogs Woods (2005) states that a single loyal consumer or an angry critic can have such tremendous influence on thousands of other consumers and readers simply by posting one message.

3. Methodology

The research question was operationalized by identifying the following central concepts with reference to the research question. Following is their description:

- **Usage of social media** = The purpose for which the student is using different social media
- **Usage of social media after a critical event** = The way the students use different social media after a critical event
- **Expectation from participation** = The expectations of students after political participation through social media.
- **Blogging about critical event** = Views of the students about blogging about a critical event
- **Impact of blogs on governmental decision making** = The impact that students think the political blogs have on governmental decision making
- **Impact of participation on democracy** = The impact that the students think their participation through social media would have/has on democracy in Pakistan
3.1 Data Collection

As Yin (1994) stated interviews to be one of the most significant sources of information, the method chosen for the study is mainly interviews combined with literature study. An inductive approach has been used since it provides a convenient and efficient way of analysing qualitative data for many research purposes (Thomas, 2003). Since the research question deals with perceptions and views, interviews were a better way for collecting data for this study as they help to get as much data as possible and since it deals with perceptions and to measure perceptions a qualitative approach was preferable (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

The sources used are research papers, articles, books, reports and research projects carried out in recent years. These sources were searched from ACM digital library, Elin@Örebro and Google Scholar and Google. Many papers and books regarding democracy, social media and eParticipation were studied before the referenced material was chosen. Internet websites have also been used as sources for statistics. Most of the literature that was used had been read before the writing of this paper. But a few articles and reports were found while the work was in progress.

Regarding the interviews, the sample size is 10 and convenience sampling (Oates, 2006; p. 98) has been done. Ten students of Quaid-e-Azam University Islamabad (5 men and 5 women), ranging in age from 21-35 participated in the study and were interviewed separately for 15 to 20 minutes about the concepts defined in section 3. (Appendix I). They were carried out in two parts on 13th and 14th March 2010. The questions were open ended (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) and a transcription of the interviews has been included in the study (Appendix II). The interviewees were chosen by visiting the various departmental libraries of Quaid-e-Azam University and interviewing the students who were interested in participating in this study. The target population is the students of higher educational institutes of Pakistan. Students were chosen as the target for this study since they are more familiar with ICTs and their response will help guide the authors in a particular direction. Quaid-e-Azam University was chosen for these interviews as it is a public sector university situated in the capital Islamabad offering Masters, M.Phil and Ph.D. programs, where students from all over the country and different cultural and educational backgrounds come to study. So it helped in getting a diverse sample as one student hailed from Tharparkar, a most remote area in Sindh and had his own political blog while another was from Karachi, the cosmopolitan business hub of the country. The question guide was designed to gather data directly related to the research question and identified concepts. (Appendix I)

Tape recorders and note-taking were used to register the interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The interviews were conversational in style and semi-structured as the questions were not always asked in the same sequence in order to work around the questions and to prompt and probe for more information. (Oates, 2006) (Appendix II). Permission of the interviewees was asked before tape recording (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The interview guide was designed on the basis of the research question in order to get data on the central concepts. Informants were asked if they would like to be given a transcript of the interviews and see the presented study to see if their answers had not been interpreted wrongly. They were asked about the issue of anonymity (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) so that their names can be mentioned in the study if allowed and needed. The authors’ tested the interview guide on each other in order to test the design. So the instrument for data collection was tested with fictive data.
3.2 Data Analysis

The textual data collected as a result of interviews was refined by using a data matrix (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) in order to be able to answer the research question. While analyzing the data, the authors found that most of the interviewees’ statements could fit into the categories defined in section 3. It was also noticed that the division into themes/categories was perhaps not the most suitable way, as they started to overlap. Thus, new themes were created in order to present the results in a better way. This was an inductive aspect, as we were open to the informants’ responses. So despite an inductive approach, initially the authors had some idea of what they were interested in, but then they were also open to the informants’ responses to allow them to guide the researchers in getting a deeper knowledge of the concepts they were interested in.

As analysis was done by identifying themes and patterns and relations within the data, Table 1 shows the selected data in the form of identified themes and grouped under the categories/concepts defined in section 3. The 66 themes identified have been represented in the rows and interviewees’ represented in columns (Table 1). When an interviewee’s response was placed under a certain theme, an ‘x’ was placed in the corresponding column. To ensure validity of data collection and analyses, a copy of the study was sent to the informants by Email.

4. Results & Discussion

The interpreted data from the analysis of the transcribed material is placed in the data matrix below.

Table 1. Data matrix for analysis with 66 uncovered themes grouped under corresponding categories - Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Interviewee #</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Usage of social media</td>
<td>I use social media for staying in touch</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I use social media for political participation</td>
<td>x x x x x x x x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I don’t use social networking utilities</td>
<td>x x x x x x x x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I use social media for networking &amp; making new friends</td>
<td>x x x x x x x x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I use it to share my views/comments</td>
<td>x x x x x x x x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I use it to blog</td>
<td>x x x x x x x x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I use social media to see others’ views</td>
<td>x x x x x x x x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usage of social media after a critical event</td>
<td>I used social media to donate for earthquake victims</td>
<td>x x x x x x x x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I used social media to find where relief work was taking place</td>
<td>x x x x x x x x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I changed my Facebook status when Benazir was killed</td>
<td>x x x x x x x x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I used it for blogging</td>
<td>x x x x x x x x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I used it for commenting on the event</td>
<td>x x x x x x x x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I didn’t use it for eparticipation</td>
<td>x x x x x x x x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I used it to find other people’s views about the same issue</td>
<td>x x x x x x x x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I used it for staying in touch with friends</td>
<td>x x x x x x x x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I would rather read the newspaper</td>
<td>x x x x x x x x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectation from participation</td>
<td>I expect it will create awareness</td>
<td>It does not make a difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blogging about critical event</td>
<td>It’s a good/positive thing</td>
<td>They are informative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact of blogs on governmental decision making</td>
<td>Restoration of Chief Justice</td>
<td>Relif work in earthquake ridden areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact of participation on democracy</td>
<td>Will effect in long run</td>
<td>If used in a constructive way</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Regarding the 7 themes uncovered about how they use social media including social networking utilities like Facebook and Twitter and also blogs and online discussion forums, wide range of responses were given by the informants. Except for interviewee#1 all the informants had used social networking utilities. Since interviewee#1 was a student of History, and preferred doing live discussions with friends on a weekly basis and only visited online blogs and forums to see other people’s views, maybe he did not get the feeling of real communication while using social media. Or maybe he was not comfortable using technology, his field of study being History. But other informants from non-information technology backgrounds, all said they had accounts on various social networking utilities and they also used them. So, maybe he does not get the feeling of real communication while communicating through the internet. The other themes that emerged in this category show that most of the informants seem to use it for staying in touch, for networking and making new friends. This being the basic purpose of social networking utilities so it is no surprise that students mainly use it as such. Three informants use it to blog. Two write political blogs and one has a personal blog. The interesting thing to note here is that those who use it to blog, are the ones who use it to share their views and comments rather than read others’ views. It can be interpreted that the students who tend to blog, seem to be more interested in having others read what they have to say instead of also finding out what others’ views are.

Regarding the usage of social media after a critical event, the interviewees were asked how they used different social media after the critical events mentioned in the introduction. 9 themes emerged. Most of the informants used it to comment upon the event and to find other people’s views about the same issue. A number of varied other responses were received. Regarding the earthquake, not only had some informants used it to donate for the victims by joining but interviewee#5 had also used it for finding where the relief work was taking place. So students seem to have noticed the importance of social media as an alternate source of information in the aftermath of the earthquake as interviewee#5 said,

“*We used to find where what relief activities are happening and we could reach there because obviously this kind of information and updates you don’t get on electronic media. As media doesn’t have the monopoly anymore because any person can record and broadcast any information or news that they have through the internet.*”

Also some informants changed their status on Facebook after the assassination of Benazir Bhutto. But that was more for reasons of sympathizing than political participation as one student put it,

“*On Facebook I wrote on my status that it’s really sad that this happened but you can’t do anything about it……..so I mainly focused on the TV*”.
Two informants said that they preferred reading the newspaper. These are the same two informants who used it to find other people’s views about the same issue. It seems that they preferred receiving information rather than doing a two-way participation. According to Table1, regarding *expectation from participation* these two informants #1 and #6 had responses that were put under the themes I don’t expect anything, I think it’s useless and I will be misinterpreted. This seems to gives an idea about the way they use social media after an event and their preference for newspapers. There seems to be a link between expectation from participation and usage of social media after a critical event. But overall, after the earthquake, students preferred social media to get information while after Benazir’s death they seem to prefer newspapers.

About *expectation from participation* through the use of social media, Table1. shows that the informants who ‘expected it to create awareness’ also ‘expected to learn from participating’ through different social media. The 13 themes that emerged in this category show that there were negative expectations too like It does not make a difference, I don’t expect anything, I think it’s useless, I will be misinterpreted and It might play a negative role by misleading; but more recurring pattern was of positive expectations which had an equally wide range. Some students seem to be pessimistic in their expectation as the ‘trend’ or sounding ‘cool’ side of using for example Facebook to discuss something seems to be coming in the way of students expecting something positive out of it, as a student said,

"I don’t expect much. It’s just a trend it doesn’t make a difference. Nobody thinks that if I say something it will bring change. No change comes. They just discuss, regret and then forget."

The 8 optimistic themes in this category can be seen in Table1. but the authors’ found the theme ‘I expect to feel I am part of that event’ to be most interesting since it referred to the real essence of eparticipation, to making people feel part of an event so that they can have a sense of ownership for their country. This theme emerged as a result of the response of a student who said,

"You feel you are the part of that event of that country of that movement."

But expecting to have their voice heard and expecting to learn were the main themes that dominated this category.

The category regarding views about *blogging about a critical event* has 11 themes. The dominant themes were ‘It’s a good/positive thing’, ‘They are informative’ and ‘Benefit depends on maturity level of writer and readers’. Maturity level was an important issue with the informants. They seemed to relate the maturity of the blog writer with the effect it has on the reader and similarly they thought the sensibility and maturity of the reader decided how he/she interprets that blog. Interviewee#10 who had his own political blog interestingly felt that a lot of the blogs were ‘misleading’. He also felt that blogs created in support of a critical event had a ‘short life’ and they are used for ‘irrelevant purposes’. Regarding the blogs written after Benazir Bhutto’s death he said,

".... those blogs were in use for one year at the most but once people started to forget that incident .... that blog is no more in use. So we should make such type of
blogs that are forever in use. But to some extent such blogs could be useful in promoting..."

So there is a need for focused blogs with longer lives that keep at least providing updated information regarding that event even after it has become old. It will help in keeping alive the motivation behind that event or even providing updated information as in the case of Benazir’s death, people wanted investigation of her murder by a neutral body. Now that in April 2010 the United Nations (UN) has conducted an investigation and presented a report and thus the cause has been achieved, if more of the blogs created to support this cause were still active, those blogs could help in spreading awareness about what her political beliefs and achievements were during her when she was alive.

Two more interesting themes were ‘Few people have access to internet’ and ‘Too many people are not blogging’. These themes pinpoint to the problem of lack of internet access to the majority population of Pakistan. Although Figure 1. shows Pakistan hitting 18.5 million mark in terms of internet users which was 133,900 users back in 2000 which means 13,716% total growth rate. Despite standing at rank 8 in Asia there is still a long way to go since the total population is around 174,578,558 (174 Million) which means only 10% of the population is using internet.(Internetworldstats, 2010) Moreover, internet is not accessible for everyone yet as internet penetration rate is 10.6% (Internetworldstats, 2010). So there is a need for focus on engaging more people to use the internet and making it accessible to more so that everybody can use this platform.

![Internet in Asia - 2009 Top 10 Countries](chart.png)

Fig 1. Chart showing internet users in Asia (Internetworldstats, 2010)

Regarding the **Impact of blogging on governmental decision making**, 10 themes emerged. The themes cover a wide range of responses. Students feel it played a role in the restoration of the
chief justice. Also in the earthquake ridden areas, they think it helped in the relief work since government was criticized about the military arriving later than the private sector volunteers and media personnel, and hence increasing the life toll, the informants perceived that the government had to send more military and equipment and had to give an official statement regarding the military trying its best to deal with the situation, due to this public pressure. Social media along with electronic media i.e. television and radio seem to have contributed to this pressure since the government did not want the outside world to think it had neglected its people in this time of crisis.

Otherwise the themes ‘They don’t help to change government policy’ and ‘It is too early for impact’ were dominant in this category. They think it’s early considering internet is not accessible to all the population and also they think ‘the blogs help create ‘noise’ but at this point in time do not really affect the government’s decision making as the people are not enough politically mature yet. An interesting theme was ‘Gives ideas for solutions/projects’ though not directly related to governmental decision making, but this theme shows an expectation of the students regarding the impact of blogs on governments’ projects.

Regarding impact of participation on democracy 16 themes emerged. The responses had a wide range. Most dominant ones were ‘Will effect in long run’, ‘Opens our mind to learn new things’, ‘Will lead people to political education’. The most significant theme seems to be this last one since political education is important for any democracy to survive since it makes people aware of their rights and in expectation from participation category, the theme ‘It will create awareness’ had previously been uncovered. The students seem to have noticed the relationship between awareness, political education and democracy as political maturity of the people is needed for bringing sustainable change and having a long lasting impact. One interesting theme ‘Will impact if national interests are above personal interests’ was uncovered when one student pinpointed an important issue as she said,

“...our main problem is that our personal interests are above than our national interests and our national interest is defined as our personal interests. So until personal interests are involved I don’t think anything is going to change.”

‘Initiates/Heats up debates on important issues’ and ‘Will effect in long run’ were themes similar to the ‘Gives ideas for solutions/projects’ and ‘It is too early for impact’ themes in the previous category. It shows the importance of online discussions and participation. How they help brainstorming and generating solutions by collective effort. ‘Provides alternate source of information’ theme shows that social media is now an alternate to electronic media and people do not have to depend on newspapers and TV to get information. Where everyone is informed and has a choice, this also promotes democracy.

Overall most informants seem to agree that things need time to have any significant impact on democracy.
5. Conclusion

To conclude, it can be seen from section 4 that the objective set out at the beginning of this paper, ‘What are the views and attitudes of students in higher education institutes in Pakistan regarding the use and effects of social media for political participation?’ has been answered in Table1. and the discussion following it. This was done in the light of literature studied and themes that emerged from textual data. So, from the discussion it can be interpreted that the students in Pakistan have a wide range of perceptions and seem to use social media not only for social networking but also for political participation especially after the happening of a critical event. They expect their voice to be heard but they think that although political blogs and use of social media is a positive thing still it will take time before it can impact government’s decision making since more people need access to internet and also need to be politically educated before it could have a sustainable effect on the state of democracy. Also those who have internet, need to be using it more for political participation rather than just socializing as collective and focused efforts towards a goal are always more effective. In any case, the students seem to think they are able to play their part in the need for better democracy through eParticipation and in the long run there will be more visible results of these efforts.

References


Appendix I

Question Guide for Interviews

1. What is your educational background?

2. Have you used any social media e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Orkut, online discussion forums, blogs before?

3. For which purpose do you use social networking utilities mainly?

4. After a critical event has happened in the country how do you use the social networking utilities?

5. If you use social networking utilities to express your political views and participate in online debates, what do you expect from this participation?

6. Do you have your own blog(s)? If yes, then what is/are they about?

7. What are your views about blogging about a critical event?

8. What do you think are the impacts of political blogs on the Pakistani government’s decision making?

9. What difference do you think it would make to democracy in Pakistan and the political situation if you participate in online political discussions and express your opinions?

10. Do you think the state of democracy in Pakistan will be improved due to online participation of people through the use of social media?
Appendix II

Transcription

*Not included in online version due to ethical considerations.*