Individual's Perceptions about the Credibility of Social Media in Pakistan

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Abstract

The main objective of this research was to explore the impact of social media credibility on the usage of news regarding five dimensions: local, national politics, international politics, disaster and relief activities, and entertainment news in the social media. Non-probability convenience sampling method has been employed by using an adapted questionnaire. Data was collected from 164 respondents including male and female students of universities situated in Rawalpindi and Islamabad, Pakistan. The data was analysed by using Pearson correlation and regression analysis. The findings showed that there is a strong relationship between social media credibility and the usage of news — local, national politics, and international politics, disaster and relief activities and entertainment news — in the social media. The results of the social media credibility and news about disaster and relief activities were found to be most significant as 56.8 per cent variation, in usage of news about disaster and relief activities due to the social media credibility, was calculated. This research helped in identifying individual perceptions about social media and concluded that, in order to increase the usage of social media and enhance its credibility, people's perception needs to be changed. Also, the government, NGOs, political parties, online media outlets and particularly the regulatory authorities related to social media must take into consideration news about disaster and relief activities and international political news as the most important factor which are impacted by social media credibility.

Keywords: Social Media Credibility, Local News, National Political News, International Politics, Disaster and Relief Activities, Entertainment News, Pakistan.

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Introduction

Social Media i.e., *Facebook*, *Twitter, YouTube*, *Pinterest*, *Blogger*, *Myspace*, *Linkedin* etc. have grown as the most influential means of news updates. Social media has gained a pivotal role in initiating social movement and mobilisation of collective efforts. Social media also plays an imortant role in political and social movements by providing people with a platform for political and information expression, and symbolic identification for a collective action.

In the 2010 Arab Revolutions, social media played a momentous role in political realm. Social media familiarised people with a unique and quick tool of communication which disseminate information and provide feedback as well, build a strong community for activists and gear up the movement of protestors, bridge their gap and connect them with the rest of the world. Few notable examples of revolution like in Iran and occupy Wall Street. In these movements, social media revolutions were spread and various social media outlets provided an opportunity to discuss, promote and implement political thoughts as full-fledged movements.[1]

In Pakistan also social media has opened up new avenues for socialisation and communication not only at individual level to generate political and social opinion but also for business promotion.

The rise and growth of social media networks has influenced the trend of traditional news consumption patterns of the people by providing them multiple options to access news through internet in Pakistan. Now everyone has more options than ever to seek primary news information. However, they are concerned to obtain news through reliable and trustworthy sources. As Lankes found that the internet and social media sites are changing the perceptions of peoples about the credibility of the source.[2] In earlier studies, Flanagin and Metzger found that people have different patterns for evaluating information from social and traditional media as they know that information is filtered and there

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[1] Harb, Zahera, "Arab revolutions and the social media effect," M/C Journal 14, no. 2 (2011).

[2] Lankes, R. David, Joanne Silverstein, and Scott Nicholson, "Participatory networks: the library as conversation," Information Technology and Libraries 26, no. 4 (2007): 17.

are some levels of verification.[3] As a result, people formulate their own ways of evaluation to find the credible information. Therefore, this study found out analyses that whether the rise and growth of social media in Pakistan brought about any change in individual's perceptions of media credibility regarding the five dimensions: local news, national politics, international issues, disaster and relief activities and entertainment.

Social Media Usage Patterns in Pakistan

The usage patterns of social media in Pakistan are similar to those of any advance and develop country like the US and UK. *Facebook* is the most popular social media website in Pakistan with eight million users out of one billion global users. Table no.1 shows social media users in Pakistan.

Table No. 1
Social Media Users in Pakistan

S. No	Social Media Website	Users
1	Facebook	8 Million
2	Twitter	1.9 million
3	LinkedIn	1.2 million
4	Google +	64,000
4	Pinterest	115,000

Source: JICA Report, 2013

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[3] Flanagin, Andrew J., and Miriam J. Metzger, "Perceptions of Internet information credibility," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 77, no. 3 (2000): 515-540.

Table No. 2
By Age Facebook Usage in Pakistan

S. No	Age	Percentage of Usage
1	18-24	50%
2	25-34	25%

Source: JICA Report, 2013

Table No.3
By Gender Facebook Usage in Pakistan

S. No	Gender	Facebook Usage
1	Male	69%
2	Female	31%

Source: JICA Report, 2013

Another factor for popularisation of social media in Pakistan is the accessibility of smart phones at low prices. Therefore, the trend of using social media on smart phones further accelerated the use of social media in Pakistan.

Gradually, the power and influence of social media is utilised by political parties in Pakistan to move people for their right to vote. Since social media has become part and parcel of young life, it was used extensively in 2013 Elections in Pakistan to target young voters.

The World Population Foundation (WPF) report reinforced agenda of the political parties by indicating that 34 per cent of the Pakistani population is young (age 15-24 years). Therefore, it facilitated political parties to identify and prepare a mechanism to target their potential vote bank by social media for their political interest. *Facebook* and *Twitter* were used mostly by the various political parties to boost and inflate their party agendas, to keep people abreast with the latest happening,

influencing the mind of target audience by placing information about political efforts to bring change in the society and captivate youth with slogans.[4] The social media facilitates political parties and personalities as well to move their vote bank to suit their political interests. The instrumental role of social media also helps political parties to change the perception of common people by images, voice messages and video clips. In SAARC countries, Pakistan stands at the second highest in internet users' growth rate. For the promotion of internet services, the cellular phone companies are also making efforts for last two years to provide multiple options besides call and text messages.

The last decade has seen a notable development in communication sector of Pakistan. Media industry mushroomed in Pakistan, brought revolutionary changes in existing mindset of people and new more needs were generated. These needs vary from person to person and range from information to entertainment, communication to socialization and from searching to generating content. Pakistan is having the highest rate of urbanisation and 45 per cent population is residing in urban areas which resulted in more need generation. According to a United Nations report, Pakistan is also blessed with man power, growth of young people is notable and cultural barriers were detached to flourished social transformation[5].

During the last decade, *Facebook* was considered as a realm of youth and all the activities on it were considered youth-oriented. Parents did not appreciate its use. They tag it as time wasting activities and live chat was thought of a crime. Parents highly discouraged the use of *Facebook* among youngsters.

Now the perceptions have been changed and social network sites are being used in all fields of life. Apart from young people, remarkable users of *Facebook* were senior citizen, organisations, political parties, NGOs etc. for communication and interaction with their target audience. The purposes of usage of social media are numerous such as information sharing, interaction, promotions, a leisure activity, and a handy tool to

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[4] http://www.wpfpak.org/pdfs/wpf_Annual_report_2008.pdf
[5] http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/ urbanization/WUP2011_Report.pdf

develop new contacts and socialisation. The modern tool of communication has revolutionised the world.

Each social media outlet gratifies multiple needs of its users ranging from information to entertainment and from education to career building. By satisfying numerous needs, social media has been penetrated swiftly and deeply in the lives of people in Pakistan. Social media helps the people to share mutual interest, develop social contacts and meet people with different interest. Social media in Pakistan has established a healthy environment which reduced the gender gap and provided space to both genders to share their issues, which were once considered taboos. The cultural transformation over the years has broadened the horizon. As mentioned in the above table, JICA in its report revealed various patterns of social media usage in Pakistan and, in comparison with developed countries, same prevailing patterns of social media usage were identified and invisible difference was observed. *Facebook* was widely used in Pakistan and *Twitter*, *Linkedln*, *Google+* and *Pinterest* were found in less use respectively. JICA report also categorised the gender difference on social media and found 69 per cent male and 31 per cent female users of Social Networking Sites (SNS) in Pakistan.[6]

The use of SNS is also influenced and determined by the financial stability of individuals. The JICA report indicates 53 per cent *Facebook* users with Rs.70, 000 monthly incomes and out of 60 per cent population with Rs.25, 000, 13 per cent were found *Facebook* users. According to the report, young people were found in obsession with *Facebook* usage, particularly youngsters from 18 years to 25 years of age who use *Facebook* round the clock. 80 per cent internet users in Pakistan, spend their active time on daily basis on SNS. A Pakistani spends 40 minutes in average on social media. The obsession with *Facebook* usage and spending active time on social media indicate a shift from traditional media to new media which is exerting strong influences on people. The convenient use of social media and gratifying multiple needs through same outlet is bringing changes in communication sharing patterns in Pakistan.

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[6] Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), http://www.jica.go.jp /English/ publications/reports/annual/2013/c8h0vm00008m8edo-att/all.pdf

Table No. 4
Internet and Mobile Users of Pakistan

Internet Users	Internet Penetration	Mobile Subscriber	Average Yearly Income
30 Million	16 Per cent	120 Million	Less than $3000

Source: *Pakistan Annual Social Media Report, 2015*

Table No. 5
Users of Various Social Media Services

Facebook	12 Million
Twitter	3 Million
Linkedin	1.2 Million
YouTube	1.4 Million

Source: *Pakistan Annual Social Media Report, 2015*

Different Approaches Regarding Social Media

There are many who are of the view that social media is uncontrollable, and lacks authenticity, and spreads confusion and fake information among people. As Hollander explained, "people who find data inconsistent with their beliefs tend to perceive those sources as less credible."[7] He added that group membership can also perform an active role in perception of media fairness and credibility. However, media credibility has some indicators. Kiousis describes five main indicators that show how much the medium is credible, how factual a medium is, the extent to which it is motivated by money, whether it invades people's privacy, what is its concern for the community and whether it can be

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[7] Hollander, Barry A. "Tuning out or tuning elsewhere? Partisanship, polarization, and media migration from 1998 to 2006." *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 85, no. 1 (2008): 23-40.

trusted.[8] Bucy suggests that credibility is only possible if the source is believable, accurate, fair, informative and based on an in-depth analysis.[9] For their internet information credibility study, Flanagin and Metzger employed five indicators; believability, trustworthiness, bias, accuracy, and completeness. In a recent study to find the Chinese Millennials perceptions of credibility toward traditional and social media, Cook concluded that the traditional print media was more credible for local and national news, however surprisingly the usage of the print media was very less as compared to the usage of social media.[10]

Social Media Gratifications and Credibility

The two key reasons for using internet are information seeking and entertainment. Anita explored that consumer receive gratifications from using social media and found 10 uses and gratification from using social media.[11] Out of 10, two elements i.e. social interaction and information seeking ranked higher than other elements. With gratification, credibility of social media was also studied to establish the fact that how much people rely on social media if they are using it for informational purposes. The credibility of media is assessed in three perspectives, medium credibility, message/content credibility, and source credibility (Metzger et al.).[12] Medium credibility determined the level of credibility that individual users have of a specific medium, such as newspapers, television, internet, or blogs.[13] Message credibility identifies the

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[8] Kiousis, Spiro, "Public trust or mistrust? Perceptions of media credibility in the information age," *Mass Communication & Society* 4, no. 4 (2001): 381-403.

[9] Bucy, Erik P, "Media credibility reconsidered: Synergy effects between on-air and online news," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 80, no. 2 (2003): 247-264.

[10] Cook, Victoria, *Chinese Millennials Perceptions of Credibility Toward Traditional and Social Media*. 2013.

[11] Whiting, Anita, and David Williams, "Why people use social media: a uses and gratifications approach." *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal* 16, no. 4 (2013): 362-369.

[12] Metzger, Miriam J., Andrew J. Flanagin, Keren Eyal, Daisy R. Lemus, and Robert M. McCann, "Credibility for the 21st century: Integrating perspectives on source, message, and media credibility in the contemporary media environment," *Annals of the International Communication Association* 27, no. 1 (2003): 293-335.

[13] Newhagen, John, and Clifford Nass, "Differential criteria for evaluating credibility of newspapers and TV news," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 66, no. 2 (1989): 277.

communicated message or content, i.e., the accuracy of message, quality of shared information and relevancy. The source credibility is focused on the message provider or who disseminates the information or message.

Credibility of Social Media in the World

The chain of online media credibility research, further included social media in its domain and focused on the credibility of social media which encompassed medium, source and various news channel as online news or the organisation which utilised social media for news purposes. Many previous studies including (Johnson and Kaye) asserted that media credibility is strongly linked to the daily use of it. The more the people are exposed to a medium, the more they perceive the medium credible.[14] They also indicated that perceived credibility of traditional media was positively related to the credibility of same online source and suggested that traditional media sources can carry their credibility into new media environments. Politically established blogs were found more credible than conventional media sources. [15,16]

As the founder of the Cultivation Theory, Gerbner was of the view that the more time individuals spend on television, the more they are expected to believe social realities portrayed on television. Therefore, this study used the Cultivation Theory as a guide to explore the relationship between heavy and light users of social media users and in result about their perceptions about credibility of the medium. The researcher explored the results exactly on the same patterns and the division made by Gerbner about heavy and light users. The people who consume four or more hours a day marked as heavy TV viewers and

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[14] Johnson, Thomas J., and Barbara K. Kaye, "Webelievability: A path model examining how convenience and reliance predict online credibility," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 79, no. 3 (2002): 619-642.

[15] Johnson, Thomas J., and Barbara K. Kaye, "Wag the blog: How reliance on traditional media and the Internet influence credibility perceptions of weblogs among blog users," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 81, no. 3 (2004): 622-642.

[16] Johnson, Thomas J., Barbara K. Kaye, Shannon L. Bichard, and W. Joann Wong, "Every Blog Has Its Day: Politically-interested Internet Users' Perceptions of Blog Credibility," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13, no. 1 (2007): 100-122.

those who exposed themselves by television less than four hours per day are labelled light viewers.[17]

Therefore based on the literature review the following hypotheses have been formulated to test the theory in the context of Pakistan.

H_1: Social media credibility has a positive impact on its users in terms of local news usage.

H_2: Social media credibility has a positive impact on its users in terms of national politics news usage.

H_3: Social media credibility has a positive impact on its users in terms of international politics news usage.

H_4: Social media credibility has a positive impact on its users in terms of news about disaster and relief activities.

H_5: Social media credibility has a positive impact on its users when it comes to entertainment.

Methodology

Quantitative examination was employed to direct this research investigation due to significant amount of participants. To make the quantification of data more conceivable, questionnaire technique was adopted. Besides this, utilising questionnaire technique is the common economical approach for assembling information from possibly broad number of respondents in a short span of time. The target population in this study was secured from the social media users of Pakistani universities as university students are heavy users of social media. Convenience sampling technique was applied and 200 questionnaires were distributed in different universities of twin cities, Islamabad and Rawalpindi, of Pakistan. Selection of locale is based on factors which mainly include time restraint, cost strains and access to sample and most importantly both cities have students from all across Pakistan. Five point Likert scale was used from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

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[17] George, and Larry Gross, "Living with television: The violence profile," *Journal of communication* 26, no. 2 (1976): 172-194.

Table No. 6
Correlation Analysis

	LN	**NP**	**IP**	**DRA**	**EN**	**SMC**
LN						
NP	.525**	1				
IP	.499**	.592**	1			
DRA	.414**	.649*	.583**	1		
EN	241**	.084	.203**	.234**	1	
SMC	550**	444**	.593**	.753**	410**	1

Correlation matrix shows the strength of association among variables. It has both magnitude and direction which may be positive or negative.[18] Correlation was conducted to determine the relationship between all variables.

The results shown in the table depict that social media credibility and news about disaster and relief activities have a strongest positive correlation (0.753). The weakest correlation was found between news about national politics and entertainment news (0.084).

Results and Discussion

The above table shows the detailed regression results of the study. The regression was applied on different independent and dependant variables.

The results of the social media credibility and local news were significant as shown in the table. The value of R square ($R^2 = 0.303$) indicates that there is 30.3 per cent variation in usage of local news due to social media credibility. The F test (F = 70.282, Sig = 0.000) shows that the model was fit for the study. The value of Beta of social media credibility and usage of local news ($B = 0.485$) shows that, with one unit

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[18] Sekaran, Uma, and R. Bougie, "Research method of business: A skill Building Approach . New York: John Willey & Sons," (2003): 57.

change in social media credibility, there is going to be 0.485 unit increase in the usage of local news. The T test shows (T = 8.38 > 2, Sig = 0.000), therefore, hypothesis 1 is accepted that social media credibility has the positive impact on the usage of local news.

The results of the social media credibility and national political news were significant as shown in the table. The value of R square (R^2 = 0.197) indicates that there is 19.7 per cent variation in the usage of national political news due to the social media credibility. The F test (F = 39.833, Sig = 0.000) shows that the model was fit for the study. The value of Beta of social media credibility and usage of national political news (B = 0.465) shows that with one unit change in social media credibility there is going to be 0.465 unit increase in the usage of national political news. The T test shows (T = 6.311 > 2, Sig = 0.000), therefore hypothesis 2 is accepted that social media credibility has the positive impact on the usage of national political news.

The results of the social media credibility and international political news were significant as shown in the table. The value of R square (R^2 = 0.352) indicates that there is 35.2 per cent variation in usage of international political news due to social media credibility. The F test (F = 87.986, Sig = 0.000) shows that the model was fit for the study. The value of Beta of social media credibility and usage of international political news (B = 0.627) shows that with one unit change in social media credibility there is going to be 0.627 unit increase in the usage of international political news. The T test shows (T = 9.38 > 2, Sig = 0.000), therefore hypothesis 3 is accepted that social media credibility has the positive impact on the usage of international political news.

The results of the social media credibility and news about disaster and relief activities were significant as shown in the table. The value of R square (R^2 = 0.568) indicates that there is 56.8 per cent variation in usage of news about disaster and relief activities due to the social media credibility. The F test (F = 212.7, Sig = 0.000) shows that the model was fit for the study. The value of Beta of social media credibility and usage of news about disaster and relief activities (B = 0.853) shows that with one unit change in social media credibility there is going to be 0.853 unit increase in the usage of news about disaster and relief activities. The T test shows (T = 14.584 > 2, Sig = 0.000), therefore hypothesis 4 is

accepted that social media credibility has the positive impact on the usage of news about disaster and relief activities.

The results of the social media credibility and entertainment news were significant as shown in the table. The value of R square (R^2 = 0.168) indicates that there is 16.8 per cent variation in usage of entertainment news due to the social media credibility. The F test (F = 32.785, Sig = 0.000) shows that the model was fit for the study. The value of Beta of social media credibility and usage of entertainment news (B = 0.439) shows that with one unit change in social media credibility there is going to be 0.439 unit increase in the usage of entertainment news. The T test shows (T = 5.726 > 2, Sig = 0.000), therefore hypothesis 5 is accepted that social media credibility has the positive impact on the usage of entertainment news.

Table No. 7
Socail Media Credibility and Overall News Coverage

SR. NO	IV	DV	R2	F	Sig.	Beta	T	Sig.
1	Social Media Credibility	Local News	0.303	70.282	0.000	0.485	8.383	0.000
2	Social Media Credibility	National Political News	0.197	39.833	0.000	0.465	6.311	0.000
3	Social Media Credibility	International Political News	0.352	87.986	0.000	0.627	9.38	0.000
4	Social Media Credibility	News about Disaster And Relief Activities	0.568	212.7	0.000	0.853	14.584	0.000
5	Social Media Credibility	Entertainment News	0.168	32.785	0.000	0.439	5.726	0.000

The current study was designed to explore the impact of social media credibility on the usage of the medium in five dimensions that were local news, national political news, international political news, disaster and relief activities and entertainment news. The findings of the study verified the relationship between social media credibility and usage of the medium. The results of the study gave the similar evidence that were

explored in earlier studies like Williams found that people prefer the particular news source that satisfies their needs and that fits on the definition of credibility that they have made for themselves.[19] Even within the particular medium, they have different credibility concerns that affect their usage. For example, the results of this study showed that people have less credibility issues when they are seeking entertainment news as the "Gratification Theory" suggested that people prefer the medium that gratifies their needs, therefore, they gave less attention towards credibility of the source. However, they want to seek information from credible source when it comes to the news about their vicinity, local news, as it directly affects them. They have some other sources to verify the information so they only prefer the medium on that they believe. Findings of this study also indicates that the people have less credibility issues for national politics news as compare to international political news. They are more conscious and they have more filters to seek credible information when the information is about international politics. In this study, it was also observed that news about disaster and relief activities was one of the major concerns of the users as they prefer to lift any news about disaster and relief activities from the social media. People are very much aware that the information about disaster creates panic and fear due to these factors they wanted to search for credible information. Therefore the credibility of the medium is particularly very important to them for the news related to disaster and its related relief activities.

Conclusion

With the onset of social media, its acceptance is rising speedily in Pakistan. It has given everyone more options to acquire information about every aspect of life. However, the question of credibility of the source has also been of great concern. As empirical findings of this study suggests that when there are more options to seek information people get more concerned about the credibility of the medium. They prefer the medium that they consider more credible and even within the medium they have credibility concerns for different segments. Findings of this

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[19] Williams, Ann E, "Trust or bust?: Questioning the relationship between media trust and news attention." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 56, no. 1 (2012): 116-131.

study have proofed that people are more conscious regarding information about disaster and less concerned about entertainment news. It has been found that people are now accepting social media as an important and viable source of news. Therefore, on the one side, there is a great scope and opportunity for social media platforms, online news media websites, social and political parties using media platforms for their campaigns and, on the other side, the credibility of the medium is becoming more important particularly in terms of online marketing and advertising businesses.