Political Comics: An Emerging Trend in Social Media and Its Impact on Youth

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Abstract

Youth of today is greatly influenced by different social media platforms e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or X etc. These social media platforms offer them enormous opportunities to explore and learn new concepts and practices. This research aimed to study the emerging trend of political comics on different social media platforms and how it impacts the youth in Pakistan. This study is composed of survey analysis. This study was survey research, in which a close-ended questionnaire was used to collect the data from a sample of 120 undergraduate students of Lahore district including an equal number of male and female. The study explored that political comics have some hidden meanings that have strong psychological impacts on young social media users. T-test analysis shows that political comics have both positive and negative impacts. This research concludes that nationalism and trust on state machinery is strongly damaged if its political leaders have a negative image among youth. This may lead to more political polarization among youth. This study also explores that social media plays a healthy role in political awareness with a strong and extensive impact.

Keywords*: Social Media, Political Comics, Impact, Youth*

1. Introduction

In the age of technology, new trends and innovations have been seen. In this regard, mass media and social media are the focal items. Social media is a well-liked means of communication as it provides a platform of immediate feedback with the democratization of the communities (Akram, 2018). Young generations are very much familiar with it and used it as an active member in political affairs as a responsible citizen. Political comics are an emerging trend in social media and have acquired a position where young people are directly affected with the emotions of anger and amusement. It is a visual medium that engages the audience, helps them comprehend and construe the political scene of the country (Chen, Phiddian & Stewart, 2017). Basically, Political comics put out a point of view, which may differ from one of its own. Political cartoons or political comics are illustrations that convey a political or social message relevant to current happenings (Knieper, 2023). Political cartooning is enthused by the situations around the cartoonist, cartoons are often jesting and exaggerated, yet aim at making a pragmatic appeal. However, these are very popular among the youth of our country.

Youth have been identified as a social group, most influenced by the phenomenon of social media. According to the Institute for Strategic Studies, Research and Analysis (2022), in Pakistan, the youth population is approximately 64 % of total population and 29% is between the ages of 15-29 years. Pakistani youth is actively engaged with social media. Political comics are the emerging trends in social media which are not only popular among youth only, but these comics provoke hatred and love for the politicians. "We accept as true that we live in the 'age of information', that there has been an information 'revolution,' while in a certain sense this is the case, in many significant ways the opposite is true" (McKibben,1992).

According to Worcester (2017) comics are getting popular day by day; there are many comic pages which have been popular among youth in Pakistan. The concepts of comics are derived from cartoons or caricatures. Various research has proved that comics play an indispensable role in our lives, and it does have a great impact on the masses.

Ijaz (2013) conducted a study which aimed to find out the usage pattern of new media by political parties. The study partially focuses on explaining the political content usage patterns of the University students on the basis of rural and urban population by selecting equal students from hostels and day scholars. Keeping in view the various factors, they found that enlightenment in the political domain through new media is limited as compared to general perceptions. The whole society does not share the same resources and that is why it is a myth that Pakistani society is into politics through new media. As the above-mentioned study investigated that Pakistani society is divided into digital divide, have and have-nots. However, with an increased literacy rate, improved infrastructure, and equitable resources, people can participate actively in the political process.

Lawate (2012) investigated the phenomenon of political cartoons in newspapers and its impact on readers. By using both qualitative and quantitative methods, they proved that political cartoons have a great impact on newspaper readers, although they are small but they influence the readers very much. The results showed that people are more interested in getting information through cartoons rather than editorials, this is because they find the latter medium more complex and biased whereas cartoons are an easier and lighter way to understand the whole situation. They also found that cartoons are indispensable for the newspapers, and they will be cherished by readers for many years.

Another research by Brantner and Lobinger (2011) discussed the usage of comic books in the 2010 election campaign in Vienna, Austria. They worked on those comics which have been used during the selected election campaign with violent and bleak images of political rivals. This research showed that people are more vulnerable to Politainment that is, "the blending of politics and entertainment into a new type of political communication" (Nieland, 2008). Similarly, a quantitative content analysis of news reports about the election campaign comics in German-language newspapers was conducted. The period of investigation was September 25, 2010, to February 2, 2011. All media items, whether in Austrian or foreign newspapers, mentioning one of

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the comics were coded. The study explored a very interesting fact that media gave more coverage to the comic campaign rather than general political advertising.

The McCord Museum conducted a survey, in which they interviewed famous cartoonists like Chapleau, Aislin, Garnotte and Godin, whose drawings are featured in the virtual exhibition "Where to Draw the Line", "Editorial Cartoons in Quebec". They were asked about the impact of their cartoon on the general public, on a daily basis or in the long term. In response they revealed some important insights and impacts which their editorial cartoons have on the public. The discussion with these cartoonists revealed how the public and even politicians appreciate their work. These caricatures have long lasting effects on the memories of the public and are remembered for a long period of time.

Sani et al., (2012) investigated Political Cartoons as a Vehicle of Setting Social Agenda through newspapers. The objective of research is to find out how political cartoons are used as a vehicle in setting social agenda in Nigerian newspapers to reorient and shape the public opinion. They selected a purposive sample of one hundred cartoons and analyzed the data by content analysis and semiotic analyses. The result showed that the Nigerian newspaper plays an important role in shaping the opinion of masses on political issues. They further added that Nigerian political cartoons serve as an agent of setting social agenda used by the media specifically to build up public attention, reorient people and initiate social and political reforms in Nigeria.

2. Theoretical Framework

Mass Media is playing an important role in globalization. In this regard, the Internet is a main medium in the transfer of information from one nation to the other nation. Theoretical perspective used in this study – Cultivation theory perspective. The cultivation theory is used to explore the effects of political comics on youth. As it has been seen that more the exposure of youth towards social media 's political comics more they are affected from these comics.

2.1. Cultivation Theory

The cultivation theory is presented by George. Gerbner. In this theory, Television is considered responsible for our perceptions regarding norms and reality. The theorist tracked the amount of violence portrayed in prime-time programming; he found that 80% of the material had violent content. In his analysis, he found that heavy viewers perceive the world as a dangerous world as compared to the light viewers because of the higher exposure to violent content portrayals (Settle, 2018).

2.2. Research Objectives

The main objectives of this research are:
- To explore the role of political comics in politics
- To explore the impact of political comics on youth

2.3. Research Questions

RQ1: Do political comics affect youth?
RQ2: Do political comics play any role in politics?

2.4. Research Methodology

The present study is quantitative in nature in which survey research method is used to measure the effects of political comics on youth. In this technique, the following procedure was followed. Survey method is a systematic data collection tool from the sample drawn of large population to get the views about on specific policy matters and particular issue (Schwarz, N., Groves, R. M., & Schuman, H. 1998)

2.4.1. Participants/ Representative Sample

The population consisted of youth selected from Punjab University, Lahore for this research study. The age ranges from 18-24 age groups, having smart phones internet facilities at home and observing political comics. Convenience sampling has been chosen to select the representative sample from the population. For this study, a total sample of 120 respondents have been taken consisting of 60 males and 60 females has been selected.

2.4.2. Survey Questionnaire designing

Close ended questionnaire was designed on 5 point Likert Scale to collect the data from the respondents. Written Questionnaires were personally distributed to the respondents.

3. Results

Table 1: Famous search engine for political comics

Search engines	Frequency	Percent
Google	46	38.3
Facebook	68	56.7
Others	6	5.0
Total	120	100.0

An online survey was conducted to collect the data. The analysis showed that among the respondents, 48.3% were females and 51.7% were males. The respondents belonged to the young adult (18-24 years) age group and had an active social media presence. To determine the role of political comics in spread of political information, Cronbach alpha has been applied to find a correlation of .75; where according to Field (2009) it is considered a reliable way to determine correlation is social sciences.

The data presented in Table 1 shows that face book is the most popular social networking site for political comics.

Table 2: Purpose of reading political comics

Purposes	Frequency	Percent
Amusement	56	46.7
Information	56	46.7
Other	8	6.7
Total	120	100.0

This data gives an insight into the purpose behind reading of political comics by youth. The analysis shows that youth consider the political comics as a source of amusement and information equally.

Table 3: Political comics involvement on social networking sites

Construct Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
Information regarding political parties	2.07	1.08
Preference for parties of politics	2.13	1.15
Discussion of respondents	3.60	1.16
Easy access to political information	3.55	1.18

The statistics in table 3 shows the opinion of respondents regarding the sharing of information in political comics. A dominant trend was observed regarding the participation of youth in political matters with a (M=3.60, S.D=1.16). The outcome represented that political comics are disseminating political information within different discussion forums. A common man's access to political information has been shown to be a point of concern with a (M=3.55, S.D=1.185).

Table 4: Role of political comics' in political information dissemination

Construct Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
Useful political information	3.18	1.24
Endorsed political ideas	2.88	1.23
Shared to spread political information	3.32	1.14
True depiction of the political event	2.90	1.39

The data depicted in table 4 explains the use of social media forums. Most of the respondents agreed that political comics shared political information to inculcate awareness regarding political matters with a (M=3.32, S.D=1.142). Similarly youth also believed that political comics endorsed the political ideology of parties with a (M=2.88, S.D=1.23). Noticeable concern of respondents is found over the question of political comics sharing useful political information with a (M=3.18, S.D= 1.24).

Table 5: Credibility and content shared on social media

Construct Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
Political information Source	2.81	1.536
Democracy promotion	2.76	1.87
Political agenda	3.56	1.85
Fun making of serious issues.	2.60	1.06

The credibility of political comics regarding political content is represented in table 5. The results show that majority of the respondents believe that political comics depict political agendas of groups with a (M=3.56, S.D= 1.85). A considerable number of youth notices that political comics raise political awareness amid masses. The results designate that the political comics are being used to propagate the political ideologies.

Table 6 represents the respondents' opinion regarding the effect of political comics on youth. The majority of the respondents granted that political comics play with emotions of party supporters by making fun of serious issues (M=2.83, S.D=1.16). Respondents also believe that political comics influence their opinion regarding politics with a (M=2.20, S.D=1.56).

Table 6: Political comics' effect

Construct items	Mean	Std. Deviation
Influence on opinion	2.20	1.56
Change in attitude	2.38	.52
Desensitize towards political parties	2.61	.90
Played with emotions	2.83	1.16
Politicians' personalities affected	2.50	1.03
Effects on politics	2.85	1.03
Inculcate language tersm	2.71	1.30

Table 7: Independent Sample t-test of the role of political comics in raising political awareness based on gender (N = 120)

Variables	Male (n=60)		Female (n=60)				95 % CI		
	M	SD	M	SD	t(656)	p	LL	UL	Cohen's d
Impact of political comics	56	14	62	11	-1.69	.096	-13.0	1.09	0.4

Note: Gender wise impact regarding political comics

Independent sample t-test was showed to find the significant mean difference between the males and females with reference to the political comics' role in the dissemination of political information among youth. T-Test shows that there is not significant mean difference between them regarding the impact of political comics. Cohen's d mentions small effect size. The cause of insignificant differences can be similar because all respondents have the same level, so their analyzing ability is sensible.

4. Discussion

Social media has carved a strong niche for itself in Pakistan. Because of the interactive nature of its platform, it has gained popularity over time. As El-Khalili (2013) has observed, the platform of social media has garnered an important role in not only highlighting corruption and inciting protests and movements, but also as a watchdog between the relationship of mainstream media and its government.

Political comics are an emerging trend in social media that actually represent the political scenario of a country. Youth, being the active users of social networking sites, are very familiar with political comics. This familiarity has in turn led to the political comics influencing the youth in terms of building an opinion towards the political affairs. Adeel et. al. (2013) has shown that, social media has a vital role in altering and influencing the political preferences of the youth regarding the parties and political candidates. This study also suggests a somewhat similar trend, by observing a strong role of political comics in the dissemination of political information among the young adults of Pakistan; thus, confirming the first objective of the study.

Sabir (2009) observed that social media not only plays a significant part in the spread of political information, but also plays a mediating role between the state and public. These comics present serious issues in a humorous way. The data analyzed has confirmed the second objective of the study, by showing that the political comics are endorsing and pitching political ideas among youth of Pakistan; thus, raising the overall political awareness. Brown (2000) observed that the youth learned a lot about politics and economics via media, thus making them an active civilian. The data collected for measuring the third objective of the study showed the perception of young adults of Pakistan regarding the political comics. The youth though, agreed upon the strong part of political comics in raising awareness, but a rather significant concern was found about the credibility of content. The respondents did question if the comics are being used as a tool to further political agendas.

As El-Khalili (2013), showed in their study, social networking sites have been regularly used by citizens to share their views. The free expression of youth is used to mobilize communities and it is an effective propaganda tool of governments. The study, in liaison with its fourth objective, showed that the political comics do exert an influence in swaying and building the political ideology among young adults of Pakistan.

5. Conclusion

Based on the research findings of this paper, it is concluded that political comics can be considered as an effective tool for the dissemination of political information among youth. Although comic creators often use these comics to inculcate their ideology, their popularity has been increasing. Where on one hand political comics are raising concern over the shades of defaming and propaganda in its content; on the other they are also being applauded for garnering an active involvement of the youth in current Pakistani political scenario.

Based on findings of this research study, it can be concluded that political comics are the effective tools for the dissemination of political information among youth. Although comic creators used these comics to inculcate their ideology but still these are very popular. Political comics involve youth in political affairs of the country, but this medium inspires propaganda content and defames politicians. The negative representation of a country's politics can have a great negative impact on national image at international level.

In this regard, the political content comics should be followed cautiously and, authorities are required to make proper rules to ensure its credibility. So, although political comics do have their benefits, they also merit a caution and proper monitoring to counter any questionable or manipulative content.

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