Social Media and Shaping Voting Behavior of Youth: The Scottish Referendum 2014 Case

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This study analyzes the role of social media in shaping voting behavior of youth in the Scottish Independence Referendum 2014. Findings from a survey of inhabitants of Scotland and England (n=985) indicate that the social media is composed of limited self- selected members (especially Facebook). Young voters seek information from like-minded political experts on social media. The politically aware young voters are more efficient and active than their less politically aware counterparts with respect to gaining political information. Social media were effective in changing voting behavior of young voters in Scottish Referendum 2014.

Keywords: Social Media, Voting behavior, Political information, Young voters, Referendum

S haping voting behavior in an independence referendum is not an easy task. When the issues at stake are serious and there are blurred party lines such as in the case of a heated referendum, then putting a simple cross on a Yes or No requires careful reasoning and vast cognitive engagement (Morisi, 2014). In such circumstances, convincing evidence should be gathered to support and justify one's stance at the moment of voting. The wider choice of information proves to be a "double-edged sword" and citizens can broaden their views by consulting a wider menu of options available to them through social media. It is the same as if they can pick the dish that perfectly suits their taste (Morisi, 2014).

Langford and Baldwin (2013) assert that in this era, social media use is common in the routine lives of most people, particularly youth. Gibson and McAllister (2011) also proclaim that social media are not only widespread in politics but are also being used as a tool of communication for political campaigns. Social media serve an agenda-setting agent when many news stories are broken on a daily basis through sites e.g. Twitter (Gibson & McAllister, 2011). Social media also effects voter behavior, which can be seen from the

findings of research by Bond et al. (2012), who studied the effect of Facebook messages on turnout of voters in the U.S. 2010 mid-term elections. His research suggested that strong links on online media are also maintained in the real-world environment.

Morisi (2014) says that the social media tools can effectively increase political literacy and engagement and a more informed and critical citizenry can be created who are supposed to be sharp and active in their social media interactions. This research attempts to investigate the participation of youth in Scottish Independence Referendum 2014 by actively using social media. According to Scottish Referendum Report (2014), youth not only provided their votes but also participated enthusiastically as campaign volunteers in the Scottish referendum. According to Langford and Baldwin (2013), the use of social media is popular among young people. In this research, the focus is on young people whose age range falls between 15-40 years.

The Scottish Referendum 2014

According to the Scottish Referendum Report (2014), the main campaign group demanding for independence was "Yes Scotland" and the main campaign group in favor of maintaining the union (denying independence) was "Better Together." It was found that individuals from campaign groups, political parties, businesses, print media and prominent figures participated in the referendum (Scottish Referendum Report, 2014). In April 2014, these groups were appointed as chosen lead campaigners for each referendum outcome that was followed by an assessment process of the Commission (Scottish Referendum Report, 2014). On September 18, 2014, the Scottish independence referendum was held in Scotland (Scottish Referendum Report, 2014).

"Should Scotland be an independent country?" was the independence referendum question that the voters answered with either "Yes" or "No" (Scottish Referendum Report, 2014). One of the major innovations in this referendum was that the voting age was lowered from 18 to 16 years (Scottish Referendum Report, 2014). A total of 98,068 young voters who were 16 or 17 years old on the referendum date registered to vote by March 10, 2014 (Scottish Referendum Report, 2014). According to Scottish Referendum Report (2014), the total registered young voters in this age group up till September 18, 2014 were

109,533 voters, who comprised 2.6% of the total referendum electorate and were equivalent to around 89% of all 16 to 17 years old residents of Scotland.

The Scottish Independence Referendum was rejected by a 10.6% margin (according to the Scottish Referendum Report presented to the Scottish parliament). The referendum report (2014) claimed that the "No" side won, with 2,001,926 (55.3%) who voted against independence while 1,617,989 (44.7%) voted in favor. The report (2014) depicted that 2,001,926 electors (55.3%) voted "No" while 1,617,989 electors (44.7%) voted "Yes."

Scottish Referendum and the Role of Press

Law (2015) found that the *Sunday Herald* endorsed independence, the *Scotsman* supported a No vote, while the *Scottish Sun* and *Daily Record* refused to adopt an explicit position. According to Law (2015), much of the coverage was "neutral" as explained by David Patrick's statistical and qualitative analysis of front-page articles, editorials and comment pieces. Law (2015) further explained that for the remaining coverage headlines were four times more likely to be anti-independence and articles were three times more likely to be pro-Union, that deployed a more pejorative use of language such as the "Nats" (meaning the Scottish National Party) and personalized the Independence campaign around a negative cult of leader of the "Nats," Alex Salmond.

According to Law (2015), the newspapers were more effective in determining how people voted in the referendum as compared to social media or the campaign groups (News UK, 2014). Law (2015) entails that Mike Darcey, CEO of News UK, affirmed that it was a *Sunday Times* poll putting the Yes campaign ahead that flustered the No campaign behind. According to Law (2015), 'The Vow' depicted by *The Daily Record* under the banner 'Our Nation Decides' itself boldly claimed that a No vote would deliver faster, safer and better change than independence. Yet 'The Vow's' status as a sacred contract with the Scottish nation was soon the object of UK party political positioning and rivalry (Law, 2015). Haggerty (2014) claims that social media and websites appeared to exercise more influence (39%) as compared to newspapers (34%) in forming the voter's decision and the Yes and No campaigns shaped the decisions of almost one third (30%).

Scottish Referendum and the Role of Websites, Local Blogs and Social Media

Social media have now challenged the dominance of television and press in the same way as television once threatened the authority of newspapers (Law, 2015). According to Law (2015), some of the websites that were most active and influential during the Scottish referendum were the National Collective, Bella Caledonia, Common Weal, Scottish Review and Wings over Scotland. Law (2015) affirms that the National Collective website grew from a small coterie of cultural workers in Edinburgh in 2011 to more than 3000 members by September 2014 (http://nationalcollective.com). Law (2015) further claims that Bella Caledonia attracted up to one million unique users in August 2014. Common Weal represented a policy forum for academics and economists (Law, 2015).

Law (2015) opines that political websites like Wings Over Scotland focused on mainstream print and broadcast media as well as online and social-network communities while providing its own commentary and analysis (http://wingsoverscotland.com/about/). Wings Over Scotland also produced a popular, fully-referenced guidebook to the facts, *The Wee Blue Book*, some of which were fiercely disputed by pro-Union business blogger Kevin Hague (http://chokkablog.blogspot.co.uk/2014/08/the-wee-blue-book-oflies.html) (Law, 2015).

According to Boffey (2014), although social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter are often regarded as a source of malign and abuse, they helped to proliferate information and opinion, regardless of their reliability. Labelled "Project Fear," businesses, bankers, economists, foreign politicians among others were prepared to support its main message that independence would spell disaster for the Scottish economy, welfare state, academic research, employment, currency, interest rates, retail prices, international relations, and so on (Law, 2015).

According to Law (2015), due to the Better Together campaign video 'The woman that made up her mind', a counter-productive 'No Thanks' appealed to women voters. In the video, a female actor stood in her kitchen enjoying a cup of tea but agonized to the camera about the referendum that her husband is always going on about, even to the children over breakfast (Law, 2015). 'There's not much time for me to make a decision and

there's only so many hours in the day', especially when independence 'sounds too good to be true', the woman ruminated, before suddenly deciding to vote No after all (Law, 2015). It produced an Internet meme, #PatronisingBTlady, that trended widely in various satiric versions and mocked the official campaign video as "sexist" and "patronizing" to women voters, a message that one spoof framed as, "Thinking is hard: Just Vote No" (Law, 2015).

Cortizas and Antunes (2016) reviewed the level of mobilization of activists on social networks in favor of the Yes and No campaigns by examining the tweets #indyref, #voteyes and #voteno. They gathered almost 3.5 million tweets about the Scottish referendum (Cortizas & Antunes, 2016). In order to filter the tweets, they used the keywords 'yes Scotland', 'better together', 'indyref' and 'voteyes' and they found that at the initial stages of the campaign, those in favor of Scottish freedom (#voteyes) were more active in publishing tweets, #indyref was taken as a neutral reference point and with the days near referendum, the relative importance of participation in 'No' traffic (#voteno) with respect to 'Yes' continued to increase thus increasing polarization globally (Cortizas & Antunes, 2016).

The Rationale for Selecting Social Media

Schlozman, Verba, and Brady (2010) state that the advent of social media has completely transformed the traditional political scenario. Smith (2009) found that the onset of social media has diverted the attention of research scholars towards enquiring the increased participation of youth in politics. Cohen and Kahne (2011) found that youth shows a great concern on political issues and therefore participate in politics by actively forming political groups to promote their particular party or leader and share information instantaneously among their social groups. Fishkin (1995) in his study found that participation in political life influences democratic processes to a greater extent. Habermas (1996) observed that social media outlets (including Facebook, twitter, and blogs) facilitate political participation and the main advantage is that sites do not require any approval from the gatekeepers involved in traditional media (including newspaper editors and owners of TV channels). Dalton (2008) found that social media's rapid use has made citizens more engaged in the democratic process and have made them politically

active. According to Dalton (2008), social media are actively being used for political campaigns and issues and create several opportunities to give voice to youth. This study focuses on finding out whether the social media has been influential in changing the voting behavior of youth or not.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have been conducted on the use of social media during revolutionary period, crises, elections and referendums. Robert Putnam considers the Internet to be fundamentally individualistic, which results in lowering the quality of political discourse due to the infinite limit of expressing opinions over the Internet (Putnam, 2000). Online activities can be viewed as a means for individuals that allows them to hide behind a veil of anonymity (Putnam, 2000).

However, building a sense of community allows people to be part of the same physical space that would permit them to share common experiences and find solutions to problems (Davis et al, 2002). Motivation always allows people to participate in public life despite one's age and social status (Delli Carpini, 2000). Such motivation derives from a belief that the involvement in a particular online campaign will make a difference (Delli Carpini, 2000). Delli Carpini (2000) found that young people vote less and therefore they have lower levels of political participation. Various reasons were proposed which included lower registration rates of young voters, lower voting experiences and the reluctance of politicians to influence young voters at a meaningful level (Delli Carpini, 2000). However, the Internet provides opportunity for candidates to influence young voters in new and innovative ways as young voters are the most principal users of Internet (Delli Carpini, 2000; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996).

Shah et al. (2001) found that social capital increased among users who used the Internet for gathering information and decreased among users who used it for recreational purposes. Social networking sites have the skill to lessen the high costs of voting for youth (Plutzer, 2002). Youth often face a lot of barriers in voting registration, developing an understanding of party differences and in finding their polling places (Plutzer, 2002). Due to these barriers, many 'real-world networks' of young people consist of such nonvoters

who cannot be persuaded that voting is exciting, enjoyable and satisfactory (Plutzer, 2002).

Some studies suggested that the Internet provides citizens a platform to not only interact with one another but also be concerned about each other and their society. However, some scholars were even of the view that citizens could generate social capital without the support of political institutions and the media (Davis et al., 2002). Whereas, it has also been found that the features of the Internet users play an important role in information gathering and participation at various levels (Bimber, 2003).

Some studies suggest that online political communication leads to greater political participation, such as, Johnson and Kaye (2003) found that during the 1996 general election, Internet use was directly related to political engagement. Other studies suggested that exposure to online political information was positively associated with campaign knowledge and voting (Drew & Weaver, 2006; Tolbert & McNeal, 2003). In this context, Nisbet and Scheufele (2004) found that levels of political knowledge and electoral participation were prohibited by certain levels of interpersonal discussion on the Internet.

The Internet has an advantage over the print and broadcast media in producing advanced patterns of communication (Xenos & Foot, 2005). Henry Jenkins (2006) defined the concept of viral sharing and explained that social media allows its users to "get the right idea into the right heads at the right time" (pp. 206-7).

 Xenos and Moy (2007) tested two competing models of Internet use. According to Xenos and Moy (2007), an instrumental approach suggested that the Internet use effects were direct whereas a psychological approach allowed for contingent effects (Xenos & Moy, 2007). They found in their research that Internet use directly affected information acquisition while it indirectly affected political engagement (Xenos & Moy, 2007).

Gustaffson (2010) in his paper found out that the Swedish participants had a cynical view toward political campaigns on Facebook. Many of them sustained the idea that participation in online political campaigns fulfilled two functions (Gustaffson, 2010). Firstly, it built one's public or semi-public identity as someone expressed political views and concerns and secondly, it acted as an excuse not for taking a more active part in a campaign (Gustaffson, 2010). Offline activity was viewed as being more important because

from the political context, it is still a myth whether social media are marketing tools or a forums for civic responsibility (Gustaffson, 2010).

Kavanaugh et al. (2011) analyzed the social media's effective usage during the mass protests in Egypt, Iran and Tunisia. They specifically studied the use of Twitter in emergency or in crisis situation whether it would be natural or man-made disasters. Himelboim, Lariscy, Tinkham, and Sweetser (2012) found a positive association between interpersonal informational trust and the perception of online activities, and was related with the use of every type of social media for the purpose of political communication.

Okoro & Nwafor (2013) tested social media usage in political participation during 2011 General elections in Nigeria. They found that Nigeria had used social media in political participation for the first time (Okoro & Nwafor, 2013). According to the findings, social media was used by several participants to make important input in political discourse; however others used them for attacking opponents, spreading false rumors, hate and inciting messages which contributed in violence that was witnessed before, during and after the elections in the country (Okoro & Nwafor, 2013). Their study suggested review of various media laws that could monitor the use of different social media platforms (Okoro & Nwafor, 2013).

Lorenzo-Rodriguez (2014) in his paper discussed a complete analysis of the online activities of 163 political parties that competed in 28 member-countries during 2014 European Parliament Elections. According to Lorenzo (2014), there were several important differences across countries that confirmed the controlled effect of national institutions but the individual campaign intensity of parties was not affected by the condition of opposition government (Lorenzo, 2014).

Vissers & Stolle (2014) in their research studied different practices of offline and online political engagement on the part of undergraduate students. They referred 'political participation' to all sorts of involvement that would allow citizens to express their political opinion (Vissers & Stole, 2014). Pedersen *et al.* (2014) identified the topics that were the focus of peaks in the use of Twitter during three televised Scottish Referendum 2014 debates. They found that the issues that grabbed the attention from the Twitter sample

changed in every debate. They suggested that viewers were keen to debate the question of Independence from every aspect.

Voting Behavior

Lazarsfeld & Berelson (1948) conducted classical studies on voting behavior. Gaudet (1948) identified useful voting patterns that directly influenced individual voters. Some of the principles established by Lazarsfeld & Berelson (1944) served as foundation for the work done by other authors afterward which was termed *two-step flow of communication* later on (Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet 1948). Carmines & Huckfeldt (1996) claimed that there were many harmonies between various traditions and each tradition provided awareness to react to individual challenges.

Downs (1957) used the economic approach and analyzed the 'political apathy' by arguing that voters did not consider the participation in elections to be rational. He claimed that it was basically the rational economic factor that determined the effect of media campaigns on politically active citizens who did not had strong partisan dispositions (Downs, 1957).

Four ground-breaking studies were linked with the presidential elections of 1940, 1948, 1952, and 1956 and initiated the establishment of scholarly 'survey-based research on voting behavior' (Rossi, 1959). According to Rossi (1959), these studies provided the core concepts and models that can be used in contemporary voting research (Rossi, 1959). Lazarsfeld and his associates at Columbia University conducted the first two studies on voting behavior (Rossi, 1959). Their aim was to find a relationship between the preceding attitudes, expectations, personal contacts and group affiliations with the "final voting decision" (Rossi, 1959).

Dalton and Wattenberg (1993) presumed that voters identified their choice regarding a particular party as they perceived the party's objectives to be compatible with their own. They proclaimed that the decision-making process became quite simple as they supported those candidates whose background matched to their own (Dalton & Wattenberg, 1993).

In normative studies, the average voter was considered as having a strong sense of "political rationality" (Visser, 1994). However, the first psychological investigations of

electoral behavior devastated this optimistic vision and replaced it with the concept of "semi-rationality" which entailed that the voter's choices at the voting booths were determined by various "mental constructs (political beliefs, attitudes, values, etc.)" (Visser, 1994a, pp. 43-52). Even though, political psychologists did not agree on the exact nature and number of these mental dispositions, the semi-rational models had upheld it even up till now (Visser, 1994b, pp.699-711). On the basis of B.F. Skinner's work on human social behavior, voting behavior was considered subject to the same possibilities of reinforcement as other behaviors (Skinner, 1953; 1957).

Three prominent schools were prevalent in social psychological voting research (Visser, 1994a). The first school was a group of researchers who worked under the direction of Paul Lazarsfeld at Columbia University and their research extended between the early 1940s and the late 1950s (Visser, 1994a). Their research was an extension of Lazarsfeld's empirical analyses regarding "consumer actions" and "occupational choices" in the field of voting behavior (Berelson, Lazersfeld & McPhee, 1954; Lazersfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948; Lipset, Lazarsfeld, Barton, & Linz, 1954).

The second school that started in 1948 and continues to the present, was located at the University of Michigan (Visser, 1994a). This school was influenced by the field theory that was presented by Kurt Lewin, whereas a huge impact of Rensis Likert"s early work in attitude measurement was also observed (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1954; Converse, 1964). The third school is cognitive, that is a loose collection of scholars who have incorporated insights from cognitive psychology in their voting research (Kuklinski, Luskin, & Bolland, 1991; Lau & Sears, 1981; Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1991). Wahlke (1979) in his study questioned the exclusive attention of political science regarding mental variables. He recommended the incorporation of ethological, psychophysiological and psychophysical aspects of ethology into political science (Wahlke, 1979).

Ladd (2005) in his research studied the influence of attitudes toward the news media on decision-making by voters. According to Ladd (2005), the voters who had negative attitudes toward the press, voted more due to their biased predispositions and voted less based on the present messages. Ladd (2005) claimed that the analysis of American National Election Studies and General Social Survey data was consistent with

expected results. Ladd (2005) explained that voters that had more negative attitudes toward the news media and party identification were more influential while current economic conditions were less influential on voting preferences (Ladd, 2005).

Zhang et al. (2010) conducted a telephonic survey of Southwest residents and found that dependence on social networking sites was considerably related to an increasing amount of civic participation. According to Zhang et al. (2010), social networking sites were engaging citizens in political activities to a large extent. DiGrazia, McKelvey, Bollen, and Rojas (2013) enquired about the statistical relation that existed between tweets mentioning a candidate (for the U.S. House of Representatives) and their respective electoral performance. Their findings suggested that reliable data about political behavior could be conveniently extracted from social media (DiGrazia et al. 2013).

Falck, Gold, and Heblich (2014) tested the effect Internet had on different aspects of voting behavior and found that Internet access had negative effects on voter turnout. They found that the Internet crowded other forms of media that contained much better information (Falck et al. 2014). They took the example of newspapers as "other" media and found that these newspapers are affected by the Internet (Falck et al. 2014).

Key Studies Related to Scottish Referendum 2014

Cartrite (2012) in his article considered Scottish referendum as an example of "ethnopolitical mobilization" and predicted the impact of the Scottish referendum upon other regional movements in the British Isles and beyond. He entailed that the constitutional issues raised by a Scottish secession would stimulate discussion and nationalism in both the "Celtic Fringe" and the English core of the UK (Cartrite, 2012). Campbell (2013) examined the currency options that would have been or not been available to an independent Scotland. He found the feasibility of the Scottish Government's proposals by paying special attention to the interrelationship between EU membership and choice of currency (Campbell, 2013).

Marshall (2014) reflected on the prospects of the United Kingdom government's declared intention to reform the future working of the European Union (Marshall, 2014). Researchers also examined how the governance of justice and internal security in Scotland

could be affected by the outcome of the Scottish independence referendum in September 2014 (Kaunert, Léonard, Carrapiço, & Rozée, 2014).

Walker (2014) studied the International reactions about the Scottish referendum. His article is a personal reflection of the Scottish referendum by completely being neutral. Walker (2014) has highlighted the government's views on the referendum and the politics involved since the announcement of referendum in 2011. The article was written before referendum so it raised questions about its expectations and about whether it should happen or not.

Somerville (2014) inquired about the role of community learning and development in Scottish referendum. This study found that CLD (community learning and development) workers had a vital role in helping people to make an informed choice in the referendum.

Morisi (2014) explored the effect of information on voting intentions during the Scottish referendum. He found that information reduces indecision about voting, increases the intention of voting Yes and interacts with individual-level elements. It was an experimental study that revealed the effects of information to be non-linear as voters react differently to same arguments depending upon their choice.

Baxter and Marcella (2014) presented the initial impact of online behavior of the voters during the referendum campaigns. It reported the views of participants on the information that was obtained online. It also discussed the potential influence of that information on their voting decisions.

MacDonald (2014) examined the consequences Scottish independence had on the UK's nuclear posture and argued that a vote in favor of independence would undermine the posture as the nuclear force of UK completely operated out of Scotland. He concluded that the Scottish independence would in turn be the end of nuclear posture of United Kingdom (MacDonald, 2014).

Dardanelli & Mitchell (2014) declared that the referendum as milestone in Scotland's history and they categorically suggested that even after "307 years of union with England" and a "15-year experience with devolution," Scottish nationalism was holding "important lessons" for the wider world (Dardanelli & Michell, 2014).

Kaunert et al. (2014) claimed that the result of referendum affected the governance and internal security in Scotland. They identified that in the domain of justice and internal security, a "no" vote was leading to more changes than a victory of the "yes" campaign (Kaunert et al., 2014). Kenealy (2014) suggested that the European Union would find a way to handle internal enlargement so that they could avoid a dislocation in the market. According to Kenealy (2014), the emergence of new states from existing member states could prove to be quite problematic.

Paterson, O'Hanlon, Ormston, and Reid (2014) questioned the beliefs about the relationship of language with national identity in the Scotland region. They found that language was not related to national membership or culture (Paterson et al., 2014). They claimed that language campaigning had never been vital to the political campaigns for self-governance in Scotland (Paterson et al., 2014).

Researchers examined the political and strategic implications for transatlantic security arrangements and the institutional, legal and political obstacles during the referendum (Fleming & Gebhard, 2014). According to Nicol (2014), the vote in favor of referendum would significantly not only alter the British Isles, rather it would potentially alter Europe as well. According to Nicol (2014), many politicians would try their level best to maintain their 307-year parliamentary union. Researchers examined the referendum in the light of evolution of the United Kingdom and the changing place of Scotland within it and proposed that Scotland should be seen as a case of the kind of "spatial rescaling" that is taking place more generally across Europe (Fellner & Seidel, 2015). Antunes (2015) presented a clear and reliable interpretation of the Scottish campaigns in order to make sense of the No vote. Filled with many unexpected moments, the campaign was found to be "intense," "vibrant" and almost "breath-taking" (Antunes, 2015).

Waters (2015) argued that the Scottish referendum provided less standard for a changing legal norm and offered a persuasive model for how a new norm ought to look. His article was about something that did not even happen but was still important after referendum (Waters, 2015).

After the referendum, researchers examined the role of migrants in expressing their attachments by exploring the participants' justifications for voting in the referendum (Piętka & McGhee, 2015). Their article focused on the experiences of Scotland's largest

foreign-born minority group, namely "Poles," advance to the Scottish independence referendum in 2014 (Piętka & McGhee, 2015). Researchers also critically analyzed the debates that unfolded in the aftermath of the Scottish independence referendum of 18 September 2014 concerning the constitutional arrangements of the UK as a "plurinational state" and the internal governmental structure of England (Colomb & Tomaney, 2016).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework serving as a basis for this research is built using agenda setting theory, the two-step flow of communication, uses and gratifications theory, and media dependency systems theory.

Agenda Setting Theory. Agenda setting emerged from the idea that the mass media reflect the items and issues in their news agenda according to their prominence and then this prominence goes in the hands of public agendas. The effect of agenda setting can be best understood by Cohen's (1963) statement: "The press may not be successful in telling its readers what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about" (p. 13). Lippmann (1922) theorized that the mass media create pictures in our mind about the world. The reality is only reflected in the media which is not the actual or exact reality (Lippmann, 1922). McCombs and Shaw (1972) found five issues important for voters: "foreign policy, law and order, fiscal policy, civil rights and evaluation of the news coverage across three weeks of the last presidential campaign" (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 176-187). It was found that there was a deep relationship between the public agenda and the media agenda. Likewise, Iyengar, and Kinder (1987) found that the agenda setting effects were observed after watching a number of newscasts.

According to the agenda setting theory, when attention is given to particular issues, they are more emphasized while others are ignored. This results in the formation of public opinion that is based on the assumptions of media. The reality is not accepted the way it actually is but is accepted the way media wants us to accept. Agenda setting effects vary on issue obtrusiveness and issue unobtrusiveness (McCombs, 2004). Those issues with which people deal in their everyday lives are obtrusive issues and those issues with which people cannot directly deal are called as unobtrusive issues (McCombs, 2004). The

international issues fall under the category of unobtrusive issues and it has greater effects on the formation of public opinion through agenda setting (McCombs, 2004).

Two-Step Flow of Communication. Lazarsfeld and Berelson (1948) conducted classical studies on voting behavior. Some of the principles established by Lazarsfeld and Berelson (1944) served as foundation for the work done by other authors afterward which were termed as *two-step flow of communication* later on (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet 1948). The researchers proposed that messages transfer from media to opinion leaders who modify what they read or hear. They pass their perceived messages to associates or followers who look forward to them as influential (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948). Gaudet (1948) identified useful voting patterns that directly influenced individual voters. The theory applies to this research as users of social media build their political opinions by forming discussion groups and following the opinion of a particular group leader acting as opinion leader of their community.

Uses and Gratification Theory. Katz et al. (1974) presented the limited or indirect effect theories of mass communication in the form of Uses & Gratification theory. According to Anaeto (2008), Uses & Gratification theory of media was not concerned with what media did to people, but explained what people did with the media. Onabanjo (2008) opined that uses and gratification theory took a more humanistic approach because it was assumed that people influenced the effects media had on them.

Adeyanju and Haruna (2011) discussed the theory by explaining that audience members had certain needs and therefore they selectively exposed themselves to certain media messages. According to Adeyanju and Haruna (2011), certain media messages got retained due to the audience's gratification. Akinwumi (2011) opined that the Uses and Gratification theory described people as being an important entity in communication process because they used to select content, made meaning and acted on that meaning (Akinwumi, 2011). In the same way, political candidates can select and use media of their own choice and can convey their political contents through social media during all sorts of electoral campaigns and political activities. This theory is applied to the study because the users are psychologically involved and they are gratifying their needs.

Media Systems Dependency Theory. According to Baran and Davis (2006), when an individual depends largely on media, its role become more gratifying and the media starts

influencing his time. The theory entailed that the more the public relies on Facebook and Twitter, the more value and influence Facebook and Twitter have (Baran & Davis, 2006, p. 127). The Media Systems dependency theory effectively applies to this research as voters keep on visiting the pages of their respective political parties. Every single tweet and Facebook post is considered important in making and strengthening voting decisions. People not only depend on social media for getting information, but also actively share their ideologies and opinions through different networking sites.

Given the review of literature and theoretical underpinnings, the following research questions are posed:

RQ1: What are the social media consumption patterns of the young voters?

RQ2: How are social media changing the voting behavior of youth, as seen by younger voters in the 2014 Scottish Referendum?

METHODS

Relevant data were collected through questionnaires with a population of the study including citizens living in UK, Scotland, Ireland and Wales. The purposive sampling method has been applied and questionnaires were completed by 985 citizens. The data has been obtained from social media users in the researcher's network. Informed consent was obtained. The respondents were told that their information and opinions will be kept anonymous and would not be misused. The link of questionnaire has been distributed to participants through Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, blogs and personal email. Majority of the participants started and completed the survey.

Most of the participants of this study are the inhabitants of Scotland (86.29%). The others live in England (12.49%). The survey has been filled by respondents living in Glasgow, London, Edinburgh, Dundee, Aberdeen, Napier, Manchester, Dublin, Wales, Melbourne, Northern Ireland, Brussels and Cardiff. The participants are between 15-40 years old. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are summarized in Table 1.

Social media is the independent variable which includes Facebook, Twitter and blogs. The variables are conceptualized and operationalized as:

Social Media — an independent variable specified for measuring the online activities of its users on Facebook, Twitter and blogs.

Voting Behavior — specified for measuring the change in the reaction, opinion and perception of young voters after participating in the campaigns, protests and revolts before and during the referendum. Voting behavior is operationalized as either being changed or remaining unchanged due to social media usage. The change in voting behavior refers to the change in political affiliations and political perceptions of young voters.

Youth— refers to young voters, ages 15-40, who participated in the Scottish referendum and also shared content on social media as campaign volunteers.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

	Response	Response %
Gender		
Male	396	40.20
Female	583	59.19
Third Gender	6	0.61
Total	**985**	**100**
Age		
15-20	529	53.71
21-25	201	20.41
26-30	63	6.39
31-35	81	8.22
36-40	111	11.27
Total	**985**	**100**
Location		
Scotland	850	86.29
England	123	12.49
Wales	6	0.61
Northern Ireland	6	0.61
Total	**985**	**100**
Designation		
Student	476	48.32
Employee	181	18.38
Business person	92	9.34
Citizen	236	23.96
Total	**985**	**100**

RESULTS

A maximum number of respondents (n=615) use Facebook. A total of 955 respondents use their favorite social media component on a daily basis, 351 respondents use social media for entertainment purposes and 703 respondents consider Facebook to be

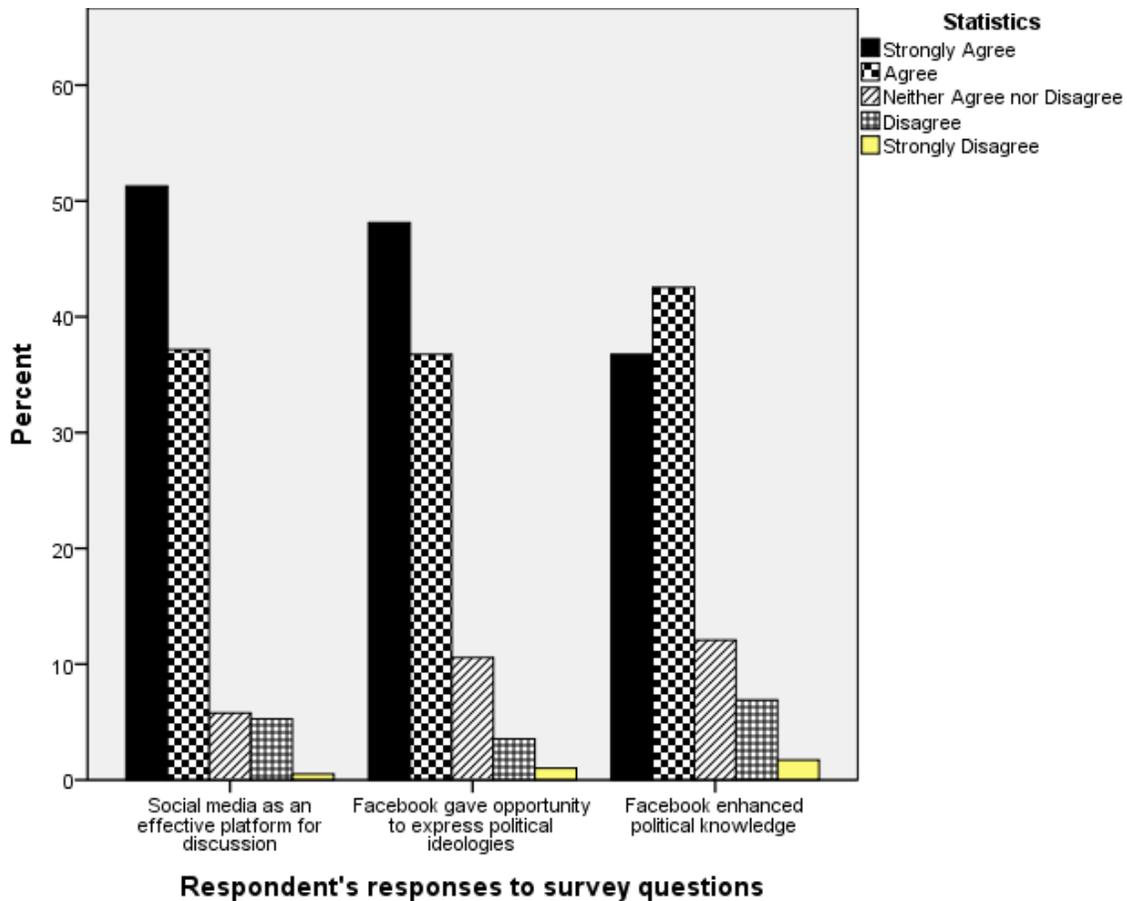most effective in their posts. More than 78% voted Yes in the referendum, and 90% were interested in the referendum.

Figure 1. Distribution of Responses to "Facebook used as an effective Political Forum"

On a Likert Scale, 51.3% respondents strongly agreed that social media provided an effective platform for political discussion (see Fig. 1). A total of 37.2% respondents agreed to some extent, 5.8% respondents neither agreed nor disagreed and were neutral, 5.3% respondents did not agree and 0.5% respondents strongly disagreed. A total of 48.1% respondents strongly agreed that Facebook is an effective forum for expressing political ideologies, 36.8% respondents agreed to some extent, 10.6% respondents neither agreed nor disagreed and were neutral, 3.6% respondents did not agree and 1% respondents strongly disagreed.

Does Facebook enhance the political knowledge of the users? On a Likert Scale, 36.8% respondents strongly agreed, 42.5% respondents agreed to some extent, 12.1% respondents neither agreed nor disagreed and were neutral. 6.9% respondents did not agree and 1.7% respondents strongly disagreed about Facebook enhancing political knowledge of users.

Figure 2 shows maximum respondents agreed that social media campaigns had an influence on referendum results.
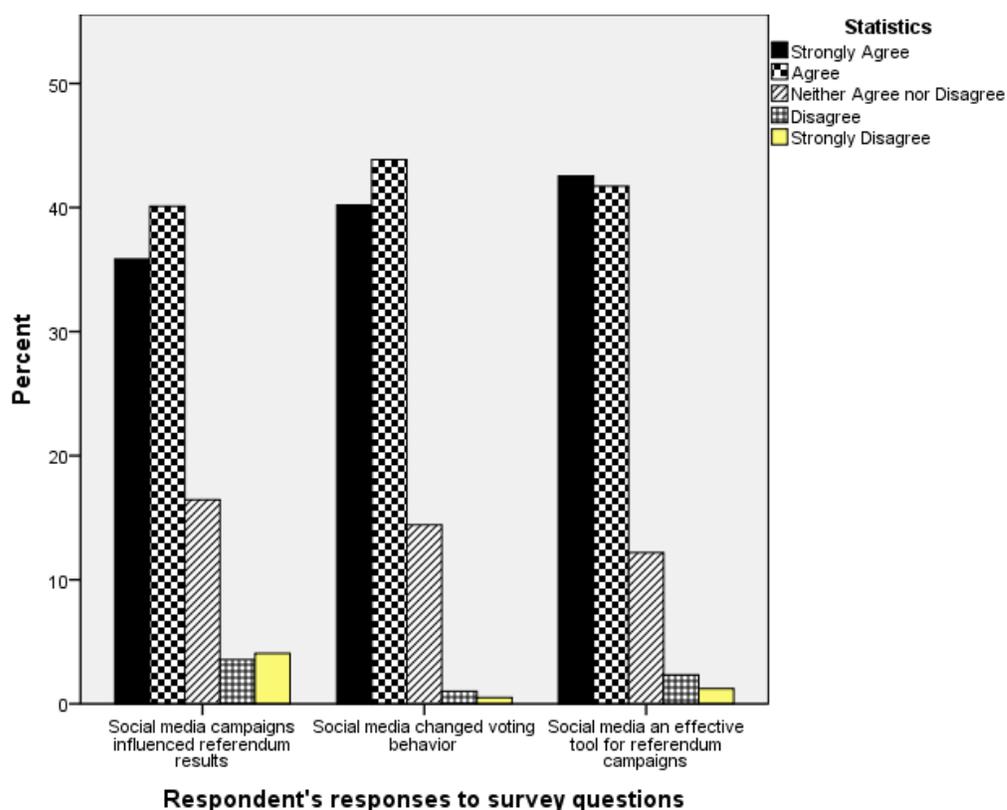

Figure 2. Distribution of Responses to "Social media changed voting behavior"

Figure 2 shows the number of respondents who consider that social media campaigns had an influence on referendum results. On a Likert Scale, 35.8% respondents strongly agreed, 40.1% respondents agreed, 16.4% respondents neither agreed nor disagreed and were neutral. 3.6% respondents did not agree and 4.1% respondents strongly disagreed about social media being an effective tool. The majority were in agreement that social media changed voting behavior. On a Likert Scale, 40.2% respondents strongly agreed, 43.9% respondents agreed, 14.4% respondents neither

agreed nor disagreed and were neutral. 1% respondents did not agree and 0.5% respondents strongly disagreed about social media being effective enough to change voting behavior.

Again, a majority believed that social media have been proved to be an effective tool for referendum campaigns. On a Likert Scale, 42.5% respondents strongly agreed, 41.7% respondents agreed to some extent, 12.2% respondents neither agreed nor disagreed and were neutral. 2.3% respondents did not agree and 1.2% respondents strongly disagreed about social media being an effective tool.

DISCUSSION

The "effectiveness" of social media has been operationalized in the political context. Although the information shared on social media is not always authentic or reliable, young voters believed they got maximum political information through social media as evident from responses of survey (Figure 1). It proved to be an effective forum for discussion and expressing views during Scottish referendum but is not particularly a "political" forum. Therefore, the first hypothesis is not supported.

Young voters discussed the referendum in their posts on social media. Perceptions were that social media campaigns were successful enough to alter respondents' voting behavior (Figure 2). Therefore, to these younger voters, social media played an important role in changing their voting behavior to a greater extent. The social media posts influenced the voting behavior of respondents in the referendum (Figure 2). It can be a forum for discussion and expressing views and proves to be effective enough in changing "voting behavior." Therefore, the first part of second hypothesis is supported.

Respondents were of the view that social media was used as an effective tool by them and it also changed their voting behavior and decisions.

Limitations and Future Studies

The research work has certain limitations. The researcher could not directly interact with the respondents as data were collected as self-reported through an online medium from UK citizens who participated in referendum. The time duration for getting

responses was short. The campaigns and events of Scottish Independence Referendum are still under progress. Therefore, the interpretation is based on the generalizations drawn after the incidents of referendum. However, despite all the limitations, this research work still contributes to the area of research knowledge and provides detailed analysis of the contribution of social media in the Scottish Independence Referendum 2014. Future research can be done on following topics related to the Scottish Independence Referendum 2014:

1. Responses through survey can be collected to find out different social conditions due to which the need for referendum aroused.

2. A content analysis can be conducted on framing of the news stories related to the Scottish Independence Referendum 2014.

3. A case study can be done by observing the effects of social media on referendum results.

4. An experimental research can be done to find which form (mainstream, print or social) of media was more influential in the Scottish Referendum 2014.

CONCLUSION

According to voters, social media helped in setting agendas to alter the decisions of voters as portrayed by Agenda Setting theory. However, in this research, the Uses and Gratification theory also depicts that young voters gratified their needs and were quite active as they knew what to do with social media sites and how to use them effectively before, during and after the Scottish referendum. Moreover, the Media Systems Dependency theory supports findings that maximum young voters kept on visiting the pages of their respective political parties on social media (Figure 1). The real situation and referendum results have proved that younger voters believe social media have been used as an effective tool by voters. Social media are composed of limited self-selected members (especially Facebook), and young voters seek information from like-minded political experts on social media according to Two-Step Flow of Communication. Young voters selectively choose their information source on social media and their selectivity depends upon their self-orientation. The politically aware young voters are more efficient and selective than their less politically-aware counterparts with respect to gaining political

information. Young voters got maximum political information through social media. It can be an effective forum for discussion and expressing views. Moreover, the social media posts influenced the voting decisions, voting behavior and the results of referendum, in the eyes of the younger voters. Therefore, younger voters believe social media have been effective in changing voting behavior of young voters in Scottish Referendum 2014.

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