The Use of Social Media for Political Socialization in Nepal: An Effectiveness Analysis of Platforms

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Abstract
The recent advancement of information technology has led to the advent of social media. The outburst of such social networking sites has created opportunities for several human activities, including those related to politics throughout the world; Nepal is no exception to it. Since social media is explosively increasing for political socialization in Nepal in recent times, it is now required to find its usefulness and effectiveness. In this regard, this paper attempts to explore the effectiveness of various social media platforms used for political socialization in Nepal. The study adopts an exploratory research design, using survey questionnaires for data collection. Pokhara Metropolitan City in Gandaki Province, Nepal is taken as the sample study area and the information is received from 160 respondents who are liable to cast vote in the election. The study finds a remarkable impact of social media on political socialization. The results of the study suggest that online political activities are strongly correlated to political awareness and offline political socialization. The study is expected to be useful for political parties, political leaders, political activists and the general public to determine effective social media platforms as per their usefulness for political communication in Nepal.
Keywords: Information technology, political communication, political socialization, social media

Introduction

Social media refers to "the websites and online tools that facilitate interactions between users by providing them opportunities to share information, opinions, and interest" (Swar and Hameed 141). It is a computer-assisted technology that helps to share ideas, opinions, information, and thoughts through virtual networks among people. The use of social media has grown substantially in recent years (Leong et al. 296). It promotes a sense of intimacy with concerned others (Twenge and Campbell 311) that may help to reduce social isolation. Social media provides several ways to interact "both with close ties, such as family, friends, and relatives, and weak ties, including co-workers, acquaintances, and strangers" and "it contributes to individuals' social capital

and psychological well-being" (Chen and Li 958). All in all, it provides opportunities for political socialization. It is believed that "social media stimulates online and offline political participation (Ahmad et. al. 1).

The term 'socialization' describes the ongoing process by which a person or group of individuals pick up the norms, values, attitudes and actions of a particular society. Political socialization is a process in which people of a political system learn their values, beliefs and orientations towards politics and the political objects. It also contributes to maintain and change the political culture (Almoda and Powell 64). Political socialization helps people to learn about "basic political concepts, behaviour, customs and political policy" (Gupta 276). Moreover, it acts as a tool for securing a preferred change in the opinions and perceptions of people and also for increasing support for the policies of the political system (Almoda and Verba 268). Political socialization is the process by which "orientations toward the political system are developed from one generation to another" (German 17). Likewise, political socialization acquaints individuals with the political system that ultimately determines one's perception of politics and the reaction to political phenomena. Thus, political socialization can be considered the development process through which a citizen matures politically. It helps people to construct political viewpoints and political values so that they can develop an understanding of political identities, beliefs and activities.

There are several agents of political socialization like family, educational institution, peer groups, mass media, information communication technologies (ICTs), etc. (McLeod 45, Sears and Levy 60). In recent times, the tendency of using social media has become one of the important instruments of political socialization throughout the world (Hamid et. al. 61). The advancement of science and technology has amplified this scope due to which people are able to share, discuss, influence and learn ideas interactively in a convenient way from each other.

The history of political socialization can be traced in several directions: "The conceptual development of Political Socialization" was "necessitated by the complex happenings in several parts of the world" (Almoda and Powell 64). The scientific study on political socialization "began in late 1950s and died a premature death in 1970s" (Niemi and Hepburn 1). Initially "promoted by a scholar Herbert Hyman" (Bender 390) through his writings, political socialization has been established as an "important concept of political theory" at present (Ke et. al. 382). In autocratic regimes, political socialization was limited only to a small circle whereas in a democratic society, political socialization is growing rapidly among the citizens as well. Moreover, after the development of the internet and social media, a new form of political socialization has emerged. The emergence of the internet and social media has shrieked the world merely into a global village.

In the last few years, the world has witnessed an enormous effects of social media in many areas. The influence of the use of social networking sites on people's behaviour has recently become more visible than before. One of the most significant effects is seen in the area of politics. It is widely believed that Barack Obama won the presidential election of the USA in 2008 with his intelligent use of Twitter to spread his message among the voters (Bimber 130). During the presidential election in 2012, Obama's campaign had a much greater ability to respond in real-time unfolding commentary around political events (Kreiss 1473), which probably facilitated his victory.

The use of social media in political participation is dramatically increasing in the recent context of Nepal. Smriti Dhungana asserts that "political parties in Nepal have changed the way of their election campaigns" and they have inclined toward social

media for political communication almost entirely replacing earlier days of "posters and wall paintings" (1). Social media has emerged as a powerful tool for politicians in Nepal and experts believe it can have a massive influence on voters (Ghimire 1), which can be a reason that social media is increasingly used in political communications at present.

There are numerous studies both in favor of and against the use of social media for online and offline political participation around the world. In this context, this study examines the usefulness of social media for political efficacy and in-person political participation among the general public in Nepal. This study further clarifies the connection between online political activity and its effect on political awareness.

Methodology

This study has adopted an exploratory research design. It employs quantitative research method with the survey questionnaire as a tool for data collection. The questionnaire was circulated to the respondents visiting them personally in their respective places as well as through email and other social media. The study is based on 160 respondents from Pokhara Metropolitan City who have been using different social media platforms and are liable to cast vote in the election. The study is based on the idea developed by Yasemin Ozkent and Lauren Langman that every aspect of life is now surrounded by social media, and these platforms are essential to foster modern communication.

Social media is built on the "ideological and technological foundations" of Web 2.0 that allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan and Haenlein 61). The term social media was first used in 1994 on a Tokyo online media environment, called Matisse (Aichner et. al. 215). The use of social media platforms allows people to "share messages with a larger audience in a way that was not previously possible. All this sharing can now be accomplished without running the risk of censorship, a common barrier of traditional media outlets" (Olaniran and Williams 81). It is one of the agents of political socialization which has been increasingly stimulated by the human urge for effective communication.

In fact, social media has "surrounded every area of life, and social media platforms have become indispensable for today's communication" (Ozkent 1). As verified in different facets of our daily communication practices, "social media has established itself as one of the preeminent communication vehicles. Studies show that 75% of internet users access a social network or blog when they go online" (Johnson 32). It has "redefined the parameters of established forms of political engagement and facilitated the development of new types of participation. People use social media to gain information, communicate with other citizens, politicians, and journalists, create and distribute content, network, organize, and fundraise, among other applications" (Owen, et al. 1). Thus, it has become a medium for common people as well as political parties and leaders to exchange their political thoughts and ideologies as well as to give updates about their recent projects so that many people can be informed about their projects, plans and agendas.

Social media has also amplified the speed of conversation and movement of information. Due to the existence of different social media spheres, it has become possible and easy to transfer the information and news from one place of the globe to another which plays an important role in the variety of protests, election turnout, police actions, violence, medical service and legal guidance (Langman 42). Therefore, in today's context, the use of social media has facilitated the communication system making it more effective whether it is day-to-day casual conversations to enhancing professional communication and political socialization.

Results and Discussion

The influence of social media on political activities is no longer a secret. Whether it comes to persuading people during elections or mobilizing people in other spheres or it is organizing political campaigns, social media has come out to be one of the efficient means. Major political parties and leaders at present have created their own social networking sites where they advocate their agendas, plans and policies, which reach individuals within seconds and are also used in schooling citizens. Moreover, as social media is communicative and economic in nature, it has become one of the means of cultivating as well as transmitting political agendas in and to the people. In this regard, the usefulness of social media in Nepal is explored through the survey analysis below.

Socio-demographic Profile of the Respondents

Personal aspects like gender, age, education, occupation, etc. play an important effect on understanding political socialization and the use of social media. Therefore, the study has incorporated data from heterogeneous respondents in terms of gender, age, education, ethnicity and occupation. The term respondents here refer to the sample size of the citizens adopted for the survey questionnaire which includes people liable to cast vote such as members of *Aama Samuha* ["Mothers' Group"] including young people over 18 years and people being engaged in different job sectors, etc.

Table 1

Socio-demographic Profile of the Respondents

Socio-demographic Profile		Total	Percentage
Gender	Male	69	43.1%
	Female	91	56.9%
Age	18-25	47	29.4 %
	26-35	60	37.5 %
	36-45	37	23.1 %
	46-55	13	8.1 %
	56 and or above	3	1.9 %
Education	Under SEE	4	2.5%
	SEE	4	2.5 %
	PCL/+2	45	28.1%
	Bachelor's Degree	49	30.6 %
	Master's Degree	55	34.4%
	Above Master	3	1.9%
Caste/Ethnicity	Brahmin	88	55.0 %
	Chhetri	23	14.4 %
	Janajati	34	21.2%
	Dalit	12	7.5%
	Others	3	1.9%
Occupation	Teaching	53	33.1 %
	Government Job	16	10.0 %
	Private Job	20	12.5%
	Business	7	4.4 %
	Others	64	40.0 %

Source: Survey questionnaire, 2021

The data were collected from the viewpoints of both male and female respondents. The 160 samples contained 56.9% females and 43.1% males. Similarly, the respondent's age has been divided into five categories. The highest number of

respondents belonged to the age category from 26-35 followed by the age 18-25 who covered 37.5% and 29.4% respectively. The lowest number of respondent belonged to 56 and above age who covered 1.9%. Similarly, the number of respondent belonged to 36-45 is 23.1% and 46-55 is 8.1% of the total sample. The educational profile of the respondents shows that the highest numbers of informants: 34.4% were Master's Degree holders. The informants with Bachelor's Degree were 30.6%. Similarly, 28.1% informants had PCL level education, 2.5% had SEE level education and 2.5% had under SEE level of education. Moreover, 1.9% informants were Master's and above. The study also includes information from people of various ethnic backgrounds. The majority of survey participants were Brahmin. They made up 55.5% of the sample size, and *Janajati* covered the remaining 21.2%. But 14.4% of the respondents identified as Chhetri and 7.5% of the respondents identified as Dalit. Similarly, 1.9% of the respondents chose not to identify their ethnicity. The study has integrated the idea from the respondents belonging to different occupational status too. According to the table, 33.1% of the respondents worked as teachers, 12.5% held private professions, 10.0% held government jobs, 4.4% ran their own businesses and the other 40.0% held various other occupations.

Evaluation of Most Used Social Media

The study has accessed most used social media platforms in use in Nepal. The respondents were provided with five options namely Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and Others. The details of the evaluation are presented in Figure 1 herewith.
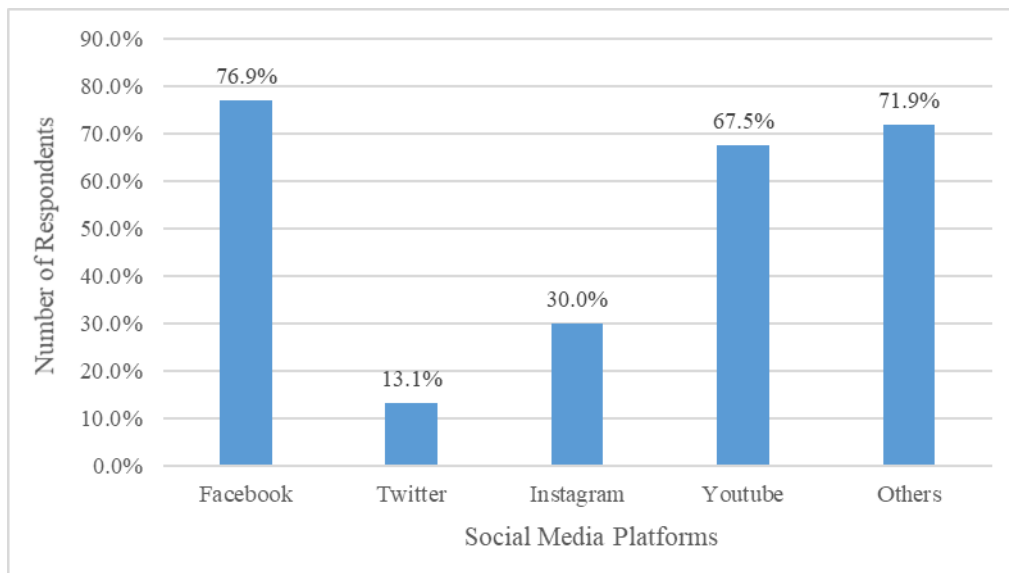

Fig. 1. Social media platforms and their use
(Source: Survey questionnaire, 2021)

The figure shows that Facebook is the most used social media in Nepal, which has been found being used by 79.9% of the respondents. Similarly, YouTube is the next most popular social media among people in Nepal which covers 67.5% of the total respondents. Likewise, the percentage of people using Instagram is 30.5% and 13.5% of the total respondents use Twitter. The number of respondents who use other social media platforms specified as Google, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Tiktok, Viber, and WhatsApp is also significant in numbers. These social media are used by 71.88% of respondents. Thus, from the survey conducted, it is concluded that Facebook is the most popular social media site followed by YouTube in Nepal.

Purpose of Using Social Media

Figure 2 presents the reason behind the use of social media by the respondents. They were provided with four reasons for using social media in Nepal. The percentage of the people using social media for the purposes of education, business, political news update, time pass and entertainment is examined below.
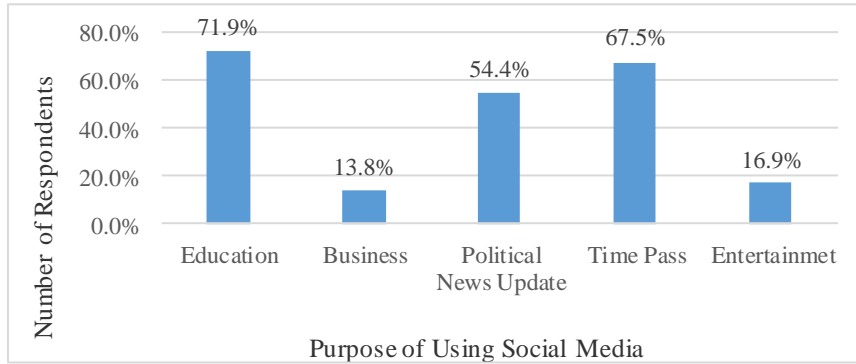

Fig. 2. Purpose of using social media
(Source: Survey questionnaire, 2021)

According to the survey data, the highest number, i.e., 71.9% of respondents were found using social media to get updates on education which is followed by the people who use social media for the time pass which covers 67.5%. Likewise, the percentage of people using social media to get political news updates is 54.4%, and using it for entertainment is 16.9% while the least percentage of people were found using social media to get updates on business which is 13.9% of the total respondents. The survey finds that the largest number of people use social media for education, followed by time pass and to get political news updates.

Political Awareness through Social Media

Among different spheres of information, social media platforms include issues and content related to politics. Whether the issues, contents and discourses raised and disseminated through social media are useful for political awareness or not is evaluated in this section.
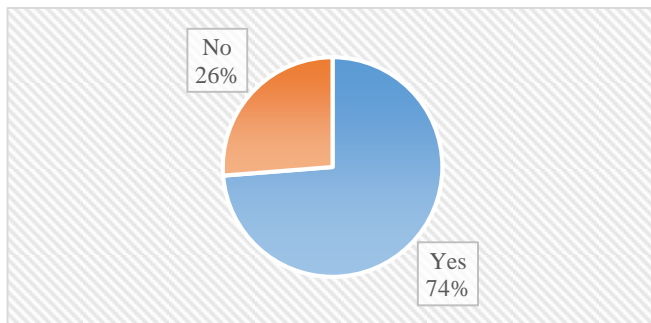

Fig. 3. Political awareness through social media
(Source: Survey questionnaire, 2021)

According to the figure, social media works as a platform for political awareness for 74.0 % of the sample population whereas social media leaves no impact of political awareness for 26.0 % of the respondents. Since the percentage of people who believe on the role of social media for political awareness is significantly higher, it can be concluded that social media covers a substantial role in political awareness.

Social Media for Political Exposure of an Individual

Social media and politics go hand in hand since so much political dialogue takes place on these platforms. Additionally, many people use social media to access political news. Social media platforms act as the contemporary public forum and allow users to expose their political views. This section provides an answer to the question of whether social media is actually helpful for political exposure in Nepal or not.
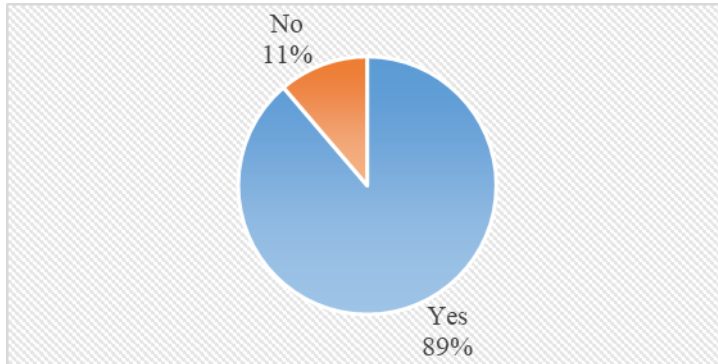

Fig. 4. Social media for political exposure of an individual
(Source: Survey questionnaire, 2021)

Figure 4 illustrates how social media affects a person's political exposure. The data show that using social media can give a person significant political exposure; according to 89.0% of respondents, social media are a crucial medium for political exposure. For instance, 11.0% of the total answers, or a relatively small percentage of persons disputed the use of social media for political exposure.

Easiest Social Media Platform for Political Communication

Nowadays, a lot of political action takes place online, and individuals are most active there, whether they are tweeting about politics or leaving comments on a certain news website. The most well-known social media platforms are the ever-famous Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram. Social media platforms are constantly emerging. The survey in this section assesses Nepal's most convenient social media platform for political communication.
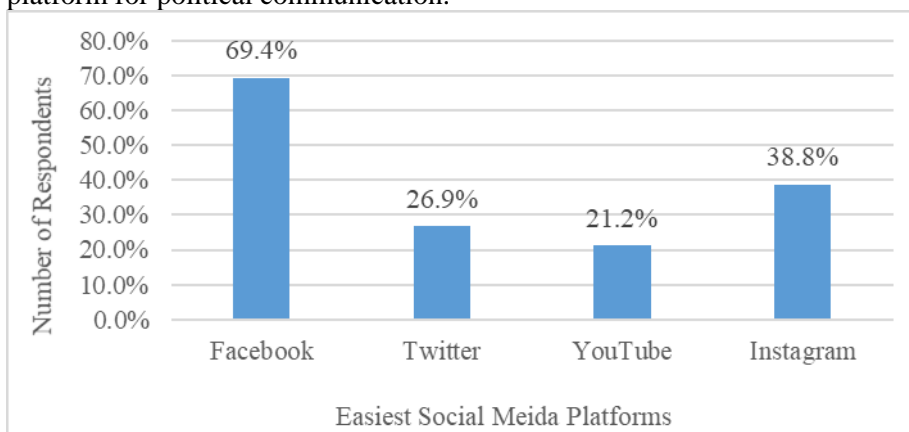

Fig. 5. Easiest social media platform for political communication
(Source: Survey questionnaire, 2021)

The most accessible social media channels for political communication are shown in Figure 5. Facebook stands out among the four social media sites as the one that makes political communication the simplest, with 69.4% of respondents saying that it is

easier to communicate on Facebook. Instagram comes in second with 38.8% of the vote. In the same way, YouTube comes in the last position while Twitter places the third.

Following Social Campaigns of Political Parties

      Social media's influence on political campaigns is nothing new. Many political parties all around the world have used this authority to their advantage in order to win elections. Digital media strategies are now essential since voters are more accessible on social media. The survey presented here assesses Nepal's tendency of supporting social campaigns run by political parties.
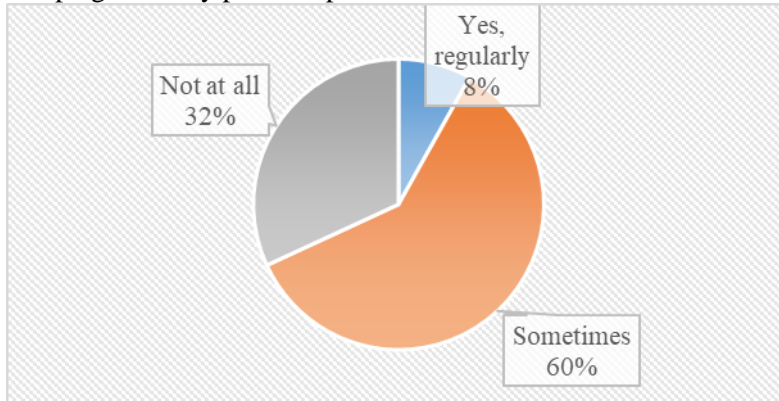

Fig. 6. Following social campaigns of political parties
(Source: Survey questionnaire, 2021)

      Figure 6 above provides an illustration of the public trend of follow-up of social campaigns organized by political parties. According to the available statistics, only a small percentage of respondents, or 8.0%, consistently followed political campaigns on social media. It was discovered that a significant portion of respondents. that is, 60.0% follow social campaigns via social media. 32.0% of people said they did not follow social media efforts.

Following Political Leaders on Social Media

      Social media gives leaders of the most populous nations an obvious advantage in gaining millions of followers. Numerous world leaders in politics have millions of followers on various social media websites. The survey examines the practice of political leaders being followed on social media in Nepal.
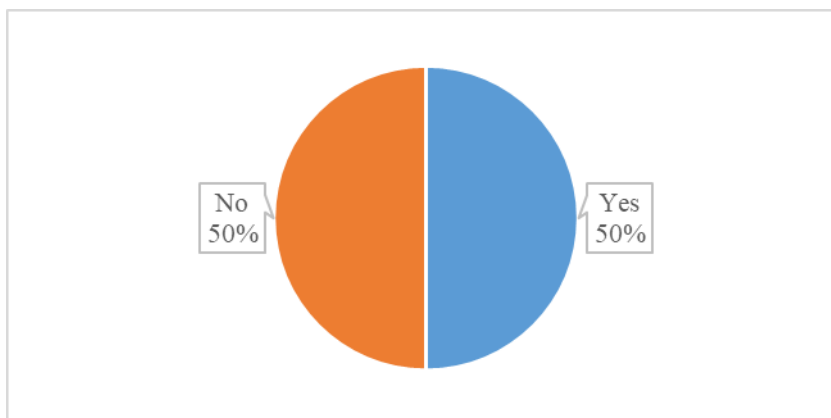

Fig. 7. Following political leaders on social media
(Source: Survey questionnaire, 2021)

In Figure 7, the number of respondents who follow political figures on social media is shown. The respondents were split into two equal groups. The proportion of respondents who followed political figures on social media was 50.0%, which is the same as the proportion who did not follow political leaders on social media in Nepal

Comment on the Content Related to Politics

The social media environment is dynamic, enabling the creation, sharing and exchange of political content on websites and in networks that support communication and cooperation. Political practices are significantly impacted by social media. Social media have changed the way that political communication is conducted among citizens and have overhauled the political media structure. Here is a survey that analyzes the frequency with which people comment on content related to politics in social media.
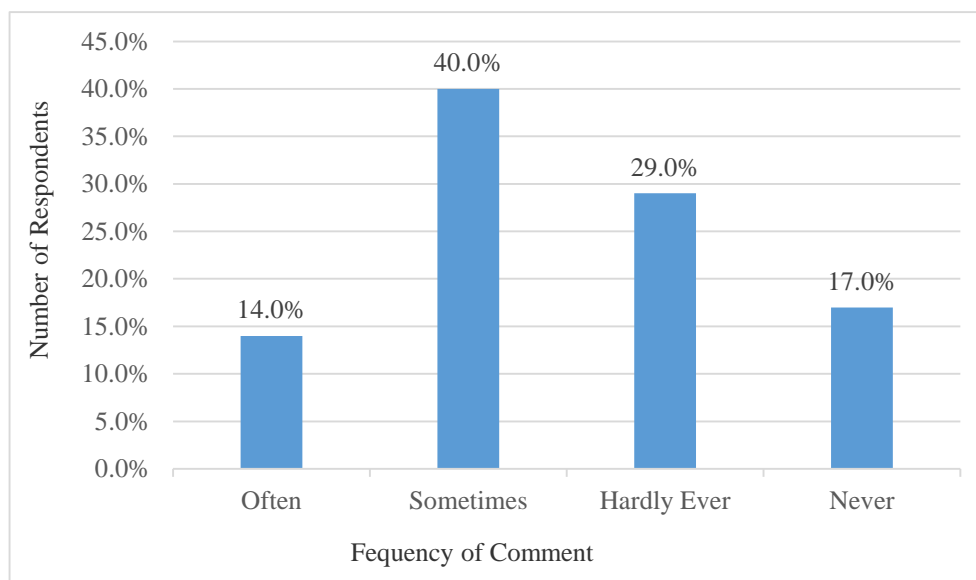

Fig. 8. Reading and commenting on the content related to politics
(Source: Survey questionnaire, 2021)

The way that people react to political content on social media is depicted in Figure 8. The percentage of respondents who commented on political matters sometimes was determined to be 40.0%. Similarly, 29.0% of respondents said they hardly ever remark on political content. While 17.0% of respondents had never commented on political topics, 14.0% of respondents often had the habit of doing so on social media. From the aforementioned information, it can be stated that a significant portion of the population engages in low to moderately frequent social media commentary on political topics.

Informative Political Discussion on Social Media

Politics-related social media posts might be incredibly informative for some people while they might be uninformative to others. The following analysis looks at how the general public uses political content on social media in Nepal.
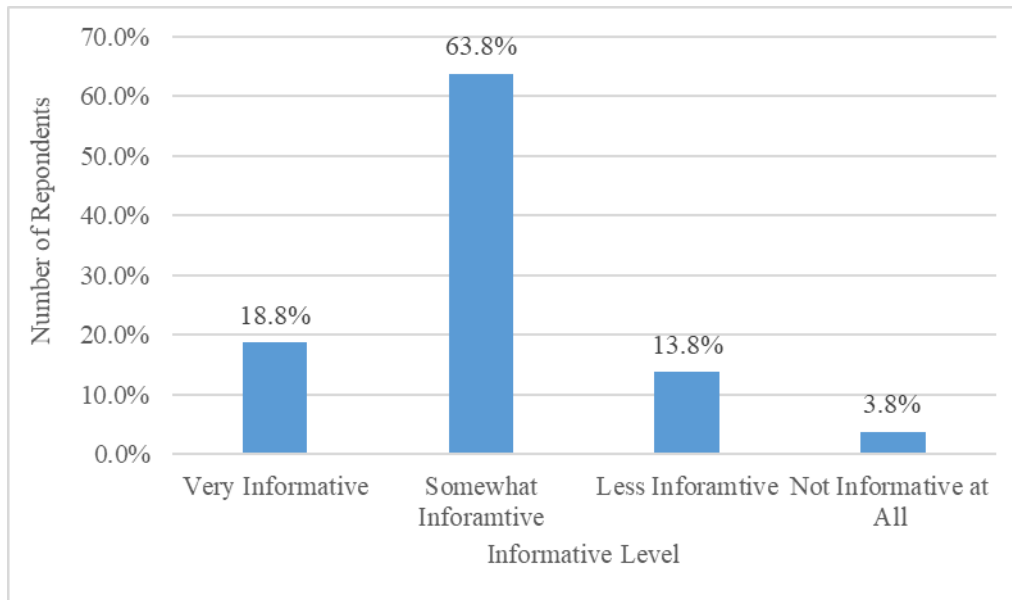
Fig. 9. Politics-related discussion in social media posts
(Source: Survey questionnaire, 2021)

Whether the political interactions on social media cultivate informative background for political socialization or not is presented in Figure 9. The highest number of respondents informed that the discussion on social media is somewhat informative for them. Likewise, 18.8% of the respondents stated that they are very informative. For 13.8% of people, the discussion is less informative whereas, for 3.8% of respondents, they are not informative at all. Since 97.3% of people accepted the political discussion on social media as informative to some level, it can be strongly concluded that the discussion on social media is useful but at different levels, for different people.

Changes in Views about Political/Social Issues

Social media may have an impact on people's ideas when they are looking for new information on a subject. When it comes to politics or other topics where people already have opinions, they frequently look for material to support their opinions. Here is a survey to determine whether or not social media content has affected people's opinions.
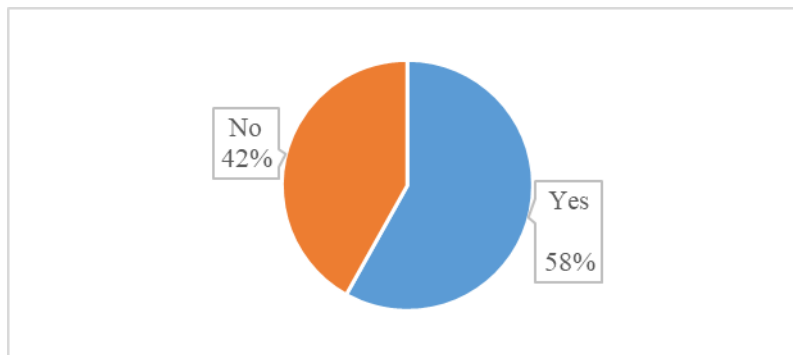

Fig. 10. Changes in views about political/social issues
(Source: Survey questionnaire, 2021)

Do citizens' pre-existing ideas about politics change as a result of using social media? Both yes and no are the responses. Figure 10 demonstrates that a larger percentage of people's perspectives shift as a result. While 42.0% of respondents

indicated that social media information had no influence on their opinions and values, 58.0% of respondents claimed that social media content had altered their prior ideas and attitudes.

Influence in Political Socialization through Social Media

If social media really influence for the political socialization, in what level it affects the people has been sought for herewith. The use of social media and its degree of influence upon the citizens on political activities and political socialization has been conspicuously illuminated in Figure 11 below.
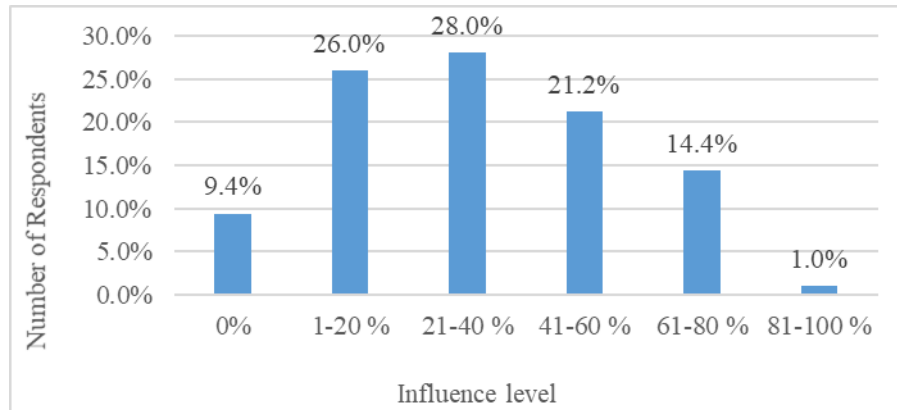

Fig. 11. Degree of increment of political socialization
(Source: Survey questionnaire, 2021)

According to the figure, 9.4% of respondents said social media had no influence on their political concern. Only 1.0% of the respondents were determined to have been significantly impacted by social media. Their numerical influence level was given as 81-100%. The biggest percentage of respondents, 28.0%, claimed that social media had an effect on them (between 21.0% and 40.0%). Similar to this, social media had an impact on respondents at levels of 1-20%, 41-60%, 61-80% on 26.0, 21.2 and 14.4 percentage people. It can be said that social media use has a significant impact on citizens' political socialization because 91.6% of people were found to be impacted by it at low, moderate, or high levels.

Discussion

The findings of the study demonstrate two categories of persons during the research process such as how they view political socialization. Some people have solid awareness of what political socialization is and how social media affects it. While others had very little understanding of the term 'social media'. Therefore, in order to help people grasp political socialization, the researcher had to define the term well. The respondents were unaware of the fact that political socialization is an ongoing process, they used social media for various purposes but did not realize that social media helped them to get politically socialized.

The examination of the data reveals that social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram and many others are used by individuals in Nepal for different purposes. Facebook is the most popular social media network among those mentioned, followed by Youtube, Instagram, and Twitter. Additionally, the evidence shows that social media has had a significant influence on political socialization. However the easiest platform for politial socialization is slightly different than the most popular social media network in Nepal. Facebook stands as the easiest means of political

socialization followed by Instagram, Twitter and YouTube. It is clearly visible through the user participation in social campaigns of political parties, following those campaigns, following political leaders, reading and commenting on political content, all of which help users become more politically exposed in society. Since Facebook, Instagram and YouTube are all recognized as effective tools for making an impression on users, they may present opportunities for concerned parties, including political figures and activists, to promote their major initiatives and future agendas in order to reach a large number of people in a short frame of time.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the introduction of social media has increased communication flows and made a significant contribution to Nepal's political socialization and exposure. The most user-friendly social media platform for political socialization, according to the study, is Facebook, which is followed by Instagram, Twitter and YouTube. There appear to be relatively few people who follow political parties frequently. Additionally, there are equal numbers of those who follow and do not support political leaders. The study also concludes that the politics-related social media information is increasingly being commented on by people in Nepal.

The study also concludes that people from all walks of life, including citizens, politicians and political parties have been increasingly using social media in political contexts at present. Globally, social media has been associated with raising political knowledge and encouraging political involvement. Similarly, the usage of social media by diverse population in Nepal has clearly had an impact on how they are politically socialized. Therefore, political parties, leaders and activists are advised to utilize social media carefully and creatively with more facts and information to make a greater impact on people.

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