

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54663/2182-9306.2023.v11.n20.226-248>

Research Paper

Impact of Online Cross-Cutting Exposure on Political Participation & Social Anxiety

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ABSTRACT

This study suggests that more nuanced human relationships and interpersonal communication structures must be explored to understand users' political actions better. Cross-cutting exposure influences users' political participation such that disagreement from close ties is negatively associated with political participation. In contrast, conflict from weak links is positively related to political involvement. Users' political participation and social anxiety are further strengthened when they are highly engaged with the disagreement from weak ties. With 83% of the respondents between 18-35 years of age, this study mainly represents the young lot's results. The study contributes to the ongoing debate on social media's effectiveness and whether cross-cutting exposure encourages or discourages political participation. It also contributes to the literature on the differentiation between close ties and weak ties and the effects of disagreement from each. This study aids in political consultants' and campaign managers' understanding of the effects of communication on people's political and psychological attitudes in various contextual and cultural settings.

Keywords: Cross-cutting exposure; social media; political participation; social anxiety

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Received on: 2022/09/27

Approved on: 2023/03/16

Evaluated by a double-blind review system

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media platforms like Facebook offer yet another track to galvanize user engagement in political life, particularly in elections and electoral campaigns. They are the “mass personal” form of communication (O’Sullivan & Carr, 2017) and are critical marketing platforms that have become more mainstream and are expected to grow even more (Boulianne, 2018). They have evolved into a socially entrenched experience that can shape users’ perception of the world. With the declining confidence and trust in the news coming from television and newspapers (Min & Wohn, 2020), people's perceptions are more easily influenced by information from ostensibly unpaid outlets, and they are more likely to trust it. While social media may not have outstripped traditional media (because some of the news appearing on social media can be unverified, fake, and fabricated), they have nearly broken the monopoly of traditional media in the capacity to expose users to cross-cutting, different and diverse viewpoints (Ogidi & Utulu, 2016; Simons, 2017).

Literature defines cross-cutting exposure as the exposure to disagreeable information (Min & Wohn, 2018; Mutz, 2006). This term represents the disagreement with the differing points of view in the individual’s communication environments (Matthes et al., 2019). Users may experience perceived disapproval from others due to cross-cutting exposure prompting them to avoid online actions that reflect their political party identification. It is further suggested that cross-cutting exposure from close ties may not cause anxiety because users may feel more comfortable encountering differing opinions from their friends/family members. However, cross-cutting exposure from weak ties (a heterogeneous group of people with diverse views) can cause more disagreement and anxiety (Min & Wohn, 2020) and encourage political participation in some users (Lu & Lee, 2020). Existing scholarship suggests that cross-cutting exposure can increase their political knowledge, develop more enlightened opinions, enhance political efficacy (Min & Wohn, 2018), increases news usage, political discussion, inculcate democratic social responsibility (Kim et al., 2013), besides breaking the filter bubble (Beam et al., 2018).

The exposure to disagreement is shared on social media (Bakshy et al., 2015). While much work has been done in this direction, a need exists to examine how cross-cutting exposure influences

political participation in different settings (Knoll et al., 2018), especially in non-Western contexts. There also exists room for research in comparing the effects of cross-cutting exposure from both weak and close ties and examining the influence of cross-cutting exposure on personal relationships on social media (Min & Wohn, 2020).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Influence of cross-cutting exposure on political participation and social anxiety

The pervasiveness of Facebook in the 21st century, which has attracted scholarly attention, can be attributed to the technological advancements this social media platform has shown (Apple et al., 2020; Valenzuela et al., 2021). It has attracted users because of its reachability, significance, sociocultural context, and group engagement (Ruess et al., 2021; Shehzad et al., 2021), exposing them to cross-cutting political discussion and quickly transmitting political information. However, since the literature on whether cross-cutting conversation supports or inhibits political participation has yielded inconsistent results, more research is needed (Chan et al., 2021; Matthes et al., 2019).

Cross-cutting exposure is a person's contact with disagreeable political perspectives. Exposure is an antecedent to the cross-cutting discussion, which results in increased political knowledge (Min & Wohn, 2018), which in turn influences political participation (which includes voluntary actions like voting behavior/intention, information seeking, involvement in political discussion to buttress efficacy and influence public policy, etc. (Masiha et al., 2018)). The fragmentation of news media and the propagation of disinformation on social media contribute to rising political polarisation (Kubin & von Sikorki, 2021). Existing research has found a robust relationship between online political involvement and offline political action. In fact, social media campaign supplements offline efforts (Shehzad et al., 2021). Due to its low entry barriers, Facebook has been extremely useful in disseminating and amplifying political news, attracting and influencing people through group discussions to join offline political activity (Zhuravskaya et al., 2020). Perhaps this is why users get exposed to cross-cutting exposure online more than in face-to-face interaction (Barnidge, 2017). Platforms like Facebook offers a venue for information exchange and make it easier for users to vent their frustration, express and read diverse views (Min & Wohn, 2018). However, research has shown contradictory opinions about the effect of cross-cutting exposure on political participation (Dilliplane, 2011), so the relationship warrants more

scholarly inquiry (Lu, Heatherly & Lee, 2016).

Cross-cutting exposure may cause social anxiety in users in both online/offline settings (Lee-Won et al., 2015; Zsido et al., 2020). The negative cognitive appraisal of a probable menace (Gkika et al., 2018) occurs due to the possibility/presence of interpersonal assessment in real/imagined social settings (Leary, 1983). Literature suggests that social anxiety is often caused when an individual fears receiving criticism from others and is dissatisfied with how people view them (Pitcho-Prelorentzos et al., 2020). However, to our knowledge, this has yet to be investigated in further detail.

2.2 The mediating role of close & weak-ties

Technology usage exposes individuals to more assorted, different, and dissimilar viewpoints (Bakshy et al., 2012). The cross-cutting exposure coming from weak ties (acquaintances/strangers) influences users differently than the exposure to disagreeable news/information from close ties (more united/bounded network of friends/relatives) (Min & Wohn, 2018). This link strength (a combination of time, emotional attachment, mutual confiding, and reciprocity of services, among other things) distinguishes close ties from weak ties. Researchers have included friends, family, and relatives in the close-ties category of like-minded people. While loose coalitions, strangers, colleagues, and acquaintances are in the weak-ties category (Baer, 2010; Granovetter, 1973). Existing literature also implies that the label of a social connection may not predict its strength. Colleagues, for example, might be in close or weak relationships depending on the circumstances. Based on Granovetter's (1974) closeness measurement, which specifies its strength, this study considers colleagues in the soft ties category. Not only do they come from varied backgrounds, and connection with them might lead to knowledge that one is not previously familiar with, but individuals frequently keep friends separate from colleagues, even when interaction with them can be regarded as trustworthy or frank. Furthermore, whereas close ties are commonly thought to be more crucial in personal interactions, weak ties are deemed more relevant when acquiring new knowledge (Krämer et al., 2021).

People with strangers (and remote acquaintances) in their network are more exposed to unfavorable news. Discussing politics is increasingly tricky compared to those with a limited online social network of close ties with similar ideas and viewpoints (Min & Wohn, 2018, 2020). In addition, the literature suggests that some people avoid political discussions when they find

themselves in politically incongruent situations to prevent political strife. Others, unable to resist the urge, engage in political debate in such a setting (Huckfeldt & Mendez, 2008). As a result, it is vital to investigate the influence of cross-cutting exposure on political engagement, both from close and weak ties.

2.3 Moderating role of online news engagement

Literature suggests that the degree of attention an individual gives to disagreeable information/news and gets involved with it moderates the effect of cross-cutting exposure on political participation (Min & Wohn, 2018). Individuals who get highly engaged may seek to investigate the information and compare/analyze their stance with the opposing point of view. Compared to cross-cutting information from weak ties, cross-cutting information from close ties might create an uncomfortable scenario for the individual. The available literature also suggests disagreement during interpersonal communication can influence an individual's social anxiety (Keles et al., 2020). However, with weak ties, one experiences less emotional attachment. Also, it is easy to engage in social interactions/discussions accidentally or on purpose with weak links, resulting in higher chances of gaining information about the points of agreement and disagreements. This experience broadens the user's understanding of the given political issue and encourages them to go further into the data to evaluate it. As the users reconsider their stance in light of the cross-cutting exposure, their opinions may become more definite, affecting their online/offline political participation (Min, 2021). It is thus interesting to investigate if the tie types relate to levels of engagement with disagreement.

On the other hand, users may become victims of social anxiety mainly when they want to make or hold an image (or preferred impression) on their real/imagined audience. If liking a page or responding to post results in a perceived feeling of dislike from subjectively important people, individuals may experience social anxiety due to the negative appraisal of the situation (Gkika et al., 2018) or due to the uncertainty they feel when trying to make or hold preferred impression on their close- and weak-ties (including real/imagined audience) (Kampmann et al., 2019; Massazza et al., 2022; Zsido et al., 2020). The literature focusing on these cognitive theories advocates the need to understand and investigate social anxiety (Pitcho-Prelorentzos et al., 2020).

The research shows that during political encounters on social media's heterogeneous network discussions, the chances of users' exposure to political disagreements increase (Barnidge, 2015); this study employs engagement with disagreement as a moderator. Considering the debate so far,

H1a. Cross-cutting exposure from weak ties will be positively associated with political participation, whereas cross-cutting exposure from close ties will be negatively associated with political participation

H1b. Cross-cutting exposure from weak ties will be positively associated with engagement with disagreement.

H1c. Engagement with disagreement will moderate the strength of the relationship between close/weak ties and political participation

H2a. Cross-cutting exposure from both close- and weak ties will be associated with increased social anxiety

H2b. Engagement with disagreement will moderate the strength of the relationships between close/weak ties and social anxiety

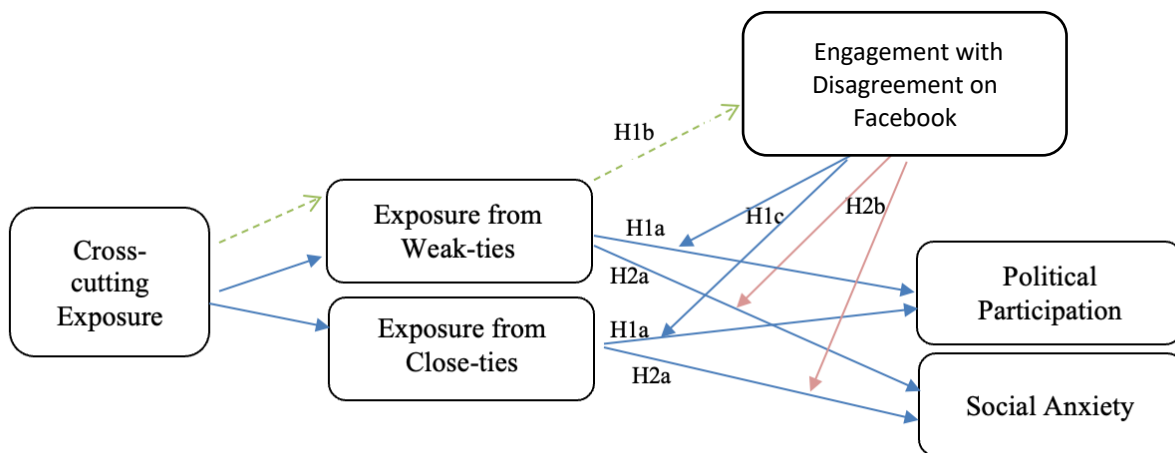


Figure 1. Theoretical framework

3. METHODOLOGY

Social media usage, especially by millennials, is widespread in industrialized countries and underdeveloped nations. Political parties and individual politicians in Pakistan utilize social media extensively to distribute information to social media users and voters (Michaelsen, 2011). Research has also shown that just like the developed world, developing nations are also affected by new technology and social media in terms of political communication (e.g., Ahmad et al., 2019; Riaz, 2010). Social networking sites (SNS) considerably impact users' social and political

learning, particularly among the young (Khan & Shahbaz, 2015). According to a recent study, social media has a significant political influence on Pakistani users (Karamat & Farooq, 2016). Students actively utilize new media to obtain political information, such as exchanging thoughts and debating political topics with their peers (Arshad & Hassan, 2014). This was observed during the 2013 General Election when Pakistani social media, Facebook in particular, emerged as the most potent source of news updates and a channel for attracting (nearly) eighty million registered Pakistani electorates (Butt & Awang, 2017). Since then, it has become an integral resource for political marketers to engage, inform and mobilize voters, especially a prominent bulge of the young population (Saud, 2020). This makes the cross-cutting informational exposure on Facebook and its influence on an individual's political participation and social anxiety more intriguing (Xiaoming et al., 2014).

Facebook is the most widely used platform, especially for political discussion. It is one of the most popular places for people to talk about politics online and reflect on their offline political behavior in Pakistan (Ahmad, Alvi & Ittefaq, 2019). While other social media are primarily networks of weak ties, the Facebook network usually comprises both close- and weak-ties (Kim, Lu & Lee, 2021). As such, it allows researchers to look at more nuanced user relationships, which is this study's focus. It is the most widely used/studied platform concerning users' political participation (e.g., Pennington & Winfrey, 2021; Stumpel, 2010; Thorson et al., 2021; Westling, 2007; Young, 2021, etc.). Facebook is also used as a data collection platform because of its respondent heterogeneity (e.g., Rife et al., 2016; Schneider & Harknett, 2019) and stated that Facebook is the most used network among Pakistani young for political information (Ahmad et al., 2019).

Cross-cutting exposure is essential for a thriving democracy since it improves people's mutual understanding and makes them more tolerant of opposing ideas (Huckfeldt et al., 2004; Mutz, 2006). As a result, the pre-election settings are designed with the importance of social media in politics in mind. The online effect of cross-cutting exposure on Pakistani consumers' political participation and social anxiety will not only aid in gaining a better understanding of the larger picture, probing the impact of communication on people's political and psychological attitudes. Still, it will also assist political parties and news outlets in better understand online behavior and design campaigns accordingly.

3.1 Data collection & sampling

Surveys were distributed in the twin cities where it is easy to meet people from every region of Pakistan. Data collection started in March 2018, three months before the general election of 2018, and continued till the first week of May 2018. Convenience sampling was employed because this study focused on producing and testing a theoretical model on the roles of cross-cutting exposure, political discussion and participation, and social anxiety. While statistical inference is crucial for proper data analysis, interpreting results, and drawing conclusions (Laake & Fagerland, 2015), belief can be less important than the contribution in terms of theory.

Of the 400 questionnaires, 296 were answered (74% response rate). Among the 296 responses, there were 165 men and 131 women. 120 (40%) were students. 42% of the sample were 18-25, 40.9% were 26-35, and only 17% were 35 years or older. Youth participate in offline political activities and communicate their opinions with the public in great numbers, and exchange political information/news about political parties and leaders with their colleagues, family, and friends. The democratic process is strengthened by young people's active participation in social media. This is why many scholars have been drawn to Facebook because of its popularity to look at the involvement of engaged youth in political activities, which is deemed critical to a country's expansion and progress (Ahmad et al., 2019; Shehzad et al., 2021).

3.2 Measures

Cross-cutting exposure on Facebook, political participation, close ties, weak ties, and news engagement with disagreement on Facebook was measured with items taken from Min and Wohn (2018). For Facebook cross-cutting exposure, a single-item question was employed (How often do you find political news or information on Facebook that you disagree with?). There were two relationship variables: close-ties and weak ties. Close ties represented the extent of the disagreeable news from spouses, friends, family, and relatives ($\alpha = 0.775$). Weak ties represented the extent of cross-cutting political information from co-workers, acquaintances, classmates, teachers, public figures, and strangers ($\alpha = 0.835$). News Engagement with Disagreement on Facebook was measured with three items on a five-point Likert scale ($\alpha = 0.769$) (Items included: When I see political news or information on Facebook that I disagree with, I pay attention to it; When I see political news or information on Facebook that I disagree with, I read it carefully; When I see political news or information on Facebook that I disagree with, I respond by posting my comment.) Items for social anxiety were taken from Marder et al.

(2018), who adopted Feldman (1995). Four things were measured on a four-point Likert scale ($\alpha = 0.851$). (Social anxiety Items included: happy/unhappy; anxious/relaxed; tense/calm; worried/not worried. Political Participation items included: I discuss important community/political issues with others and advance my position; I vote in significant elections; I attend a meeting involving important community/political issues; I work with others in the community to try to solve local problems; I donate to political campaigns.) Age, gender, education, income, number of friends, and political ideology, were entered as control variables.

4. RESULTS

H1a: Results suggest that cross-cutting exposure from weak ties positively affects users’ political participation. The relationship between cross-cutting openness and the user’s political participation only exists when weak links mediate this relationship (i.e., complete mediation). In other words, cross-cutting exposure positively influences users’ political participation through weak ties only (i.e., $b = .00647$, $se = .0233$, 95% CI [.0240, .1147]). None of the relationships are significant for close ties. Hence, based on the results, H1a is accepted when users are exposed to cross-cutting from their weak relationship on Facebook. Results are presented in Figure 2.

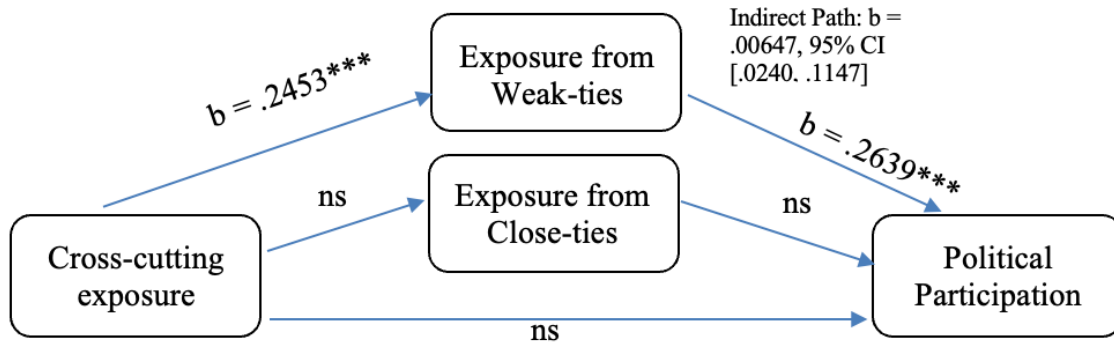


Figure 2. H1a – Relationship between Cross-cutting Exposure & Political Participation via Weak-ties

H1b: As predicted, results of linear regression show that cross-cutting exposure from weak ties is positively associated with engagement with disagreement such that $b = .366$, $t = 5.388$, $R^2 = .35$, $p < .000$, mean = 2.4924, SD = 1.06273. ANOVA test results are significant. VIF values are

below 10, while tolerance values are above 0.2. Detailed results are included in the supplementary table.

H1c: Results depict that the relationship between cross-cutting exposure through close ties on the user’s political participation is contingent upon the user’s engagement with disagreement on Facebook. Also, it was evident that when meeting with Clash is moderating the relationship between close ties/weak-ties and the user’s political participation, the relationship changes in the opposite direction.

The relationship between close-ties and user’s political participation is significant/positive ($b = .9208$, $se = .2627$, $t = 3.5051$, $p < .000$). Engagement with disagreement negatively moderates this relationship (i.e., $b = -.3701$, $se = .0940$, $t = -3.937$, $p < .000$). The relationship between weak-ties and user’s political participation is significant/negative ($b = -.6911$, $se = .2142$, $t = -3.2259$, $p < .01$). However, engagement positively moderate the relationship between weak-ties and political participation such that among those highly engaged with disagreement, cross-cutting exposure from weak ties increases political participation (such that $b = .3208$, $se = .0717$, $t = 4.4715$, $p < .000$).

Hence, H1c is accepted for both close-ties and weak ties. Results are presented in Figure 3.

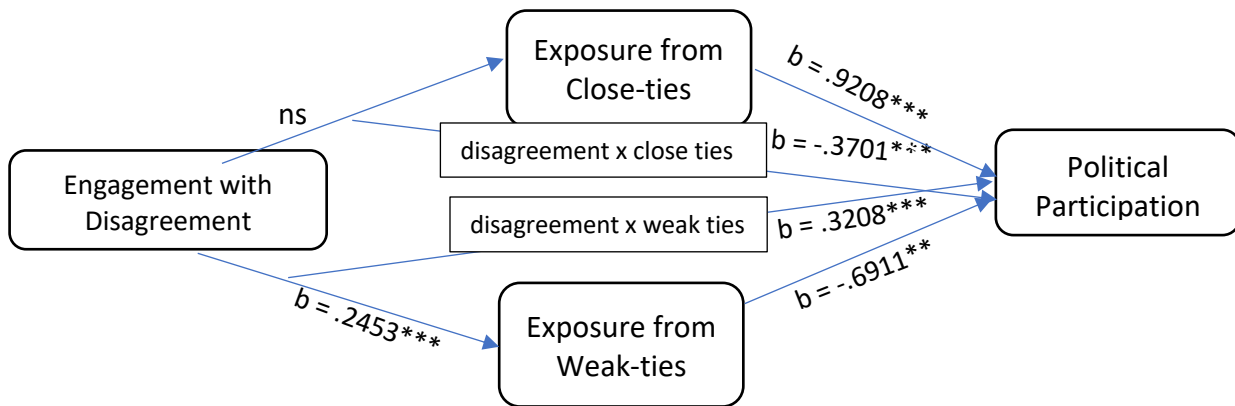


Figure 3. H1c – Moderated mediation between Cross-cutting Exposure from both Mediators (Close & Weak-ties) & Political Participation via Engagement with Disagreement

Graph I shows that when engagement with disagreement with close ties is high, the user’s political participation decreases. When meeting with clashes with close ties is low, the user’s political involvement increases. Graph II shows that at a high level of engagement with

disagreement with weak ties, political participation increases. However, when moderation is low, users' political participation decreases steadily.

H2a: Results show no relationship exists between users' cross-cutting exposure and their social anxiety. However, the indirect effects show that cross-cutting exposure through weak ties ($b = .0303$, $se = .0106$, $95\% \text{ CI } [.0116, .0528]$) is associated with user's social anxiety. Since no relationships with close ties are significant, H2a is accepted for only weak links for complete mediation.

Results are presented in Figure 4.

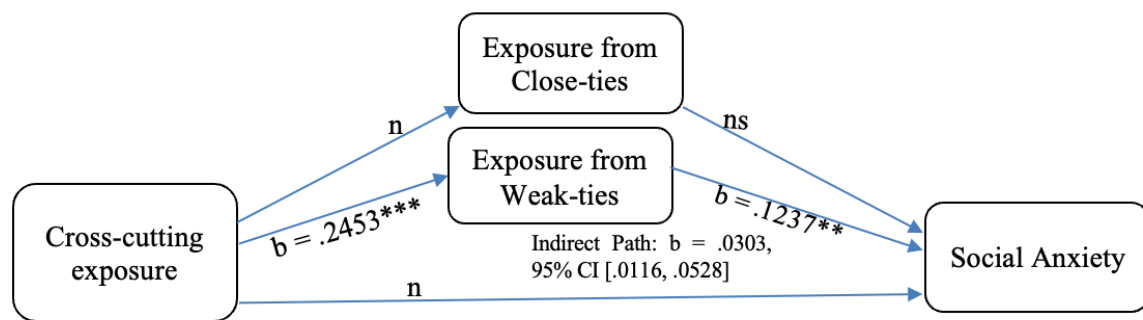


Figure 4. H2a - mediation between Cross-cutting Exposure and Social Anxiety from Close-ties and Weak-ties

H2b: Results show that engagement with disagreement on Facebook moderates the strength and direction of the relationship between close and weak ties with social anxiety. Cross-cutting exposure has a significant negative influence on the user's social anxiety ($b = -.0571$, $se = .0260$, $t = -1.9873$, $p < .05$). The moderator, engagement with disagreement ($b = -.9267$, $se = .1855$, $t = -4.9965$, $p < .000$), is found to have a negative influence on user's social anxiety. Results also demonstrate that the effect of cross-cutting exposure through close ties on social anxiety is contingent upon the user's engagement with disagreement on Facebook.

Weak ties ($b = -.3872$, $se = .1274$, $t = -3.2160$, $p < .001$) are negatively associated with user's social anxiety. However, the direction and strength of the relationship change when engagement with disagreement is moderating between weak ties and the user's social anxiety ($b = .1718$, $se = .0403$, $t = 4.2599$, $p < .000$) such that among those highly engaged with disagreement, cross-

cutting exposure from weak-ties causes social anxiety. Whereas close-ties have a positive influence on the user's social anxiety ($b = .5767$, $se = .1477$, $t = 3.9054$, $p < .000$). But engagement negatively moderates the relationship between close-ties and social anxiety effect on user's social anxiety ($b = -.1983$, $se = .0528$, $t = -3.7525$, $p < .000$).

Results are presented in Figure 5, Graph III and IV.

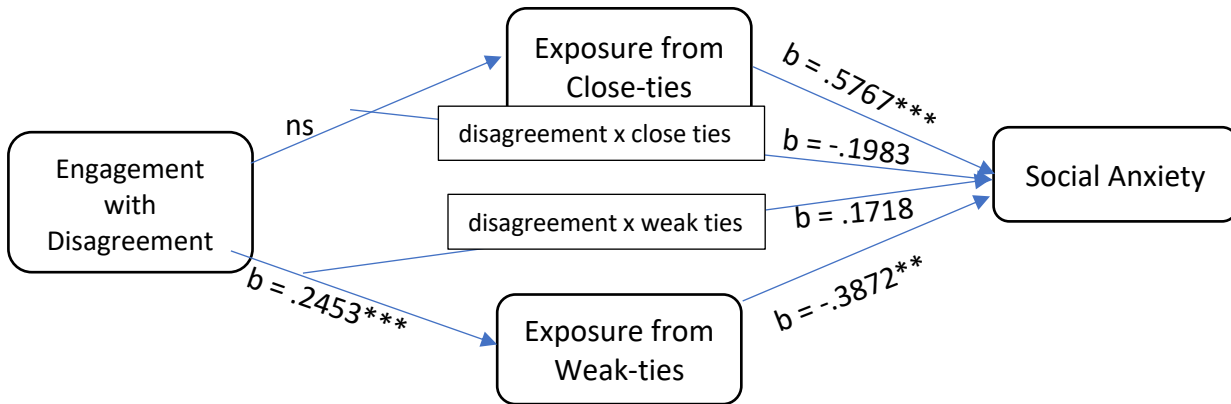
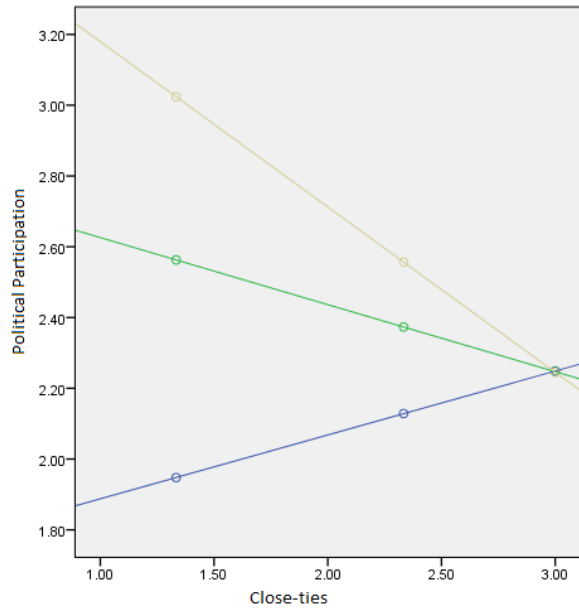


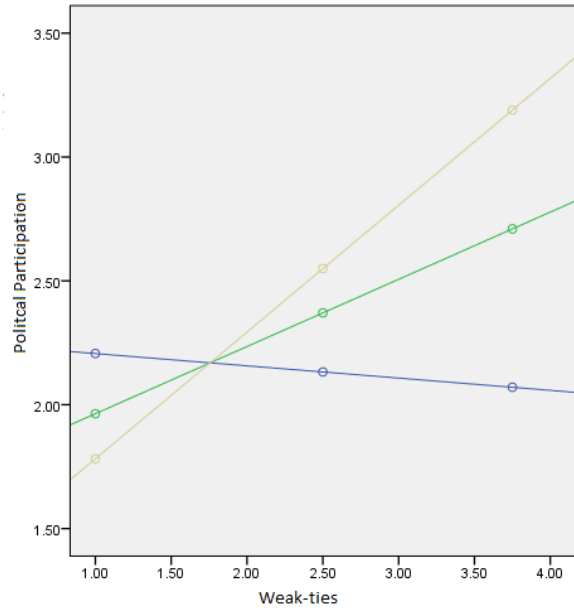
Figure 5. H2b – Moderated mediation between Cross-cutting Exposure & Social Anxiety from Close/Weak-ties via Engagement with Disagreement

Graph III shows that when engagement in disagreement with close ties is high, the user's social anxiety decreases, whereas when meeting with a clash with close ties is low, the user's social pressure increases. Graph IV shows that social anxiety increases at high and medium levels of engagement with disagreement with weak links. However, when moderation is low, the user's social pressure decreases steadily.

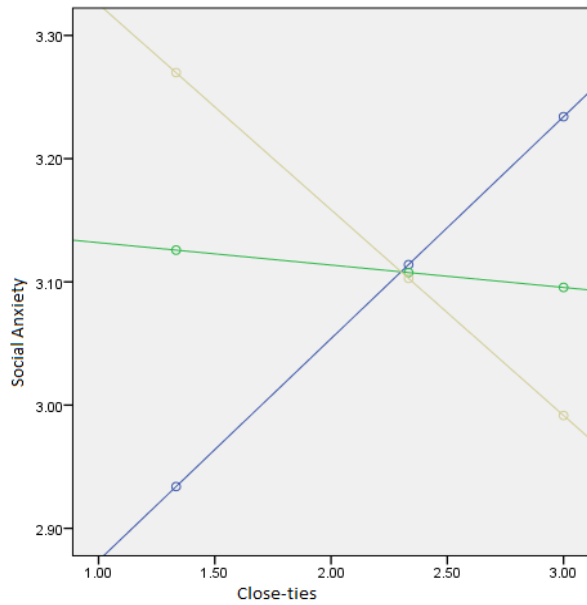
Impact of Online Cross-Cutting Exposure on Political Participation & Social Anxiety



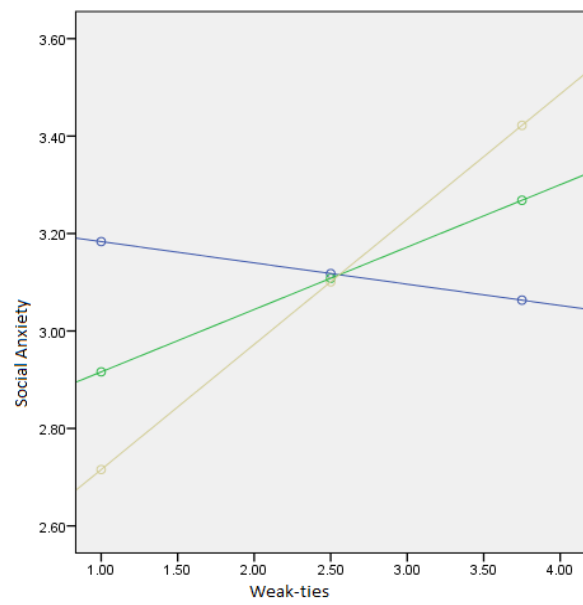
Graph I



Graph II



Graph III



Graph IV

Note:

- High level of engagement with disagreement on Facebook
- Medium level of engagement with a clash on Facebook
- Low level of engagement with conflict on Facebook

5. DISCUSSION

There are approx-43 million monthly active Facebook users in Pakistan (20.3% of the total population). Most of them are between 25 and 35 (Napoleon, 2020). Pakistani youth, particularly those with access to social media platforms and who are educated, are actively creating new political cultures (Ahmad et al., 2016). As a result of the greater access, democracy, and political knowledge are promoted (Eijaz, 2013). And social media play a critical role in building a reality and molding public opinion on problems, framing conflict (Yousaf, 2018; Yousaf et al., 2020).

While much research has been done on whether disagreement in political debates depresses or encourages political engagement, some significant research gaps are awaiting scholarly attention. For instance, understanding the relationship between engagement with the dispute and its impact on behavioral results is inconclusive and based on a shaky foundation (Klofstad et al., 2013; Matthes et al., 2019; Matthes et al., 2021). In addition to testing this concept in a non-Western context/setting, this study has employed psychological variables like social anxiety to understand how people consume cross-cutting messages. Most of the findings are consistent with the research in the West, which suggests that people have a variety of relationships comprising of weak and solid/close ties and that social media offers a fertile ground for exposure to disagreeable news. While the characteristics of social anxiety have been examined in both offline and online contexts/environments (e.g., Lee-Won et al., 2015; Seabrook et al., 2016), further study into its use in the political context was needed. The findings show that cross-cutting exposure from weak ties (as opposed to close ties) has a favorable impact on political engagement while also causing social anxiety in users. This reflects the magnitude of the negative cognitive consequences of unfavorable news from weak-ties.

In line with the Western literature, findings show two theoretical perspectives (Matthes et al., 2021) in this study. On the one hand, close-tie relationships are better equipped to endure disagreement since such persons are more likely to agree on other, more significant subjects. Therefore, simply disagreeing on political issues does not affect anything. Furthermore, spouses and family members contribute far more to sustained disagreement (Bello & Rolfe, 2014), implying that close relationships provide a safe space for interpersonal and political discussions and remain stable over time, regardless of whether one agrees on political topics or not (Matthes et al., 2021). This can be observed in the results of H1a and H2b. Results of H1b show that the strength of the relationship between cross-cutting exposure through close ties on a user's

political participation is dependent upon the user's engagement with disagreement. Cross-cutting exposure through close ties does not affect users' political involvement, and high concentration with clashes with close relations on Facebook reduces users' social anxiety. Perhaps this is because of the same core values, ideology, worldview, opinion, etc., an individual shares with close ties.

The other perspective suggests that users may avoid conflict out of fear of social exclusion, which is more likely when disagreement comes from close ties rather than weak ties (Lu et al., 2016; Matthes, 2013; Mutz, 2002). Results of H2b for both near- and weak ties align with this perspective. This suggests that users may become increasingly disinterested in political participation when they disagree with their network of intimate relationships. Perhaps because it is more difficult to be interested in anything that puts the individual in conflict with family/friends; however, the impact could be more prominent for cross-cutting discussions with weak ties (Matthes et al., 2021; Torcal & Maldonado, 2014). In line with the extant research (e.g., Lu & Lee, 2020; Matthes et al., 2021; Min & Wohn, 2018, 2020), weak ties in this study are a source of exposure to disagreeable and diverse points of view. One of the reasons is the unavailability of emotional attachments and mostly casual interactions with strangers and acquaintances, which introduces users to various points of view. It is also observed that the cross-cutting exposure from weak ties is a force that encourages political participation (H1a & b). High and medium levels of engagement with disagreement with weak ties increase users' social anxiety (H2b). While there are no emotional attachments with the soft ties, the meeting with clash through with fragile relations may result in held beliefs about politics being shattered or shaken. Recent research suggests that at the micro (i.e., individual), meso (i.e., group), and macro levels, an interdimensional experience can be formed and experienced (Harris, 2021). Hence, engagement with disagreement with weak ties may cause social anxiety.

Anxiety is a negative emotion; alerting the individual to something wrong incites a reflexive response (Valentino et al., 2011). As a result of anxiety, individuals may feel like seeking more political information. Anxiety hinders selective exposure as the individual gets exposed to counter-attitudinal political notification. This may increase and improve their learning (Valentino et al., 2009). This can ultimately influence their political participation. Therefore, it will be interesting to assess the influence of anxiety on users' political participation in different contexts and settings.

6. CONCLUSION

This research contributes to the domains of social media communication and the idea that the more nuanced human relationships and interpersonal communication structure need to be explored to understand users' political actions better. Social anxiety was evident once users were exposed to the incongruent concepts emanating from the weak ties. Cross-cutting exposure from weak ties appears to be more effective than cross-cutting exposure from close ties in impacting political involvement and social anxiety. Because unfavorable news from weak links has a more significant impact on political participation than news from close ties, political parties' social media campaign managers and news outlets can try to spread their messages through weak links rather than solid ties to increase the chances of cross-cutting exposure and political participation. Social interactions taking place online are often associated with network diversity. Social media have not replaced traditional face-to-face political discourse, but they have broken the monopoly of traditional media. They attract people for various exposure and offer settings for new tie formation (Hampton, Lee & Her, 2011). While this diversity mostly comes from weak ties (Hampton et al., 2011), weak ties are also effective in bridging social distances. News spreads quickly through weak links than solid ties (Granovetter, 1977). However, they can also induce social anxiety when they become a source of disagreeable news in Pakistan.

64% of the respondents reported using Facebook on their cell phones. Future studies can examine how mobile phones can be used as a part of vital communication strategy. Technologists can develop mobile apps that can help mobilize people through cross-cutting exposure from strangers and employ software that can gauge the impact on users' political participation.

Future researchers can explain some other confounding factors in the analysis; for instance, "offline" cross-cutting exposure, such as those encountered in face-to-face situations. Future studies can compare online and offline conditions. Future research should also examine how cultural norms connected to interacting with relatives, families, and individuals in general influence (or do not influence) reactions. We haven't explored such factors; therefore, we recommend them as a future study topic.

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How to cite this article:

Shahid, M. N.; Min, S. J.; Obaid, A.; & Hassan, W. (2023). Impact of Online Cross-Cutting Exposure on Political Participation & Social Anxiety. *International Journal of Marketing, Communication and New Media*, Vol. 11, N° 20, 226-248.