

Original Research Article

## Studying Facebook as a Source of News (Case Study of Afghan Youth)

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### Article History

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**Abstract:** The main claim in this research is "studying Facebook as a news source". Facebook is now a news source like other media, and users become members of the Facebook virtual network in order to access the events of the day. The method of this research is a survey, and the measuring tool is also a questionnaire. After completing the questionnaires, the findings were obtained and analyzed at the descriptive level through SPSS software. The statistical population of the research includes all Facebook users in Balkh Province, Afghanistan. The sampling method in this research was based on the use of available people, and finally 500 people completed the researcher's questionnaire. The results of this research showed that the majority of users of the Facebook virtual network are young people, and Facebook has become a serious source of news among users, and in fact, the purpose of using Facebook for most of the respondents is to receive daily news. In other words, the importance of using other features of Facebook are secondary. It should also be noted that the main source of news for users was Facebook at first, and then it included television, radio, news agencies and printed publications. The lack of Facebook filter, the diversity of its news, the ease of producing news, the speed of news dissemination, the freshness, the brevity of the news, the speed of access, the ease of access, the production and consumption of news by autopilots, its universality, freedom of expression, are the important factors in the tendency of users to Facebook news in Afghanistan. The uncertain atmosphere (economy, security, politics) has greatly increased the need of the people of this country to the events.

**Keywords:** Youth, Facebook, news, Balkh, Afghanistan, source.

## INTRODUCTION

The current traditional media and virtual social networks of Afghanistan are the products of the long and winding path of the freedom of their previous media, which now strongly criticizes the functions of the government and supports the plurality of expressions of support and lays the groundwork for new media activities. That is, Facebook's virtual network is beneficial. The growth of information technologies shows that our world has become an interconnected village, and the power of the media to influence human societies after the middle of the 20th century is evidence of such a claim that with the invention of radio and television, recently the computer and the global Internet network, and today applications Virtual media cannot doubt this fact. Afghanistan's media began its historical journey from the Shams-ul-Nahar publication during the reign of Amir Shir Ali Khan, to the arrival of radio in the era of Amanullah Khan, from television broadcasts during the rule of Sardar Mohammad Dawood Khan, to the arrival of the Internet and virtual media social networks in less than two decades. It has gone through many ups and downs. Today, social networks, especially Facebook, are used as the most important resource among different strata of people in Afghanistan, especially the youth. Among all the virtual networks, since the beginning of its arrival (2005) in Afghanistan, until now, Facebook has been warmly welcomed by different groups of people in this country. Every person follows his goals and wishes on this virtual page (Facebook). Sharing opinions, suggestions, criticisms about social issues and most importantly receiving daily news has multiplied the popularity of this virtual page among the people of Afghanistan (Sarpoli, 2014).

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### **Problem Statement**

Virtual social networks are not very long-lived, but their effects in terms of information are not hidden to anyone, and they have been able to enter the context of people's lives in a short period of time. A large number of people with differences in age, gender, and also social groups with different social bases came together in these virtual social networks, breaking the geographical boundary and communicating with each other, and keeping up with the current events. Facebook, with its many capabilities, has also had its own effects in Afghanistan, and it is used differently by users. Among all the advantages that Facebook has, that are most popular among Afghan users in this country are, they are information about daily events in the least amount of time and easy content generation by users themselves. These advantages of Facebook in this country have caused the number of its users to increase every day, and every Afghan user feels that by becoming a member of Facebook, he has become the owner of a powerful media and is free from the domination of the powerful in his place, who control everything, including the media. They receive unbiased and accurate information from events. This is because they are the producers and consumers of content and share uncensored news content with other users. In Afghanistan, the default of most citizens is that the news they receive from affiliated and non-independent media passes through several filters and they are fed classified news. The advantage of news, and the fact that Facebook is independent from the domination of the powerful, in the matter of information, caused the number of its users to increase day by day in Afghanistan for more than fifteen years. Now, this virtual page has replaced other media among the important sources of fast information in Afghanistan, and Afghan users on Facebook receive the first news from the Facebook channel. This virtual page has become a source for obtaining information and daily news, and has surpassed media such as radio, television, and newspapers in terms of information speed. With the occurrence of the smallest event in the country, Afghan users are informed about the hot events of the day in this way, and it often happens that first the events become news on the virtual pages of Facebook, then other media, according to their media policy, from their own point of view. They pay it and quote Facebook news content in their news services. With the explanations given in the above paragraphs about the news role of Facebook, I found it necessary to investigate what makes the news role of Facebook prominent in Afghanistan. Having such a default, that now Facebook is considered as a source along with other media. The subject that the researcher has addressed to prove this issue from the perspective of Facebook users.

### **The Necessity of Doing Research**

Facebook does not have a long life in Afghanistan, but even with this short life, it has gained a warm welcome and a lot of influence among the people. In recent years, the creation of telecommunications networks and their development in villages and the access of 25 million people out of the 32 million population of the whole country to mobile phones, the free access and lack of Facebook filters, the provision of Internet services by various companies, the reduction of Internet costs, the universalization of electric energy services, they reduced people's problems in the field of accessing the Internet and Facebook, and these things caused people to access Facebook more and Facebook became more popular among the people of Afghanistan. With the arrival of Facebook in Afghanistan, users have struggled with a wave of social problems and in some cases with various threats. By putting pressure on the government through this channel, Facebook users were able to bring a large number of powerful people into the grip of the law, publish the events of the day, do various humanitarian and benevolent activities, and express their opinions on various political issues. The opinions of Afghan users can easily convince the government to follow public opinion (Peyman, 2012). I am reminded of the examples of the functioning of Facebook in Afghanistan, which makes the necessity of doing this research clearer, while publishing daily news and informing people about the current events in the country without censorship have become a normal thing among Facebook users. In 2014, a Facebook page named "Kabul Taxi" was launched, and due to its different, critical and attractive content, the number of its fans increased day by day, and in a very short period of time, about 80 thousand Facebook users liked the content of this page.

The contents of this page were written by a taxi driver, and the imaginary passengers were high-ranking government officials. During the imaginary conversations of this taxi driver with his customers along the way, he would say some things that sometimes had the aspect of disclosure and sometimes were harsh criticisms against officials and personalities and the political situation of the country. It was not clear who managed this popular Facebook page. One of the secrets that Afghan journalists wanted to know is who is the driver of "Cable Taxi" or in other words, the author of "Cable Taxi" content? The good literature and writing style of "Cable Taxi" shows that the author was well-informed and aware of the country's situation. He was well aware of the mystery of the government officials and in a short time, he had revealed the fictional stories of the "Cable Taxi", various officials and important personalities had boarded this cab. There are many such examples for reforming and freely criticizing the misfortunes of the society, and sometimes the news and information about illegal activities, corruption, bullying... have forced people in the high ranks of the government to apologize, reform, and even dismiss some people. resulted in. Therefore, today Facebook has turned into an unofficial but powerful police force in Afghanistan and has been able to bring people together in many cases to do charitable, political and social work.

Facebook can be called a "media giant" in Afghanistan, where Afghan politicians are also trying to take advantage of it, famous political figures, by creating special information pages on Facebook more than radio and television in an

attempt to attract an audience for the mselves. The pages of these people are full of photos and news of their daily functions and activities, and they keep Afghan citizens updated through this channel.

### **Research Goal**

The main goal is to reach the claim of this research, that now Facebook is considered as a source of news among other media. People who seriously follow the events of Afghanistan are also serious users of Facebook, and Facebook users are more aware of the latest events of the day than people who are not users of this virtual page. Facebook in Afghanistan has the most users compared to all virtual social networks, so research in this field seems necessary and we want to fill a research gap and know what factors and areas have caused this evolution that users from this The virtual page is used as a source of news.

### **Study Area**

The area or territory studied in this research is Balkh province. Balkh province is one of the famous provinces in the north of Afghanistan. In terms of geographical area, this province has a total area of (16186.3) square kilometers, and the population of this province, based on the source data in 2011, which is the latest statistical data, is more than (1245.1) thousand people from different ethnic groups living in this province, of which 66% are in villages and 34% live in urban centers. The citizens of this province are mostly engaged in administrative, social, cultural, livestock and agriculture, industry and trade affairs. (Ansari, 2014: 588). The citizens of this province are cultural and knowledgeable people. After Kabul, it is the second city with the largest number of libraries. Most educational and educational centers of this province have libraries. Balkh State University is also one of the leading universities in the country, and at the time of this research, students are studying in 16 faculties in different fields.

### **Theoretical Research Literature**

#### **1. Audience Dependency Theory**

The basic framework of the work in this research is based on the theory of audience dependence, the theory of audience dependence focuses on the relationship between media, society and audience. The founders of this theory are Melvin de Flore and Sandra Bal Rokich. This theory states that people have different dependencies on the media and these dependencies vary from one person to another, from one group to another, and from one culture to another. Whenever the intensity of change, conflict, and disorder increases in a society, people become more dependent on media information to remove ambiguity and gain more confidence. In unstable social conditions, i.e. in societies where there are more social changes, people's dependence on media information sources increases. In such conditions, people try to get information about what is going on in their environment. Such conditions make the audience dependent on the media (Dehghan, 1378). There is a need for information in developed societies, but it is different from third world countries because many of the activities of life and business require fresh and reliable information, and the audience becomes highly dependent on the media to stay up to date with the latest information. Two types of society experience less transformations, one is a highly traditional society and the other is a modern and advanced society, but the transitioning countries experience more disorder and crises (social, political, economic, security), are suffering from all kinds of crises and based on the theory of audience dependency in such transitioning societies is that people's need for media to know the events of the day is increasing (Mehdizadeh, 2013). Afghanistan, as a country in transition, is in a state of political, economic and security instability. The citizens of this country are more afraid of their uncertain situation and uncertain future, and continue their lives with constant worry. Compared to countries that have political and economic stability, they depend more on the media to receive current events, because the citizens of Afghanistan do not need more information in terms of development, but the people of this country depend on the media more than the uncertain and unknown situation. (political, security, economic). Things like; The economic situation, job security, poverty and the strong need for continued aid from the international community, the relative security situation, political conflicts, ethnic and group aid, the education situation, etc. are among the most important concerns of the people of Afghanistan.

#### **Today's Media and Internet Era in Afghanistan**

The expansion of the third generation technology of the phone has been accompanied by the acceleration of the access of Afghan citizens to the Internet. After the Internet came to this country, it was used more among the youth of this country and the number of Afghan Internet users increased day by day. Data from Afghanistan's Ministry of Communications in 2014 showed 25 million citizens in Afghanistan's 34 provinces had access to mobile phones, a trend that has grown rapidly in less than ten years. The cost of the Internet has not been constant since its arrival in Afghanistan, and with the passing of each year, its cost has decreased with the efforts of the officials of the Ministry of Telecommunications of this country. Facebook users in Afghanistan are mostly the educated class of this country, and they consider using this media network as one of the ways to receive news. According to the statistics recorded in the Ministry of Communications of Afghanistan, more than one million Afghans have Facebook users in this country in 2014. They had on Facebook (<https://mict.gov.af>). In less than ten years, this trend has grown rapidly, and due to the increase in literacy and education, the coverage of many areas of Afghanistan's geography, even districts and villages, through telecommunication networks, and access to the Internet has also increased to a large extent. The Internet in Afghanistan is

not only made available to the people by the Ministry of Communications, but there are also other private companies that provide Internet. In less than ten years, this trend has grown rapidly, and due to the increase in literacy and education, the coverage of many areas of Afghanistan's geography, even districts and villages, through telecommunication networks, and access to the Internet has also increased to a large extent. The Internet in Afghanistan is not only made available to the people by the Ministry of Communications, but there are also other private companies that provide Internet.

### Research History

Inside Afghanistan, during the past years, the least work has been done in the field of research and no attention has been paid to research areas, and most of the energy of the Afghan government and political officials have been engaged in system building because the people of Afghanistan have always been harmed by the nature of the system, and in the field of Facebook as well Other research fields have not done any research on this matter, the only research that has been done so far is about virtual social networks, which was done in collaboration with a foreign institution. Afghan-German cooperation and ATR consulting services company published the results of the first extensive research on the use and understanding of social media by Afghan citizens in 2013. Based on the findings of this research, those Afghans who use social media They generally believe that social media can have a positive impact on the conditions of their country and that they have a significant potential. The main focus of this research was to find out the effects of social media on today's communication of the people of Afghanistan, as stated in this research, the number of fans of networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus and YouTube are increasing every day. Participants rely on the city of Kabul and the six northeastern provinces of Balkh, Baghlan, Kunduz, Takhar and Samangan. <https://www.avapress.com/fa/report//102829>. The main focus of this research was to find out the effects of social media on today's communication of the people of Afghanistan, as stated in this research, the number of fans of networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus and YouTube are increasing every day. Participants rely on the city of Kabul and the six northeastern provinces of Balkh, Baghlan, Kunduz, Takhar and Samangan. Outside of Afghanistan, many researches have been conducted on Facebook, but with the difference that no research has been done in the field of Facebook as a source of news, or it has been given very little attention, which has not been made available to researchers.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The method used in this research is quantitative-surveillance method. A survey method is a set of regular and standardized methods used to collect information about individuals, families, or larger groups, or a method to obtain information about the views, beliefs, opinions, behaviors, or characteristics of a group of members of a society. Statistics is a way of conducting research, which means that a number of the entire population is selected and the result of the study is generalized to it. (Negahban, 1386). The tool of this research is a questionnaire. The statistical research population of Balkh province citizens in different age groups, gender and education level has been investigated with a sample size of 500 respondents. The obtained data have been analyzed in the SPSS program at the descriptive level.

### Research Findings

#### Descriptive Findings

In this section, the background information of the respondents is reported as a comparison between the categories. This information includes distribution of respondents based on gender, religion, ethnicity, education and age. In general, out of 498 completed questionnaires, 496 respondents indicated their gender, 424 indicated their religion, 476 indicated their ethnicity, 495 indicated their education, and 470 indicated their age. The high amount of invalid data about the two variables of religion and ethnicity can have a sociological reason because the respondents have chosen to remain silent about the two variables of religion and ethnicity with such notes:

"I am from Afghan and Muslim. These questions are divisive and we seek unity. »  
But there is no such justification for the age variable.

**Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to the number of valid and invalid answers to contextual questions**

Age Category	Education	Nationality	Religion	Gender	Number
470	495	476	424	496	Valid
28	3	22	74	2	Invalid

Based on the findings of this research the number of men who participated in this research is 75. 1 times the number of women. According to the gender variable, 316 respondents (63.5%) are men and 180 respondents (36.1%) are women. According to the ethnicity of the respondents in the order of frequency, (Hazara 39.4%, Tajik 25.3%, Pashtun 16.9%, Uzbek 7.2% and Turkmen 4.8%) and the rest of the percentage of respondents is invalid data. In the same way, according to the level of education, the respondents answered the highest level of bachelor's degree and the lowest level of master's level of education.

### Internet and Facebook Status

The findings of this research show that the highest frequency is related to respondents who use the Internet more than 5 hours a day. The main social networks used are Facebook, Google Plus, Viber and then Twitter. Therefore, Facebook is the most used social network by nearly 90% of the respondents, while other social networks together cover the remaining 10%.

**Table 2: Distribution of respondents according to the most used social network**

Cumulative percentage Abundance	Valid percentage Abundance	Percent Abundance	absolute Abundance		
89.7	89.7	84.1	419	فیسبوک	valid
91.4	1.7	1.6	8	ٹویٹر	
96.6	5.1	4.8	24	گوگل پلاس	
100.0	3.4	3.2	16	وایبر	
	100.0	93.8	467	کل	
		6.2	31		invalid
		<b>100.0</b>			<b>Total</b>

People who use Facebook every day and even several times a day make up half of the respondents' population, compared to people who use the Facebook social network once or a few days. In fact, the respondents' use of Facebook is high. The main purpose of using Facebook in order; Receiving daily news, communicating with friends, finding new friends, sharing other people's content, liking other people's content, commenting on other people's content, and updating their content have been mentioned. In fact, the dominant activity of most of the respondents on Facebook is reading the daily news.

### The Reason for Users' Dependence on Facebook

Most respondents feel dependent on Facebook for receiving daily news. The frequency of this group of respondents is almost 4 times that of those who depend on Facebook for communicating with friends, 30 times that of those who like other people's content, and 72 times that of those who depend on Facebook to update their content.

**Table 3: Distribution of respondents according to the reason variable for Facebook addiction**

Cumulative percentage Abundance	Valid percentage Abundance	Percent Abundance	absolute Abundance		
72.1	72.1	66.1	329	Get daily news	valid
89.3	17.1	15.7	78	Communication with friends	
91.7	2.4	2.2	11	Liking other people's content	
92.8	1.1	1.0	5	Update my content	
100.0	7.2	6.6	33	Other cases	
	100.0	91.6	456	Total	
		8.4	42		invalid
		<b>100.0</b>			<b>Total</b>

The main content liked by Facebook users in Afghanistan is news content. After that, entertainment, literary, analytical and scientific materials have been selected. Journalists are the first group whose content is most liked, followed by political analysts, government officials, and investigative and literary writers. According to the respondents of this research, the basis of friendship among Facebook users is to become friends with other users, which was confirmed by nearly 70% of the respondents. In the next categories, work, family or co-worker relationships were said to be the basis of friendship on the Facebook social network. In the category of friends, most of their Facebook friends are journalists. Analysts of political issues, work and family relationships, government officials and other cases are in the next categories of choosing friends on Facebook.

### Fred's Most Major News Source

Most of the respondents consider Facebook as their main source of news. The frequency of these respondents is almost 17 times that of respondents whose main source of news is printed publications, 5.4 times that of respondents whose main source of news is television, 5.22 times that of those whose main source of news is radio, and 11 times that of those whose main source of news is news agencies.

**Table 4: Distribution of respondents according to the variable of the person's main news source**

Cumulative percentage Abundance	Valid percentage Abundance	Percent Abundance	absolute Abundance		
4.1	4.1	3.6	18	Printed publications (newspaper, magazine, weekly, ...)	valid
18.9	14.8	13.1	65	TV	
21.6	2.7	2.4	12	Radio	
27.3	5.7	5.0	25	news agencies	
95.0	67.7	59.6	297	Facebook	
100.0	5.0	4.4	22	Other sources	
	100.0	88.2	439	Total	
		11.8	59		invalid
	<b>100.0</b>				<b>Total</b>

The findings of this research show that more than half of the respondents follow the news related to the events of the day through Facebook. Features such as; The speed, ease and cheapness of accessing, producing and consuming messages, compared to other media, are the most important features for Facebook users. According to most of the respondents of this research, Facebook has surpassed other media in Afghanistan in spreading news and these respondents believe that Facebook news is serious.

## CONCLUSION

The main basis of the research is the use of the Facebook virtual network by Afghan users as the most important source of news and knowledge of current events. In more than two decades of positive changes and developments that have occurred in various fields in the country, this development is considered an achievement in various fields. On the other hand, the uncertain economic, political and social conditions have intensified the need to receive new news information, and Facebook as a news source without censorship and trans-ethnic, trans-linguistic and trans-local, with the speed of news dissemination, is very compatible with the news needs of Afghans. It is, and most of the respondents feel dependent on Facebook for receiving daily news. To such an extent, the frequency of these respondents is almost 4 times that of those who depend on Facebook for communicating with friends, 30 times those who like other people's content, and 72 times those who depend on Facebook to update their content. The findings of this research show that the level of acceptance of the social network Facebook by Internet users in Afghanistan, considering the time when Facebook entered Afghanistan, is more than usual in the world, and shows the excessive need of the people of this country. The news and events are related to security, politics and economy, which are directly related to the primary concerns of their lives. In Afghanistan, the growth and development of the media is interpreted as an unnatural event, which has not been active because of the intellectual capacity and intellectual needs of the society, nor because of the propagation and promotion of ideas, but the development of the media in Afghanistan can be interpreted more in the form of conflicting political and economic factors and interests. It is an analysis that in no way can represent the intellectual maturity and eloquence of collective knowledge. This quantitative growth of the media has caused a large number of non-professionals to be employed as reporters, and on the other hand, most of the media in Afghanistan depend on the resources of internal political groups and influencers of foreign countries and international institutions, and by nature, many Issues remain hidden from public opinion, or they are published in social media, which are the main operators of the people themselves, and are reflected in other media, which are the masters of power and wealth of their owners. The most important job of the media is to provide news and information to the people, and then being a representative of public opinion and a manifestation of freedom of expression is one of the other functions of the media system.

But the media in Afghanistan has lost these characteristics day by day, it does not provide impartial news to the people, nor does it represent the thoughts of the people of this country. These cases caused the trust of the media to disappear among the people.

The findings of this research also show that trust in media such as television and radio has decreased. The findings show that Facebook is the main source of news for the respondents of this research compared to radio, television, news agencies, and print media. Although the distrust of the audience towards the media is common in all parts of the world, the underdeveloped economic and political structure in Afghanistan, and the lack of professional independence, the complete dependence of the media on the government and those in power, the impossibility of the powerful activity of independent media, the publication of targeted news, and the lack of attention to the real will The audience, the low quality level of news and content produced by the media and the media's lack of audience orientation are the main causes of distrust in the media of this country.

The ease of production and availability of Facebook has increased the interest in this media. Facebook social network users themselves are the producers, distributors and consumers of daily events, so they tend to Facebook day by day. The findings of this research show the diversity and up-to-dateness of news events, the ease of producing, publishing and receiving news, the freedom of action in producing and publishing events, the publication and disclosure of important content without being pressured and their identity determined (example Kabul-Taxi) has been one of the main uses of Facebook by the respondents. So much so that more than half of the respondents of this research go to Facebook several times a day to find out about the latest news events or to share something with others. According to the findings of this research, journalists are at the top of the target of Facebook users, whose content is liked and users are trying to be friends with journalists in the virtual space of Facebook. Political analysts, government officials, writers, and others are next. Due to the fact that journalists are in the course of the events of the day and publish the news of the day and the needs of the audience more than others, they are more popular among users.

Now, along with radio, television, press, etc., Facebook has become a fast information medium and a serious news source.

In this research, after analyzing the findings, we reached the desired result and the data analysis proved the hypothesis that Facebook is a news source among Afghan users. More than 70% of the respondents of this research named Facebook as an important source along with other media. At the time of conducting this research, Facebook is a serious news source for users and has media acceptance among its users.

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