

## **The Role of Virtual News Networks on Voting Behavior (Case study: Political Science Students Islamic Azad University South Tehran Branch in 26 February 2016 Election)**

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### **Abstract:**

The present study aims to investigate the impact of the virtual news networks on political participation of Iranians in parliamentary election on 26 February 2016. The method of this paper is descriptive. The statistical population is political students of Islamic Azad University, South Tehran Branch, in undergraduate and postgraduate level in the academic year 2014-2015. The sample size was 148 students who are selected by cluster sampling method. A questionnaire was used to collect data. In this paper, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to investigate the normal distribution of the main variables. Spss22 software was used to analyze the statistical data. The results indicate that virtual news networks can directly affect the evaluation of the individual, which is conducted by his relatives. Furthermore providing the facilities for virtual electoral activity affects voting behavior of students of political sciences from Tehran University, South branch.

**Keywords:** Getting information, Virtual news networks, Political participation, Election

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### **Introduction**

Holding elections is the most important symbol of political participation in an extent that the rulers have always carefully followed the amount of people's participation in an election event. The ascending or descending trend of election conveys important points of people's attitudes towards basics of governmental legitimacy. Different factors affect

people's participation in social affairs (Nikfar, 2014).

Internet is an important tool for showing the effects of globalization. This virtual environment provides a large amount of information and different conceptual facts. When people confront this environment and face with a large number of information sources, which affect their personality, they may be

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confused. People spend a lot of time searching through internet and when are faced with this virtual environment, they feel that the fundamentals of their personality is changing so they feel doubt and anxious (Me'mar, 2014: 1).

384 of people from Isfahan, which were selected through random sampling, were tested using questionnaires and surveys. Research results showed that there is a significant relation between the amount and the way of using internet and the amount and the type of political participation. Using news networks and educational programs reinforce the citizens' political trust and effectiveness as well as common political participation among citizens. Furthermore, social networks and entertaining programs have reinforced unusual political participation (Mas'oudnia, 2012: 2-3).

It seems that using social networks has turned to a new criterion for affecting elections and political environment in Iran. Therefore, the main goal of this article is to study the role of social networks in shaping public thoughts through emphasizing on Iran's 2009 presidential election. To achieve this goal the author tried to analyze the effect of social networks on public thoughts through functional framework and through studying various sociological viewpoints as well as emphasizing on the first class documents and statistics published by western institutes (Ebrahimifar, 2009: 5).

Using the candidates' viewpoints in different virtual news networks, survey data were chosen and it was indicated that generally the importance of news networks in election was balanced. The findings showed that although the candidates largely used virtual news networks, the online election pattern

was normalized. The findings also showed that citizens' use of social media was insignificant and its effect on decision for voting was less. However, this analysis showed that political interest was not an important reason for extensive use of social networks. This analysis broke the existing patterns of political participation (See Strandberg, 2013).

In fact, the growing favor for virtual news networks in elections provided a special atmosphere for this scientific article. Sites such as Facebook, Google Plus, Twitter and YouTube present their assessment in this regard (See Zang, 2013).

In this article, the 2012 candidates' use of social media and its effect on the progress of the candidates were evaluated. Some experimental findings showed the possible effect of social networks on the U.S 2012 presidential election through testing the relation between the candidates' progress and the level of online engagement of the candidates with social media. The candidates' progress is defined as the amount of discussion conducted between the candidate and general people through online relation. Some viewpoints that were received by the candidates through social media were chosen and were studied. This study showed that social networks did not develop the statuses and the methods of campaign. Furthermore, it indicated that a high level of using social media by the presidential candidates had little effect on public attention (Hung, Nedler, 2012: 120).

So far, many researchers have been conducted on virtual environments or social networks and their effects on political environment. Hence, no research has been conducted on the voting behavior of users of virtual news networks who study political sciences in Islamic Azad University, South Tehran

branch. So using a noble processing method, virtual environment, virtual news networks and their effects on political situation of presidential election were studied.

This study uses a functional method to achieve its main goal. The aim of a functional article is to expand functional knowledge in a specific field. In another word, functional articles are directed towards the practical use of knowledge. In this regard, it is expected that all authorities, professors, researchers, universities, etc. which study the effect of virtual news networks on the behavior of the voter, use the results of this research. It is worth mentioning that in this article SPSS 22 software was used to analyze the data.

### **Methodology**

It is worth mentioning that based on the goal of a scientific research; the methods used in researches are divided in to two groups of basic and functional. Basic researches, which are sometimes called fundamental researches, try to discover the facts, know the phenomena, objects and the relation between them. This type of research expands the borders of public knowledge, discovers the scientific rules and explains the characteristics of a reality. In this type of research, a theory may be introduced or principles, theories or theoretical propositions are tested. Functional researches satisfy human has needs, improve and optimize tools, objects and patterns in order to develop the welfare and improve life level with cognitive context and knowledge that are provided by fundamental researches (Hafeznia, 2010). The presented basic research uses descriptive survey method in which the goal is to study the distribution of characteristics of a society. In a survey research, the parameters of a society are evaluated. In this type of research the researcher chooses a sample, which introduces the so-

ciety, studies the variables of the research and for collecting data, he uses questionnaires.

Society is the biggest collection of creatures, which are interested by people in a specific time. This collection at least should have a distinctive attribute. A distinctive attribute is a characteristic, which is common between all elements of a statistical community and distinguishes the statistical community from other communities.

The statistical community of this research consists of Bachelor, Master and PHD students of political sciences from Tehran Open University, South branch in 2014-2017 academic years.

Sampling is one of the most important topics in the social statistics. After selecting the topic of research and the expression of the problem, one of the important decisions of each researcher is the sample selection, a sample that should represent the population in which the researcher intends to generalize his research findings to that population. On the other hand, due to the size of the population or the studied subjects, the researcher has to sample and on the other hand, the confidence of the findings of a research is measured with the accuracy of sampling.

There are many methods to sample from a statistical population that in general, it is subdivided to two types called random-sample and non-random and in the need of investigation, each type can be subdivided to smaller parts. In this research, non-probability sampling is used to collect data because of the sample size, the character of statistical population including homogeneity of the population and choosing the topic of the study and the end result of sampling is to select a set of populations units to descriptive of parameters of population also because of not being a specific list of statistical popula-

tion and trend to sample that be generalized to all population. However, in non-population sampling, many ways to sample should choose one method from the present ways based on the search process and the target or aims of the study. Therefore, the sample size was 148 people selected by cluster sampling in this way that these people were sampled from 240 people as the preliminary sample.

To illustrate the subject, necessary related data and information should be collected and categorized necessary and unnecessary data should be separated. The aim of this study is scientific and practical not theoretical. To collect the data, four ways are almost used: interviewing, observation, questionnaire, documents, and numerical data. Choose of each ways depends on the topic and the goal of the considering investigation and it is better to use different methods to gather information. The aim of collecting information is to determine the present situation by use of data and witnesses and to choose a temporary way.

Therefore, in this study, library research was used to gather information about theories and questionnaire was used to collect data from target statistical population. Library method is used in all scientific researches and field researches are the methods that researcher has to go outside a laboratory, library or workplace setting to collect information for example human or organizational society. The library method is used in all scientific researches, but this method is used in some of them in some parts of investigation process. In some researches, the subject of the research is in fact library and relies on the findings of the library research from beginning to end. In investigations that do not the nature of library, the researcher has to use the

library methods. In this group of investigations including descriptive, casual, correlation, empirical research, etc., the researcher should study literature and background of the problem and subject of research. So the researcher should use the library methods and keep the results of his study in proper tools such as note, table and in the end of the work, use and category of the collected information.

After providing questionnaires and choosing those who had to respond the questions, the questionnaires should be distributed. In a common way, the questioner distributes and collects the questionnaires. However, due to existing limitations, some of the questionnaires are set by post and as there may be some ambiguities resulting from non-realizing the objects of the questions by the questioned, these problems will be solved through telephone conversations. In this research, the questioner completed the questionnaire.

Questionnaire is the most common tool for collecting data in surveying researches and it consists of a series of targeted questions, which through different scales evaluates opinions, approaches and insights of a questioned person. As a questionnaire asks about real facts, the way of forming and organizing it has an important effect on a research work. In order to change qualitative indexes to quantitative ones, a definite scale and domain should be considered during the process of designing a questionnaire. So in order to quantify the qualitative indexes, relative scale and Liker scale were used.

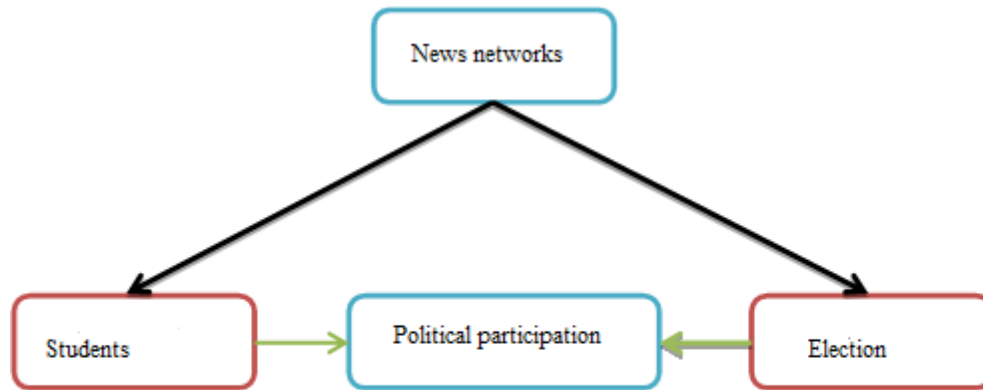
In Likert scale the scales range from 1 to 5 which are printed as very low, low, mean, high and very high on the questionnaire? So the values allocated to each range are based on tables 1 to 3.

**Table 1.**  
*Likert scale and the allocated values*

| Very low | Low | Mean | High | Very high |
|----------|-----|------|------|-----------|
| 1        | 2   | 3    | 4    | 5         |

Political participation is a descriptive combination, which means people's intervention in political affairs i.e. governing. Following the process of socialization of individuals and their intervention in managing political affairs of countries, the term "political

participation "entered the political literature of theorists of political world. It can be said that political participation is any personal behavior or act whose aim is affecting public policy making which is conducted through choosing political leaders and the rule of the leaders' opinion on people. In summary through political participation, individuals and government demand for an interaction in decision-making (see chapter 2). In this article, electoral participation is studied as a dependent variable.



### Method of analysis

Using appropriate statistical methods for analyzing data is considered an important step in doing researches as not using correct statistical methods will be resulted in wrong analysis by the researcher and the obtained statistic cannot make appropriate research results. Statistical methods in each level require to be processed both descriptively and deductively in order to achieve to correct and logical results.

Descriptive statistics are referred to methods, which are used to classify, summarize and describe the data while deductive statistics are methods, which enable us to draw conclusion about the society through the data obtained from the sample. Questions like

"Is there any significant difference?" can be answered through statistical deduction and statistical language (See Kiani, 2003).

#### A. Descriptive statistics

In this research, average and standard deviation indicators are used as descriptive statistics, which describe the characteristics of the society (demographic) of students who study political sciences in South Branch of Tehran Open University.

#### B. Deductive statistics

In this research Correlation, Regression and Variance analyses were used as deductive statistics.

### Discussion and conclusion

In this research, the existing statistical community is political sciences students from Tehran Open University, South branch. 148 students make the sample volume of this re-

search who answers the questionnaire. The redundancy and percentage of genders who answered the questionnaire are presented in table 2.

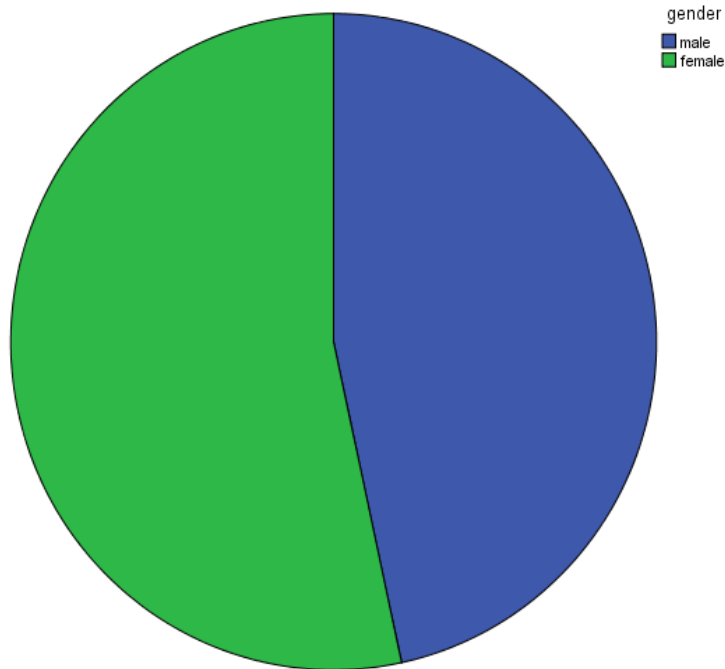
**Table 2.**

*Distributed redundancy based on gender*

| Gender | Redundancy | redundancy percentage | Cumulative percentage |
|--------|------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Male   | 69         | 26.6                  | 26.6                  |
| Female | 79         | 53.4                  | 100                   |
| Total  | 148        | 100                   |                       |

As it is indicated in table 1, 46.6 percent of responders were male and 53.4 percent were female. The most percentage of

responders belonged to female who were studying social sciences at Tehran Open University, South branch.



*Figure 1. Distributed redundancy based on gender*

### Distributed redundancy based on age

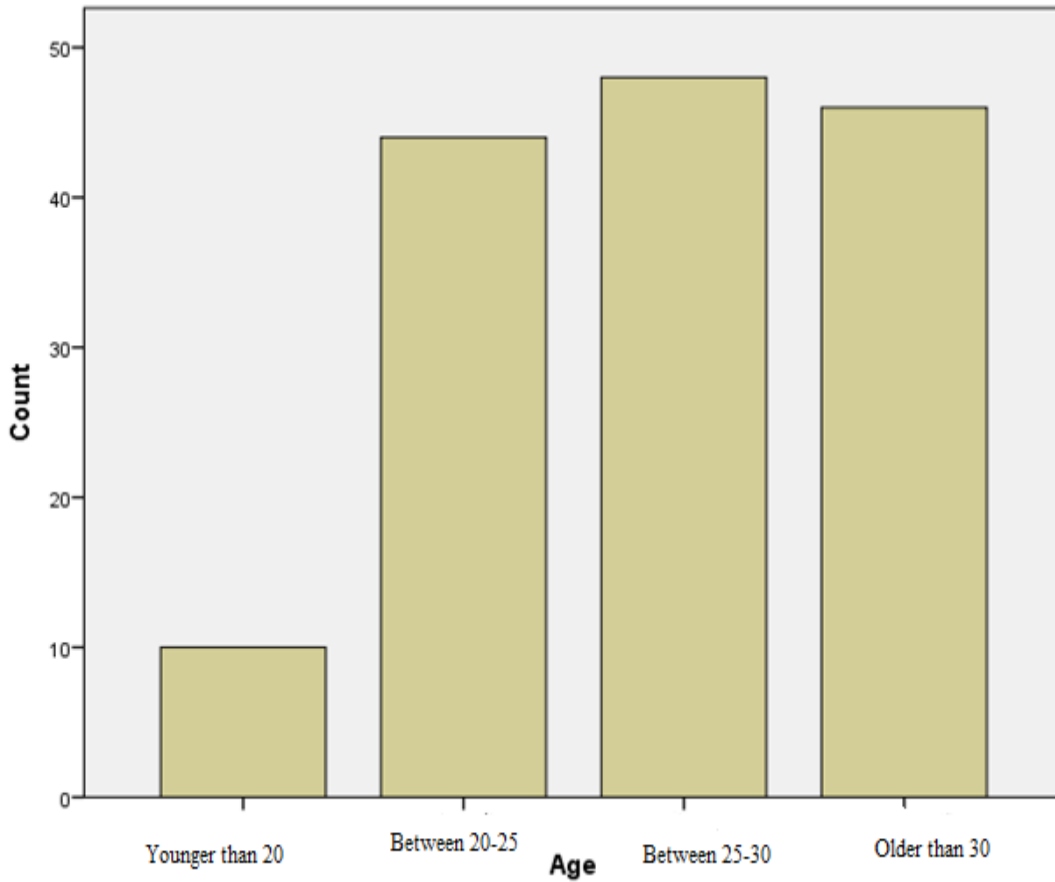
**Table 3.**

*Distributed redundancy based on age*

| Age                       | Redundancy | redundancy percentage | Cumulative percentage |
|---------------------------|------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Younger than 20 years old | 10         | 6.8                   | 6.8                   |
| 20-25 years old           | 44         | 29.7                  | 36.5                  |
| 25-30 years old           | 48         | 32.4                  | 68.9                  |
| Older than 30 years old   | 46         | 31.1                  | 100                   |
| Total                     | 148        | 100                   |                       |

The redundancy and percentage of responders' age are shown in table 3. According to the information of table 3, 6.8% of the responders were younger than 20 years old, 29.7 were between 20 to 25 years old, 32.4%

of responders were between 25 to 30 and 31.1% were older than 30 years old. So most of the responders were between 25 to 30 years old.



*Figure 2. Distributed redundancy based on age*

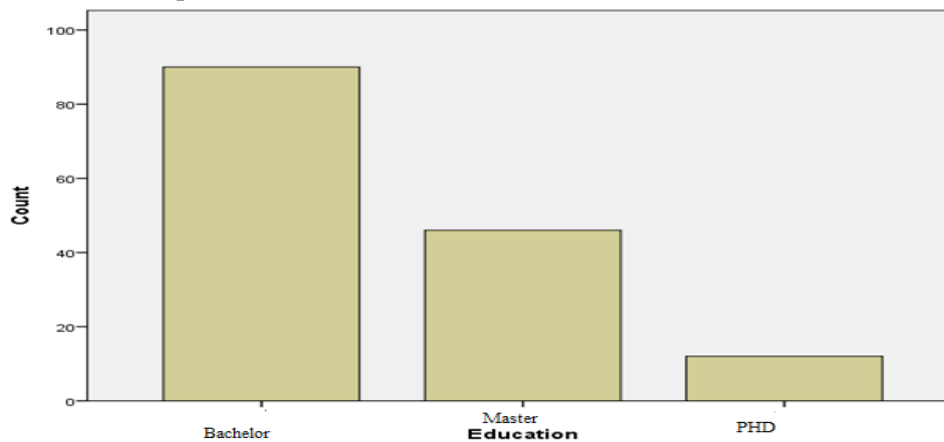
### Distributed redundancy based on education

**Table 4.**  
*Distributed redundancy based on education*

| Degree   | Redundancy | redundancy percentage | Cumulative percentage |
|----------|------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Bachelor | 90         | 60.8                  | 60.8                  |
| Master   | 46         | 31.1                  | 91.9                  |
| PHD      | 12         | 8.1                   | 100                   |
| Total    | 148        | 100                   |                       |

The redundancy and percentage of the degree of the responders are indicated in table 4. According to the information of table 4, 60.8% of the responders had a Bachelor

degree, 31.1% had Master degree and 8.1% had PHD. So the responders mostly had Bachelor degrees (60.8%).



**Figure 5.** *Distributed redundancy based on education*

It seems that there is not a significant relation between getting information through virtual news networks and the voting behavior of the students of social sciences from Tehran Open University, South branch. This relation cannot well predict the components of political participation held on February 26, 2016.

#### **Analysis of Kolmogorov–Smirnov test**

To use statistical techniques, first it should be

determined that whether the collected data had normal distribution or not. If the collected data were distributed normally, parametric statistical tests can be used to evaluate the hypotheses and if they were not distributed normally, non-parametric tests can be used to study the hypotheses. To do this, in this research Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was conducted to evaluate the normality of distribution of main variables. In a single specimen test, a variable at distance level evaluation of



the observed cumulative distribution function was compared with a variable at distance level evaluation of the expected cumulative distribution function. When interpreting test results, if the observed error level is more than 0.05, the observed distribution and the theoretical distribution are identical and there is no difference between them. In another word the distribution was normal. If the observed error level is significantly less than 0.05, then the observed distribution is different from the

expected distribution and the distribution is not normal. Considering the following hypotheses, this test evaluates the normality of distribution.

**H0: There is no difference between the observed and expected redundancy (distribution is normal)**

**H1: There is difference between the observed and expected redundancy (distribution is not normal)**

**Table 6.**  
*Testing normal distribution of variables*

| Variable                                | Type of used distribution | Significance level | Amount of error | Confirmation of hypothesis | Result |
|---|---------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|--------|
| Informing through virtual news networks | Normal                    | 0.263              | 0.05            | H0                         | Normal |
| Voting behavior                         | Normal                    | 0.202              | 0.05            | H0                         | Normal |
| Virtual news networks                   | Normal                    | 0.191              | 0.05            | H0                         | Normal |

Considering the values obtained from Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, which are shown in table 6, it can be concluded that the expected distribution does not have a significant difference with observed distribution so distribution of these variables is normal. As a result, to test the hypothesis, parametric evaluation is used.

### Sub-hypothesis

In the hypotheses test or significance test, the investigator accepts or rejects null hypothesis. It means that if  $H_0$  is accepted, rejection of  $H_1$  is assumed and if  $H_0$  is rejected,  $H_1$  is accepted. In order to determine the statistical significance of an investigation, the researcher should determine the probable level or its significant level, in order to test null hypothesis. If the results of a possible study show less than this level (significant level which is determined by researcher), the researcher can

reject the null hypothesis. If the result of the research is likely to be high, the researcher must confirm the null hypothesis.

In order to formulate research hypotheses, the researcher uses both deductive reasoning and inductive reasoning. Therefore, there are two potential sources for setting the hypothesis:

A) The present general and complete theories; these hypotheses, using a series of specific analogies, lead to predictions that will produce definite results in certain conditions.

B) The results of previous research; the purpose of these hypotheses is observe the relationship between two or more variables in the present.

Sub-hypothesis: virtual news networks can have a role in voting of political science students of Islamic Azad University South Tehran Branch by either directly influencing on the assessment of individual or indirectly

influencing through acquaintances of the person and providing the possibility of virtual election activity.

H<sub>0</sub>: it seems that virtual news networks cannot have a role in voting of political science students in Islamic Azad University South Tehran Branch by either directly influencing on the assessment of individual or indirectly influencing through acquaintances of the person and providing the possibility of

virtual election activity.

H<sub>1</sub>: it seems that virtual news networks can have a role in voting of political science students in Islamic Azad University South Tehran Branch by either directly influencing on the assessment of individual or indirectly influencing through acquaintances of the person and providing the possibility of virtual election activity.

**Table 7.**  
*Pearson Correlation Coefficient of Sub-Hypothesis*

|                       |                 | virtual news networks | voting of students |
|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Pearson Correlation   |                 | 1                     | .570**             |
| virtual news networks | Sig. (2-tailed) |                       | .000               |
| N                     |                 | 148                   | 148                |
| Pearson Correlation   |                 | .570**                | 1                  |
| voting of students    | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000                  |                    |
| N                     |                 | 148                   | 148                |

According to Table 7, the level of significance of the sub-hypothesis is less than 0.05; therefore, there is a significant relationship between virtual news networks by either directly influencing on the assessment of individual or indirectly influencing through acquaintances of the person and providing the possibility of virtual election activity and voting of political science students of Islamic Azad University South Tehran Branch. So, it can be said that the sub-hypothesis is verified and null hypothesis is

rejected. The value and sign of the coefficient of this test also indicate the direction and power of relationship. Since the sign of coefficient is positive, so there is direct and positive relationship between virtual news networks by either directly influencing on the assessment of individual or indirectly influencing through acquaintances of the person and providing the possibility of virtual election activity and voting of political science students in Islamic Azad University South Tehran Branch.

**Table 8.**  
**F-test for the significance test of regression**

| variable   | Sum of squares | mean squares | Degree of freedom | F      | Significance level |
|------------|----------------|--------------|-------------------|--------|--------------------|
| regression | 65.588         | 65.588       | 1                 | 70.211 | 0.000              |
| Remaining  | 136.385        | 0.934        | 146               |        |                    |
| Total      | 201.973        |              | 147               |        |                    |

Table 8 shows the amount of direct influence of virtual news networks on the assessment

of individual or indirect influence of through acquaintances of the person and providing the possibility of virtual election activity and

voting of political science students in Islamic Azad University South Tehran Branch. As you can see, the significance value is less than 0.05. Therefore, in general, it can be said that virtual news networks can have a role in voting of political science students in

Islamic Azad University South Tehran Branch by either directly influencing on the assessment of individual or indirectly influencing through acquaintances of the person and providing the possibility of virtual election activity.

**Table 9.**  
**Regression Effect Coefficients**

| variable             | beta  | T     | Significance level |
|----------------------|-------|-------|--------------------|
| Constant value       | -     | 3.996 | *,***              |
| virtual news network | 0.570 | 8.379 | *,***              |

The constant value is the same y-intercept and indicates the value of the dependent variable without the intervention of an independent variable. According to the results of the above table, it can be said that a unit increase in the independent variable will cause the increase in dependent variable as the mentioned coefficient in the table. The t-statistic shows the relative importance of the presence of independent variables in the model. According to the amount of this statistic and the error level less than 0.05, it can be said that the considering variable has a significant statistical effect on the variations of the dependent variable. According to coefficient of virtual news networks, the research hypothesis is accepted. As a result, it can be said that virtual news networks can have a role in voting of political science students in Islamic Azad University South Tehran Branch by either directly influencing on the assessment of individual or indirectly influencing through acquaintances of the person and providing the possibility of virtual election activity. It means null hypothesis (sub-hypothesis) is rejected and  $H_1$  is confirmed.

### Analysis of the main hypothesis

Main hypothesis: There is a significant relationship between awareness through virtual news networks and the voting behavior of political science students of Islamic Azad University South Tehran Branch. Awareness through virtual news networks is a good predictor of the factors of political participation in the October 29, 2015 election.

$H_0$ : It seems there is not a significant relationship between awareness through virtual news networks and the voting behavior of political science students of Islamic Azad University South Tehran Branch. Awareness through virtual news networks is a good predictor of the factors of political participation in the October 29, 2015 election.

$H_1$ : It seems there is a significant relationship between awareness through virtual news networks and the voting behavior of political science students of Islamic Azad University South Tehran Branch. Awareness through virtual news networks is a good predictor of the factors of political participation in the October 29, 2015 election.

**Table 10.**  
*Pearson Correlation Coefficient of Main Hypothesis Correlations*

|   |                 | Awareness<br>through virtual<br>news networks | The voting behavior |
|---|-----------------|---|---------------------|
| Pearson Correlation                     |                 | 1   | .397**              |
| Awareness through virtual news networks | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000  | .000                |
| N                                       |                 | 148   | 148                 |
| Pearson Correlation                     |                 | .397**  | 1                   |
| The voting behavior                     | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000  | .000                |
| N                                       |                 | 148   | 148                 |

According to Table 10, the significance level of the main hypothesis is less than 0.05; therefore, there is a significant relationship between awareness through virtual news networks and the voting behavior of political science students of Islamic Azad University South Tehran Branch. Therefore, it can be said that the main hypothesis is accepted and

the null hypothesis is rejected. The value and sign of the coefficient of this test also show the direction and power of the relation. Since the sign is positive, there is a direct and positive relationship between awareness through virtual news networks and the behavior of the political science students of Islamic Azad University South Tehran Branch.

**Table 11.**  
*F-test for the significance test of regression*

| variable   | Sum of squares | mean squares | Degree of freedom | F      | Significance level |
|------------|----------------|--------------|-------------------|--------|--------------------|
| regression | 25.657         | 25.657       | 1                 | 27.362 | 0.000              |
| Remaining  | 136.903        | 0.938        | 146               |        |                    |
| Total      | 162.561        |              | 147               |        |                    |

Table 11 shows the effect of awareness through virtual news networks and the voting behavior the political science students of Islamic Azad University South Tehran Branch. As you can see, the significance level is less than 0.05. Therefore, it can generally be said that there is a significant relationship

between awareness through virtual news networks and the voting behavior of political science students of Islamic Azad University South Tehran Branch. Awareness through virtual news networks is a good predictor of the factors of political participation in the October 29, 2015 election.

**Table 12.**  
**Regression Effect Coefficients**

| variable                                | beta  | T     | Significance level |
|---|-------|-------|--------------------|
| Constant value                          | -     | 3.522 | 0.001              |
| Awareness through virtual news networks | 0.397 | 5.231 | 0.000              |

The constant value is the same y-intercept and indicates the value of the dependent variable without the intervention of an independent variable. According to the results of the above table, it can be said that a unit increase in the independent variable will cause the increase in dependent variable as the mentioned coefficient in the table. The t-statistic shows the relative importance of the presence of independent variables in the model. According to the amount of this statistic and the error level less than 0.05, it can be said that the considering variable has a significant statistical effect on the variations of the dependent variable. According to coefficient of virtual news networks, the research hypothesis is accepted. As a result, it can be said that there is a significant relationship between awareness through virtual news networks and the voting behavior of political science students of Islamic Azad University South Tehran Branch. Awareness through virtual news networks is a good predictor of the factors of political participation in the October 29, 2015 election. It means null hypothesis (sub-hypothesis) is rejected and  $H_1$  is confirmed.

### Conclusion

In this research, a questionnaire was used to gather information. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to check that the distributions of the main variables are normal. Spass22 is used in order to analyze of data. The results showed that virtual news networks have role in voting of science political students by either directly influencing on the assessment of

individual or indirectly influencing through acquaintances of the person and providing the possibility of virtual election activity.

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