

Media Power and the Ballot: How Mass and Social Media Shaped Voter Turnout in Pakistan's 2013 General Election

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ABSTRACT

This paper is aimed to investigate role of mass media in increasing turnout in general election 2013 in Pakistan that how much mass media put influence on the people through different types (TV, Newspaper and social media etc) in increasing voter turnout general election held in 2013. The objective of the present study was to explore relationship between exposure to Mass Media and voter turnout in General Election. As this time level of turnout was 11% higher than General Election 2008 after the general election 1977. For this purpose, one hundred and twenty-five registered voters were selected from two different constituencies which was NA-104 and NA-105 of district Gujrat. The findings of this study reveal that all types of mass media in general and Tv specifically was considered the most influential medium to motivate the people to cast vote. In this paper role of judiciary as well as election commission of Pakistan was also explored that how in which way both these institutions motivated the people to cast vote.

Keywords: Voter's turnout, Mass Media, General election

Introduction

Media is considered forth pillar of state (Burke, 1787). Media of Pakistan is enjoying freedom very much. Private TV channels are free to criticize the wrong policies of government. A free media is also associated with higher voter turnout in developing countries (Vergne, 2009.). According to vergne (2009) it also suggests that media provided information affects turnout in developing countries. As far the role of media in increasing voter's turnout is concerned in General election 2013, it was unprecedented. Media played a leading role in taking the people out of their homes. Private TV Channels gave two days continuous coverage in almost all constituencies. The channels provide complete education to the people of Pakistan and motivate them to participate in electoral process. Mass media and education seem to be important which determines of voter turnout patterns. Mass media is the main source of political information as media coverage increase, electoral practice is expected to rise. In the same spirit, media freedom

may increase voter turnout (Vergne, 2009.). The present study Exposure to Mass Media and Voting Turn out in General Election 2013 is an attempt to investigate the relationship between media exposure and its impact on voting turnout in General Elections 2013 that how far the media influence the voter in General Election 2013.

According to the statistics given by National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA), Pakistan stands 164th in terms of voter turnout among the 169 counties that have had democratic elections over the past 50 years. They also compared the Pakistani data with some countries in Europe, the United States and Asia, like India where the average voter turnout was 59.4 % and Bangladesh where 58.2 % of the registered voters turned up at polling stations. The document explains how Pakistan with its average turnout of 45.3 % was only better than the countries like Egypt (45.1 %) and Ivory Coast (37 %). With 21.3 % turnout, Mali was placed lowest on the list. The booklet said voting in Pakistan has never been a compulsion, a fact that has been a major reason for the low turnout. (Shahid, 2013).

According to the statistics given by National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA), Pakistan stands 164th in terms of voter turnout among the 169 counties that have had democratic elections over the past 50 years. They also compared the Pakistani data with some countries in Europe, the United States and Asia, like India where the average voter turnout was 59.4 % and Bangladesh where 58.2 % of the registered voters turned up at polling stations. The document explains how Pakistan with its average turnout of 45.3 % was only better than the countries like Egypt (45.1 %) and Ivory Coast (37 %). With 21.3 % turnout, Mali was placed lowest on the list. The booklet said voting in Pakistan has never been a compulsion, a fact that has been a major reason for the low turnout (Shahid, 2013).

According to the election commission of Pakistan, this time in Pakistan elections 2013 55% voting turnout was observed which was also biggest turning out rate after 1977 and it was comparatively 11% more turn out than 2008 44%. This year, over 46.2 million people exercised their right to vote in the elections 2013. People come out from their homes regardless of this fact there is severe hot outside in month of May. There is no concept of modern democracy without free and fair elections. Similarly, there is no concept of free and fair elections in the absence of a free mass media. So, democracy, elections and media are indispensable for each other (Yasir, Mahsud, Paracha, 2008). According to Cook (1999) Mass Media provide linkage between the government, political parties, candidates, voters etc. Mass media convey the message of politician according to their desires and intent to voters.

The media plays a major role in keeping the citizenry abreast of current events and raising awareness of various issues in any society. It also has an extremely significant impact on the public's views and way of thinking. The task of the media, especially national media outlets, is not and should not be to function as a mouthpiece for any government body or particular candidate. Its basic role is to enlighten and educate the public and act as a neutral, objective platform for the free debate of all points of view. [Media and Parliamentary Elections in Egypt, Report by CIHRS, 2010.] Researcher also of the view point media also put great influence by doing strong media coverage become a major cause of turnout in elections.

During election 2013 campaign coverage of huge gathering of different political parties, political party's advertisements, different songs and open debate in Talk Shows which were started from 7 pm and ended 12 pm . Then frequent activities thorough social media networking sites on daily basis played a very important role in increasing the voting turnout. Media Channels run there transmission on 11th May, 12th May, 13th for 24 hrs . Even on Election Day media persons sitting on media channels repeatedly motivate people that they must cast their vote and basically this paper is aimed to discuss the role of media in increasing voter turnout in general elections 2013. There are many factors in increasing voter turnout, these includes A Reason to Vote: Issues at Stake, Political Competition, and Voter Choice, Voting Practices and Barriers, Mobilization, Personal Contact, Family and Friends: Voting as a Cultural and Civic Tradition, Education, Trust in Elections and Government (McDonald, 2012). As far as Mass media is concerned its role in increasing voter's turnout is unprecedented. We will look these aforementioned factors in the context of media.

Television is considered the most trust worthy medium of mass media. According to the study of Narula (2006), people use Television as a major entertainment, information and knowledge providing medium. Television is regarded as the most important medium of the election campaign with candidates spending more than half of their campaign budget on TV advertising in USA and in European countries. Newspapers are oldest and earliest medium of communication and also considered a very important in political communication. In Pakistan during general elections 2013 we can see how significant print media is during election campaign. Almost all political parties launched massive campaign during elections on print media. Front and back pages of top national newspapers like Jang, Nawa-i-Waqt, Daily Express etc to publicize their messages to the people.

Radio is also an important medium of mass communication. Radio has less effectiveness on the masses than Television and Newspaper have. It is to some extent effective in villages where facility of Television has been reached so far. According to the study of Narula (2006) to create political mobilization, mould public opinion, influence political decisions and voting behavior has been role of radio. In Pakistan, PBC (Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation) and other FM channels also played a major role creating awareness regarding General Election 2013. PBC especially formulated code of ethics for election 2013 with name Radio Pakistan's Code of Ethics and responsibilities for Election 2013 (www.radio.gov.pk, 2013).

Another very important type of mass media is social media. Social media has brought tremendous revolution in the age of information. It is said that revolution in Al-Tahreer Square in Egypt by virtue of social media. Social media forms into the effective interactive media. BBC Urdu. (2013). there is estimated 8 million people who use social media. In Pakistan two parties used social media, Face book and Twitter very effectively. According to the official website of Pakistan Tahreek Insaf (PTI) their page has been liked by 895787 and on twitter the party has 171850 followers. Similarly, the page of PML N has been liked by 219177 people and on twitter the party has 24517 followers.

According to one estimate 13% of total population of country have access of internet. People are motivated politically through social media. PTI updated their press conferences through

social media so that their supporters keep themselves update on Face book. A special team is working for social media since 2006 of PTI in this regard. BBC Urdu. (2013). PTI was become 2nd largest party in terms of vote taking. PTI toke vote 7679954. (Ecp.gov.pk, 2013).

Social media also brought revolution in Iranian presidential elections 2013. Al-jazeera English television. (2013) there were six candidates in presidential election. All candidates have account on twitter but only one candidate was observed so many tweets having 37712 tweets or 78.93% of total tweets and he also won the presidential election. This study is aimed at investigate that aspect of media which helped in increasing voting turn or motivate people for voting.

Theoretical Framework

This study posited in Pakistani context, media, judiciary and independent election commission of Pakistan were perceived as the most vibrant and independent institutions. It was observed that the constitution of media was much significant to make this perception. This election in Pakistan was unique in way that people were observed to have a trust on the different institutions of Pakistan like judiciary, election commission of Pakistan and media. This trust has been contributed very significant in motivating the people toward politics, political issues, political discussions, participating in the political process and casting vote. The trust that was developed to conceived as the extension of media propagation. Political efficacy theory talks about the belief of an individual on political system to be changing agent in the society. This research eases an attempt to visualize the political efficacy theory in the context of media

According to the Ken'ichi Ikeda (2012), a concept thought to accelerate political participation. This concept has two dimensions: internal political efficacy, in which citizens feel efficacious when they believe they have a say about the political body in question, and external political efficacy, in which citizens believe they are responded to by the political body in question. Both are conceptually independent from institutional trust. However, we can categorize the efficacy concept as an ability factor in a broader trust concept.

Nonetheless, trust in one 's competence is somewhat different from believing that the government can be trusted because it follows our expectations. In this sense, the latter refers to the intention of government. Moreover, efficacy shares much with competence in that external political efficacy relates to beliefs about the competence of those who are trusted (i.e. political institutions), and internal political efficacy concerning the competence of citizens (those who trust political institutions). There is a relationship found between internet as type of mass media and political efficacy theory. A study by Jennings and Zeitner looked at the relationship between Internet access and use for following public affairs with political efficacy and knowledge controlling for several demographic variables (Kenski &Stroud, 2006). The present study is aimed at to study the efficacy in terms of media institution that how far the media is being trusted during election 2013 as institution. We also know that media is considered fourth pillar of state. The main role of mass media is watchdog. This theory will be applied to testify the media institution during general election 2013.

Objectives of the study

Research objectives of the study are as follows;

- To examine the influence of mass and social media exposure on voter participation.
- To investigate how political campaigns, slogans, and discussions in the media shaped voter behaviour.
- To analyse the role of the judiciary and the Election Commission initiatives in motivating voter turnout.

Literature Review

Several studies have been conducted regarding voter turnout and role of media which tell that how far the role of media in increasing voting turnout. According to the study of Clémence Vergne (2009) it suggests that media penetration, measured by radio ownership, fosters electoral participation in developing countries, whereas newspapers circulation and television ownership don't have a significant impact. In addition, we show that when government owns a larger share of media outlets and infrastructure, regulates the media industry more, and does more to control the content of news, citizens are less politically active. The study also suggests that both media coverage and freedom matter. Citizens need not only to have access to information but also to have confidence in media-provided information. When they have politically relevant information, citizens are more politically active.

Another study on voter's turnout of Canayaz (2015) tells that exposure to media during the election campaign matter in determining the turnout. There are many factors affecting turnout in the 2009 European elections in the 27 EU member states. Specifically, it considers the effects of the exposure to newspapers and television when the content of these media, the amount and tone of EU news, is considered.

Krasno and Green (2000) analysis of voting rates in media markets reveals that the volume of advertising purchased by the presidential campaigns during the final weeks of the 2000 election had negligible effects on voter turnout. Classifying presidential advertisements according to whether their tone is positive or negative, we find no evidence to suggest that attack ads promote or diminish turnout.

Marilyn buchlora found a positive relationship between media and Latino Politics. In her study of 465 Mexican American males living outside the Detroit metropolitan she found in her study as "Mass media is directly associated with voter turnout. The relationship between media exposure and voting is only weakly supported using Television as an indicator. This is probably because Television may be used primarily as a source of entertainment rather than information. In the higher educational group, voting increased with to radio, magazines or the newspaper. In the lower educational group, exposure to radio doesn't have a statistically significant effect, in summary, exposure to mass media is generally positively associated with voter turnout regardless of education"(Velez, 2008).

According to the Ridout (2013), given that election campaigns are strategic communication activities designed to increase voting and influence vote choice, the ultimate question involves the ability of Social Media to alter citizen voting. Early research testing the effects of Social Media use on turnout suggests a positive indirect impact that is, use of Face book for Political purposes did not impact voting directly but did influence the factors that predict voting. For one study shows that young adults' engagement with the community was important precondition of the likelihood of voting.

Social networking sites bring a revolution in Korean politics. Those people who uninterested in politics because they felt unrepresented began to regain political efficacy. Younger, less wealthy and progressive voter began to realize that connected they can change politics. This is evidenced by increasing voter turnout for the first time in twenty-five years since 1987. The voter turnout in election of 2012 in Korea 54.3%, 8.2% up from record low 46.1% four year earlier.

In Korea twitter has become political and progressive. It has become the weapon of unrepresented because the political realities in the offline society have systematically excluded certain groups of voters for an extended period of time. It has become progressive at Large level because conservatives have dominated the traditional mass media. If people who felt they were not properly represented wanted to seek news and information that were not properly covered by the conservative mass media, Twitter could be the social media they turn to.

Research Methodology

As far as our Key Words used in our research first we will define them then we further describe methodology used in our research. Exposure is experiencing something, condition of being affected by something or, the condition of being presented to view (Merriam-Webster 2013.). In media studies exposure to media means to identify the individuals who get exposed to mass media. The present study Exposure to Mass Media and Voting Turn out in General Election 2013 is an attempt to investigate the relationship between media exposure and its impact on voting turnout in General Elections 2013 that how far the media influence the voter in General Election 2013. Voter turnout is an important measure of a country's participation level or interest in the political system. Voting turnout is a political term the percentage of eligible voters who cast a ballot in an election (Ali, et al., 2018).

Benny (2006) states that “the absolute number of people voting in the election or as the share of the population that has cast its vote is obviously correct and When ‘turnout’ is defined as a share of ‘the population’, a clear operationalisation of this population variable is also needed”.

Keeping in view the nature of the study survey method was used to explore the role of media in general and specifically other factors in the context of media. For this purpose one hundred and thirty Questionnaires were distributed in the two constituency of National Assembly comprising NA-104 and NA-105 of Gujrat, in the province of Punjab. This time in Punjab over all 60% turnout was observed which as 12% more than the elections of 2008. (ecp.gov.pk, 2013). So the importance of this study becomes more valuable.

Humanly possible efforts were made to draw a representative sample from the study of population. As far as sampling method is concerned stratified convenient sampling method was used in this connection. The universe of this study comprised is of the voters of urban and rural areas. The unit of analysis of this study was those who were registered voters and they casted their vote in this General Election 2013. Those who were registered voters but they did not cast their vote was not included in this study. Purpose of his was to draw fine and accurate conclusion. To ensure this the researcher and other hired members stood outside of different polling stations and get filled the survey only from those people whose thumb was marked by ink, black or blue which is the proof that person cast his vote. Questions regarding role of Political gathering, discussions, Slogans, Election Commission of Pakistan, Independent Judiciary, Social Media, Television, Discussion with Friends and Family members, Talk Shows on media during election campaign and demographic questions like Age, Education, and Constituency and were also included in this study.

The required data was collected through the use of well-designed and structured Questionnaire. Keeping in view the convenience, to avoid misunderstandings and ambiguity of the respondents the instrument (Questionnaire) was translated into simple Urdu language. A team of three trained people was hired in this regard. The researcher also went to the field to collect the data and also remained in touch with other members of team to avoid any kind of misunderstandings and complexity during survey. Questions of the survey were closed ended and was measured by on likert scale.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Analysis of the collected data is as follows;

Table 1

What Was the Role of Election Commission during General election 2013of Pakistan in increasing Voter Turnout in General Election 2013?

Statement	VG	G	TSX	NAA	DK	Mean Score
Role of ECP	43x5=215 (34.4%)	37x4=148 (29.6%)	22x3=66 (17.5%)	16x2=32 (12.8%)	7x1=7 (5.7%)	3.75
Vote is Duty	54x5=260 (43.2%)	36x4=144 (28.8%)	22x3=66 (17.5%)	10x2=20 (16.0%)	3x1=3 (2.4%)	3.94

Table 1 reveals a positive perception of the Election Commission's role in enhancing voter turnout during Pakistan's 2013 general elections (Mean score = 3.75). Respondents strongly agreed that voting is a civic duty (Mean score= 3.94). Both mean scores suggest effective awareness efforts and credible institutional influence. As in peer-reviewed studies, these findings imply the ECP's performance likely contributed to improved civic engagement and electoral participation.

Table 2

What was the influence of the Coverage of Different Political Parties in Media in Increasing the Voter turnout In Election 2013?

Statement	VG	G	TSX	NAA	DK	Mean Score
Coverage of party leaders through Media in Election 2013.	31x5=155 24.8%	30x4=120 (24%)	38x3=114 (30.4%)	22x2=44 (17.6%)	4x1=4 (3.27%)	3.49
Coverage of Political Gathering through Media in Election 2013.	34x5=170 (27.2%)	41x4=164 (32.8%)	35x3=105 (28%)	14x2=28 (11.2%)	1x1=1 (0.8%)	3.74

The findings show moderate to strong influence of media coverage on voter turnout in the 2013 elections. Coverage of party leaders (Mean = 3.49) and political gatherings (Mean = 3.74) both had positive effects, with gatherings showing slightly higher impact. Consistent with peer-reviewed insights, this suggests media visibility significantly shaped political engagement and motivated voter participation.

Table 3

What was the most Preferred Medium of Media to get information for the activities of different Political Parties during General Election 2013?

Statement	TV	Newspaper	SM	Radio	Others	Mean Score
Preferred Medium During Election 2013	89x5=445 (71.20%)	13x4=52 (10.6%)	22x3=66 (17.6%)	1x2=2 (1.8%)	0x1=0 (0%)	4.52

Television emerged as the dominant information source (Mean = 4.52), far surpassing newspapers, social media, and radio. This reflects TV's continued credibility and reach in shaping electoral awareness. As supported by scholarly literature, mass media—particularly television—played a pivotal role in informing voters and fostering political mobilization during Pakistan's 2013 general elections.

Table 4

Q. To what extent Media Persuaded you to cast your vote in General Election 2013?

Statement	VG	G	TSX	NAA	DK	Mean Score
Persuasion from Media	77x5=385 (61.6%)	31x4=124	8x3=24	6x2=12	3x1=3	4.36

(24.8%) (6.4%) (4.8%) (2.4%)

The data indicate a strong positive influence of media on voter turnout in the 2013 General Election. With a high mean score of 4.36 (on a 5-point scale), a significant majority of respondents reported a high degree of media persuasion: 61.6% "Very Great" and 24.8% "Great." This suggests media played a critical role in mobilizing the electorate, a finding consistent with peer-reviewed literature on media effects and political participation.

Table 5

Q. To what extent you were get influenced by the Slogans of Change during General Election 2013.

Statement	VG	G	TSX	NAA	DK	Mean Score
Third Option	47x5=235 (37.6%)	41x4=168 (32.8%)	20x3=60 (16%)	11x2=22 (8.8%)	6x1=6 (4.8%)	3.89
Slogan of Change	44x5=220 (72.8%)	43x4=172 (67.2%)	15x3=45 (28%)	21x2=42 (25.6%)	2x1=2 (6.4%)	3.84

The data indicate that political slogans, particularly the "Third Option," exerted a moderate to strong influence on voters during the 2013 General Election, with mean scores of 3.89 and 3.84 respectively. As peer-reviewed research on political communication suggests, such slogans are potent mobilization tools. The high combined "VG/G" percentages (70.4% for "Third Option") confirm their significant role in shaping voter sentiment and engagement.

Table 6

Q. Role of Independent Judiciary in increasing the Voter turnout in General Election 2013?

Statement	VG	G	TSX	NAA	DK	Mean Score
Independet Judiciary	43x5=215 (34.4%)	41x4=164 (32.8%)	22x3=66 (17.5%)	13x2=32 (10.4%)	6x1=6 (4.8%)	3.81

Based on the data, the perception of an independent judiciary was a significant factor in boosting voter turnout during the 2013 General Election. With a mean score of 3.81 and 67.2% of respondents attributing a "Very Great" or "Great" influence, the findings align with political science literature that underscores institutional trust as a critical determinant for electoral participation and democratic consolidation.

Table 7

To what extent social media influenced you to cast the vote in General Election 2013?

Statement	VG	G	TSX	NAA	DK	Mean Score
Social media	28x5=140 (22.4%)	26x4=104 (20.8%)	30x3=90 (24%)	19x2=38 (15.2%)	22x1=22 (17.6%)	3.15

Based on the data, social media had a moderate influence on voter turnout in the 2013 General Election, with a mean score of 3.15. While a combined 43.2% of respondents reported a "Very Great" or "Great" influence, a significant portion was less affected or unsure (56.8%). This aligns with academic research suggesting that while emerging as a mobilization tool, social media's impact in this context was not as decisive as traditional media or institutional factors.

Table 8

How Far the role of Political Discussions was in increasing the voter turnout in General Election 2013?

Statement	VG	G	TSX	NAA	DK	Mean Score
Political Discussion	33x5=165 (26.4%)	32x4=128 (25.6%)	39x3=117 (31.2%)	17x2=34 (13.6%)	4x1=4 (3.2%)	3.65
Discussion with Friends & Family	41x5=205 (33.8%)	37x4=148 (29.6%)	30x3=90 (24%)	16x2=32 (12.8%)	1x1=1 (0.8%)	3.80

The data indicate that interpersonal political discussions, particularly with friends and family (Mean: 3.80), were a more substantial factor in increasing voter turnout than general political discourse (Mean: 3.65). This aligns with peer-reviewed political science research, such as the theories of deliberative democracy and social influence, which posit that strong-tie networks are highly effective for political mobilization and shaping voting behavior, often surpassing the impact of broader public debate.

Findings and Conclusions

This study analysed the 2013 Pakistani general election to assess how media exposure influenced voter turnout. Mean scores and frequency distributions served as core descriptive statistics for the data. Quantitative metrics clarified public perceptions of institutional credibility, media influence, and the social dynamics shaping voting behaviour. Mean scores near 4.0 reflected strong positive impressions, while those around 3.0 indicated moderate effects. This statistical analysis offers a multifaceted understanding of how various information sources and institutional actors influenced civic engagement and voter turnout during this significant democratic event.

The results show that the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has been an effective and trustworthy institution. The average rating of 3.75 for the ECP's role in the 2013 elections

reflects the confidence with which respondents viewed its performance. As an added bonus, the idea that "voting is a civic duty" had a higher mean score of 3.94, indicating that civic education and awareness programs were successful in presenting participation as a national responsibility. The findings are consistent with the larger body of research that links trust in institutions to increased participation in democratic processes. Despite political obstacles and a long history of suspicion regarding election integrity, the ECP seemed to instil a sense of procedural legitimacy in Pakistan, which encouraged voters to cast their ballots.

One of the most important takeaways from this research was the impact of the media. Results show that political events and party leaders' appearances on television had a substantial impact on voters' motivation (Mean = 3.74) and on the election outcome (Mean = 3.49). The marginally greater impact of gatherings implies that audiences were more moved by the emotional intensity and high profile of campaign events than by the personal presence of leaders. This tendency is a reflection of the persuasive power of mass media's use of communal imagery, which uses big crowds as symbols of progress and belonging. The findings align with studies conducted on a global scale, which have shown that the portrayal of campaign activities in the media can enhance emotional involvement and political interest —important factors that influence voter turnout.

Television dominated as the most relied-upon source of political news in the 2013 elections, with a mean score of 4.52. It remained the most accessible and influential communication platform, outpacing newspapers, radio, and social media. Traditional electronic media retained dominance over public narratives and election debates, despite the emergence of growing digital channels. The findings confirm television's central role in raising voter awareness and highlight its enduring reliability for national political coverage. The research supports "media dependency theory," underscoring television's significant agenda-setting power in contexts marked by uneven internet access and literacy rates.

The media's persuasive force is underscored by its mean score of 4.36, highlighting its role in mobilising voters. Most survey participants attributed their voting choices to media messages. Research on political communication, specifically priming and agenda-setting, aligns with this robust connection. During the 2013 elections, media outlets went beyond news reporting, steering the dialogue toward themes such as citizen engagement, institutional change, and individual accountability. Evidence from other developing democracies supports this persuasive effect: exposure to political messaging via print and broadcast media converts indifferent audiences into proactive voters.

Political slogans played a significant role in rallying the electorate. With mean scores near 3.9, both "Slogan of Change" and "Third Option" resonated with voters seeking alternatives to established power structures. These catchphrases symbolised civic optimism and renewal. The public's interest in such narratives shows that ideological slogans and emotional appeals can increase political engagement and voter mobilisation. Branding and emotionally charged narratives are driving voter enthusiasm, especially among younger voters and those frustrated with the longstanding parties.

The judiciary was also included in the chain of trust that began with the ECP. The public's moderate to strong conviction in the independent judiciary's role in guaranteeing fair elections was reflected in its mean score of 3.81. Voters' faith in the fair resolution of electoral issues was bolstered by the impression of judicial independence, which in turn reduced scepticism and increased turnout. The theoretical framework that connects civic involvement with institutional legitimacy finds resonance with these results. The public's view of political fairness is influenced by the credibility of the judiciary, which guarantees procedural justice. This aspect becomes particularly critical in encouraging participation in societies with a history of contentious elections.

The research also examined how social media is influencing people's voting habits. The average score for the effect of social media on turnout was 3.15, indicating a moderate but significant influence. Even if social media sites like Facebook and Twitter made it easier to talk politics, they couldn't compete with the reach and reliability of more established news outlets. While most people were either neutral or unaffected, approximately 43% reported being impacted to some extent. This result reflects Pakistan's media landscape in 2013, when internet access was expanding but was still not widespread. Still, the numbers suggest that social media serves as an auxiliary means of communication, which works particularly well with urban millennials and college-educated voters. Although its impact on political mobilisation was little at the time, it paved the way for more robust internet engagement in subsequent elections.

Interpersonal contact also influences voting behaviour. Political conversations with close friends and family (Mean = 3.80) were more effective than casual discourse (Mean = 3.65). Strong networks amplify messages and turn awareness into action, as theories of social influence and deliberative democracy suggest. In collectivist societies like Pakistan, political decisions are reinforced through mutual trust and shared ideals, making participation more of a socially encouraged action than an isolated one.

The statistical analysis consistently depicts the dynamics of the 2013 election. Mass media, institutional trust, and personal networks increased participation. Traditional media informed people, while persuasive rhetoric drove involvement. Personal conversations grounded decisions in social contexts, and institutions like the judiciary and ECP strengthened procedural faith. Moderate social media influence marks Pakistan's transition to digital politics, showing early digital engagement. In young democracies, media exposure and institutional trust are key to voter mobilisation.

Academically speaking, this study's results align with global research that highlights the interaction between media systems and democratic engagement. Evidence from the 2013 election in Pakistan shows that voter behaviour is influenced by institutional and informational factors as well as personal decisions. A person's sense of responsibility, competence, and confidence can be influenced by their emotional and intellectual experiences with the media. Furthermore, the research suggests that social interactions reinforce political messaging and that the trustworthiness of institutions influences the effectiveness of media campaigns. This research contributes to the ongoing discussions about the interplay between civic culture, legitimacy, and communication in sustaining democratic processes.

Recommendations

Educational institutions and electoral authorities may offer structured programs to help individuals critically engage with political media.

To disseminate accurate information and counter misinformation during elections, the Election Commission of Pakistan may establish long-term media partnerships; collaboration can maintain transparency and confidence.

Policymakers and stakeholders may promote ethical campaigning, digital literacy, and equal access to online platforms as social media continues to grow.

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