
Pakistani Media Users: From Political information Repertoires to Political Participation

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ABSTRACT

In this study using the repertoire approach the effect of the nature of the media use and its impact on political knowledge, political efficacy, and political participation was observed. The survey of 200 respondents was conducted which were randomly selected from two cities and two villages of Punjab. Latent class analysis was performed to find the hidden groups present in the data based on education, income, and traditional and social media use representing the constitution of the population of Pakistan. Further analysis was done based on the four groups thus obtained. It was hypothesized that richer media repertoires provide political information, information increases political knowledge and interest which thus, increases the political efficacy which is then translated into active traditional participation. The results revealed that effect of media repertoire on political participation appear to be influenced by the socioeconomic status of the media users. The groups having richer media repertoires and higher income level do show higher political interest and knowledge but tend to have lower political efficacy, and therefore less political participation. While opposite is true for the media users with lower income level.

INTRODUCTION

Today the primary source of political information is media. However, in contemporary media rich environment individuals have to deal with overwhelming content options. Citizens typically have to keep themselves to a limited number of their preferred media channels to make sense of the available information. This particular combination of chosen media sources is referred to as repertoires.

The dictionary meaning of “Repertoire” is “the entire stock of skills, techniques, or devices used in a particular field or occupation”. As we are concerned about the political information through media therefore, the political information repertoire in this research means the subset of all the media sources and forms that an individual used for obtaining the political information. This repertoire may include any combination of sources from traditional media, internet and/or social media. The media use measured in the perspective of repertoire is referred to as repertoire approach in the literature. Studies acknowledge that each medium presents a partial reality and to get comprehensive information about any concerned matter media users often turn to variety of media channels. The repertoire is considered richer when higher and complex levels of media forms are added to the subset collection. The political information gained through particular repertoires heavily influences the perception of reality of the political scenario media consumers which in turn either motivate or de-motivate them for political participation which is essential for the health of a democratic system.

The “political information repertoires” is the term coined by Wolfsfeld, Yarchi, & Samuel-Azran referring to the personalized combination of media sources used to obtain political information. The rich repertoire then considered those which have more traditional and digital media forms.

This study aims to study the relationship between the news media consumption and political participatory behavior of the consumer. To examine the effects of political knowledge and efficacy on the participation media repertoire approach has been used. This study links the sources of political information a person uses with the knowledge gained which affects his/her efficacy which is then manifested in political participation level.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies consistently showed that people in an attempt to keep up with the politics and current affairs do not rely on any single medium or source. They turn to several media channels consuming a subset of each and create their own personal set, and generally become reliant on these chosen options for getting political information (Kim S. , 2014; Ferguson & Perse, 2000; Heeter, 1985). These subsets which are referred to as media repertoires are particularly concerned to the specific genre of information that media user is interested in and does not depend on the medium through which the information is received (Kim S. J., 2014; Taneja, Webster, & Malthouse, 2012; Van Rees & Van Eijck, 2003). Moreover, the repertoires are explained as “coping strategies” (Webster & Ksiazek, 2012, p. 45) by which individuals sort out relevant information from the “information noise” created by the over-saturated media environment. Media scholars stress on the facts that during elections citizens attend to variety of media sources for information and for real understanding the effect of political campaigns the comprehension of the interplay between the multiple media sources and political communication processes is essential (Hasebrink & Domeyer, 2012; Yuan, 2011; Holbert & Benoit, 2009).

The study is conceptualized on series of theoretical arguments. The first argument is that political information repertoires have direct effect on political knowledge of the media users and richer the media repertoire greater will be the political knowledge; because logically those who use both traditional and digital media come across varied and diverse information and are more likely to know various perspectives of an issue. Even the issues overlooked by one platform will made their way to the user through another platform (Bimber & Copeland, 2011; Strömbäck & Shehata, 2010). For instance, on social media such as face book more personalized views will be available as opposed to the governmental or politicians’ points of view on television or newspaper (Bennett, 2012).

The second theoretical argument is that those who have rich media repertoires will have higher level of political efficacy. Spending more time on media and learning more about politics and involving in political realm online gives one a certain kind of confidence in their ability to make a difference (Kenski & Stroud, 2006; Cornfield, 2003).

Political efficacy is defined as the feeling that people have that they have the ability and skills to influence political process. Use of internet is found to be related with efficacy. Cornfield (2003) explains that anonymity on the internet provides people confidence and save them from the fear of embarrassment in case they feel they are not very competent in comprehending the complexities of politics.

The third argument is that those who have rich media repertoires, high political knowledge and efficacy will show high rates of political participation. This argument derived from the mobilization theory that posits that increased media use increases political trust, which consequently likely to increase political participation (Adriaansen, Van Praag, & De Vreese, 2010) . This notion is also known as “Virtuous circle” (Norris, 2000). High knowledge and efficacy give people a sense of political empowerment which will then be manifested in their high levels of active political participation.

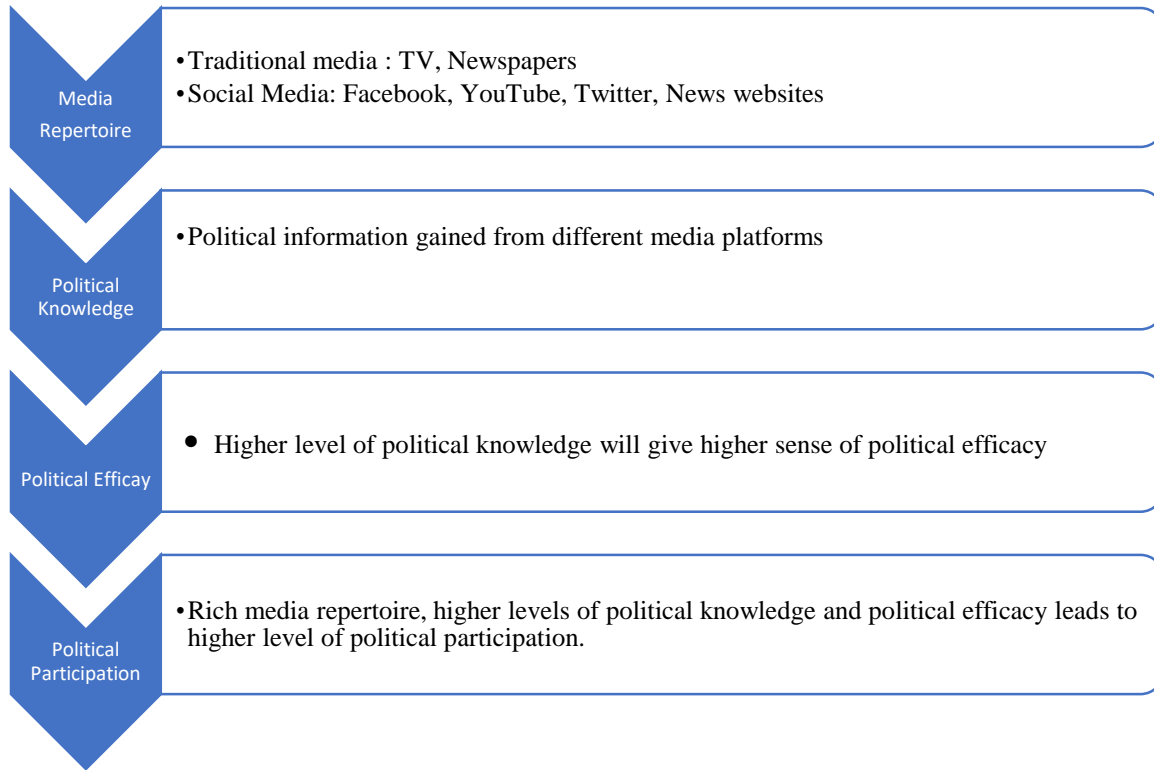


Figure 1: The Conceptual Model of the link between Media Repertoires and Political Participation

Therefore, the theoretical model adopted from makes the following four propositions : (1) people who have rich media repertoire routinely use both social and traditional media to remain informed of the political world show the highest levels of political knowledge (2) Richer media repertoire and high political knowledge results in higher levels of political efficacy , and (3) rich media repertoire, high levels of political knowledge and efficacy will be manifested in higher levels of political participation.

OBJECTIVES

This study aimed to empirically examine the relationship between the political information repertoire of the citizens and political participation considering the mediating role of the political knowledge and efficacy of the news media users of Pakistan. The research questions of the study are: (1) Does the richer media repertoire leads to increased political interest?; (2) Does the richer media repertoire leads to increased political knowledge?; (3) Does richer media repertoire and better political knowledge lead to increased political efficacy?; (4) Does the richer media repertoire, better political knowledge and enhanced political efficacy results in increased level of political participation?

The hypotheses of the study are as below:

- H1: The richer media repertoire leads to increased political interest.
- H2: The richer media repertoire leads to increased political knowledge.
- H3: The richer media repertoire and better political knowledge leads to increased political efficacy.
- H4: The richer media repertoire, better political knowledge and enhanced political efficacy results in increased level of political participation.
- H5: The group with richer media repertoire would likely to attempt to influence people's voting choices.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND VARIABLES

In this study repertoire approach was used to examine the relationship between the political information repertoires people have and their tendency to participate in political activities. The media sources of political information were taken into consideration in differentiating the effect of traditional and digital media on political participation. It was a quantitative study and survey method was used to collect the data. Stratified random sampling method was employed to obtain the valid representative data of the urban and rural population of the Punjab. The sample was collected from the two big cities and two villages of the Punjab. 200 respondents were randomly picked up from the selected areas. The sample of 100 each was obtained from rural and urban areas.

The survey questionnaire comprising of 51 items was prepared. The major variables measured with generally five independent variables and two dependents were as follows:

A. Traditional media use

The measures for traditional media consumption included watching news and political talk shows on television, reading newspaper and also on the online newspapers. The online newspaper was taken as traditional media because it has usually the same content as traditional newspaper and it does not involve reader's initiative or choice to find particular news. Six simple questions were included for this measure that are: How much do you watch news on TV?; How much do you read the news section on one of the newspaper?; How much do you watch political talk shows on TV?; How much do you read the news section on one of the news websites on the internet?; How much do you read political opinion columns on one of the newspapers?; and How much do you read the news columns on one of the news websites on the internet?.

B. Digital media use

The digital media measure included the consumption of news and political information through internet and social media specifically through Face book and Twitter. The questions asked were: You will get/read the political content on Face book or Twitter during the last election; your friends will post political information on the social media; you will open political links received via social media; and you will read political information on the internet.

C. Political efficacy

Political efficacy was measured by the standardized set of statements to be responded on five point found in the literature. These were six in total out of three for measuring internal political efficacy and three for the external political efficacy. The questions were: The public have control over what political do in office. The average citizen has considerable influence on politics; People like me have no influence over the political process; the government is generally responsive to public opinion; Politics is so complicated that one can no longer understand it; Politicians care only about getting people's vote and not about what they think; and, Politicians care about what people like me think.

D. Political knowledge

Political knowledge, in this study, refers to the information an individual has regarding to political facts and politicians. It was measured in two ways: factual knowledge of the political system and knowledge of political actors by recognizing them. Five questions were asked about the basic knowledge about the institutional working of the government and five pictures were shown of various national and international figures to recognize. The index of the total sum was taken as the measure of political knowledge.

E. Demographics

Basic demographic information was collected such as age, gender, education, monthly income and area of residence.

F. Political Participation

Political participation in this study refers to the real life physical and material engagement in political activities of various degrees of involvement. This included standard questions which are; Participating in a demonstration; Signing a petition; Attending a political meeting; Getting involved in any kind of political campaign; Working with others in the community to resolve the problems of the society.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The data was analyzed using the repertoire approach of media use. The analysis was done in two broad steps. First step to identify various audience groups present in the sample on the basis of the typical use of different of media

sources for getting political information. Second step, to examine the differences in the political knowledge, attitudes and behaviors among those groups based on the groups identified.

The gender ratio of the respondents was found to be 3:2 with 62% male and 38% females. The overall demographic characteristics of the respondents revealed that there was approximately equal representation of rural and urban residents 50.5% and 49.5% respectively. Similarly, the education levels of the respondents was 51% graduates and above while 49% were under graduates including intermediate, matric and under matric (16%). Nearly half (46.5%) of the participants had a income of less than Rs.25000. Together with 82% of the total sample having more than 25000 but less than or equal Rs.50000. Approximately 15% of the participants have income between Rs. 50,000 - 1 lac bracket and only 3% reported that they earn more than one lac monthly. The major proportion of the respondents (94.5%) respondent are below or equal the age of 45 with only 5.5% above that up to 65 years of age. Moreover, the respondents between the ages of 15 to 30 comprise the biggest portion (69.5%).

Identifying the Audience Groups

As the data was analyzed to examine the exposure to political information on the basis of media repertoire so the two variables were constructed combining all the sources of getting political information through traditional media into one variable and all the social media sources into the second variable named as “political exposure through traditional media” and “political exposure through social media” respectively. The online newspaper reading or column reading was also included in the traditional media source because it was assumed that the newspaper or columns present on the newspaper websites are the same as in the traditional hard copy of the newspaper.

For identifying already present latent groups in the sample data by means of K-Means Cluster Analysis using SPSS 17. In the cluster analysis, in total, four variables were included; two demographic variables of education and income and two variables of political exposure. Standardized z score values were used for the analysis. The K-Means cluster analysis was run with maximum no. of iterations 10 and groups to be identified as 4. The groups identified at 5 iterations are shown in Figure 1.

Media User Groups Clusters

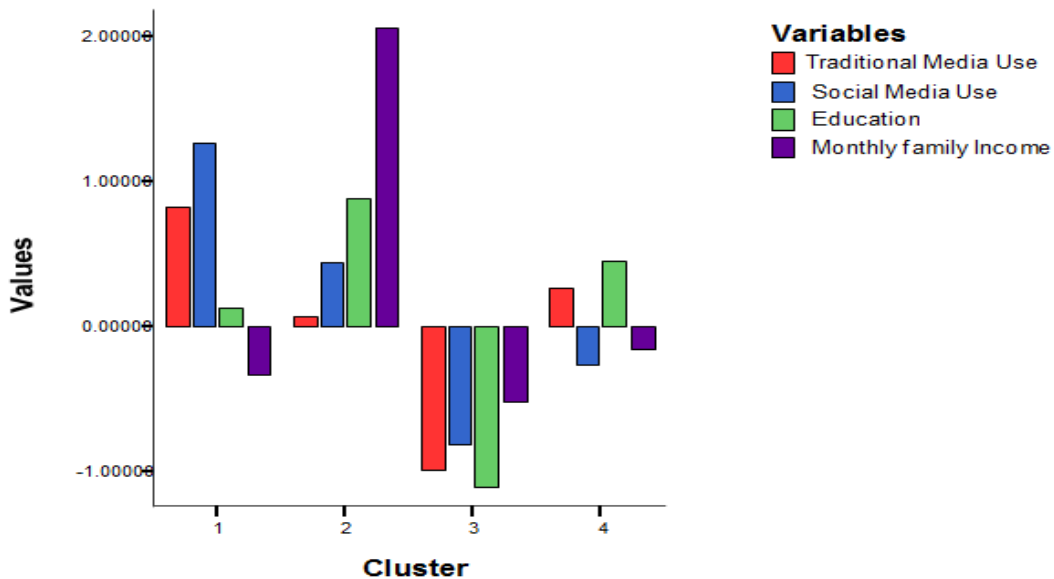


Figure 1: Clusters representing the News Media users’ Groups

As the result of cluster analysis the four major Audience groups were identified, namely; eclectics, socials, Traditionalists and avoiders, groups’ names borrowed from the literature. . The eclectics are the people who have rich media repertoires inclusive of both traditional and social media. In our analysis eclectics happened to be mostly

educated people; education ranging from Matric to post-graduation but with low levels of income. They primarily reside in less posh urban areas or rural areas.

The second group was the Socials. They have more social media sources in their media repertoires than traditional media. These are the people who belong to the high socioeconomic group with high levels of education and income. The mean education level of this group is Masters and they are equally distributed in rural and urban areas.

The third group is the Avoiders. They are the lowest in both kinds of media, traditional and social, and also they are lowest in education and income level too. The mean education level of this group is up to Matric, largely living in rural areas.

The fourth category is the Traditionalists. They are high consumers of traditional media like television and newspapers etc. This group has high education but low-income level. The mean education level of this group is up to Matric. They mostly belong to urban areas but do not use social media.

Figure 2: Scores of the Four Audience Groups on Study Variables

	Eclectics	Socials	Traditional	Avoiders
Political Interest	6.14	6.93	6.14	3.77
Political Knowledge	3.07	3.46	3.07	1.89
Political Efficacy	11.01	9.87	9.00	7.89
Political Participation	3.47	2.91	2.98	2.48
An attempt to influence others in their voting choices	4.26	3.22	2.99	2.93

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

It was expected that high users of social media would probably belong mostly to urban areas. Contrary to our expectations, the data revealed that high users of both traditional and social media, called the Eclectics, are mostly rural residents. Socioeconomic status (SES) is the significant predictor in urban areas whereas in rural areas SES seems to play a little role in determining media repertoire. The rural population is found to be active users of both forms of media, traditional and social. But in urban areas, people with high SES group appear to prefer social media over traditional media while lower SES group predominately stick to traditional media. Gender does not seem to matter in media consumption as all the groups reflect the same ratio as the sample. Only in the Socials, whose media repertoire is largely social media, does gender not seem to matter and have an equal participation from both genders. The sample comprised of a mostly young populations, this was reflected in all the groups. But comparatively the eldest respondents were found in the Traditionalists and the Avoiders, who do not use social media. This shows that younger people, from the ages of 15-30, are the primary users of social media.

The analysis of the latent groups mentioned above, that emerged from the data, were tested for the research hypotheses is discussed below

H1: The group with richer media repertoire would exhibit the highest level of political interest.

The correlation between richer media repertoires and political interest did not turn out as predicted by the literature. The political interest of the group with the richest media repertoire and high media consumption would be the greatest. But the political interest of the Eclectics and of the Traditionalists, who only use traditional media, was exactly the same. The highest political interest was exhibited by the Socials. A similar study carried out in Israel supported the idea that a richer media repertoire would increase political interest.

H2: The group with richer media repertoire would exhibit the highest level of political knowledge.

This hypothesis was also not supported. Instead the Socials showed the highest level of political knowledge among all the groups. This was also contrary to the findings of the Israeli study, who upon the results, claimed that traditional media was the most significant for political knowledge. However, in our findings, highest level of political knowledge was exhibited by the Socials, pointing to the fact that level of political knowledge is related to another factor, possibly socioeconomic status i.e. high levels of income and education.

H3: The group with richer media repertoire would exhibit the highest level of political efficacy.

This hypothesis was supported by the findings showing Eclectics as having the highest political efficacy. These were in line with the Israeli study. It shows that social media plays an important role in enhancing the political efficacy. It suggests that traditional media may increase political knowledge but it does not seem to increase political efficacy.

H4: The group with richer media repertoire would also exhibit the highest levels of political participation

This hypothesis is supported by the finding that Eclectics have the significantly highest participation levels compared to all other groups. This implies that a richer media repertoire is positively correlated to higher political participation rate. This finding agrees with the results of the similar studies mentioned above.

H5: The group with richer media repertoire would likely to attempt to influence people's voting choices.

As expected, this hypothesis was supported. The Eclectics were the most likely to attempt to influence other's voting choices. This complies with the theoretical assumptions that high media users with richer media repertoires are likely to aspire to become opinion leaders. This also explains their higher levels of political participation.

CONCLUSIONS

The relationship between the media repertoires for political information and their impact on the political behavior of the user was examined in this research. The effect of the nature of the media use and its impact on political efficacy and political participation was also observed.

In our research, we identified four groups on basis of media repertoires and their education and income levels.

It is concluded that the propositions presented in the study were partially substantiated by the data. Media provides information, information increases political knowledge and interest thus, increases the political efficacy which is then translated into active traditional participation.

The pathway from media repertoire to participation is correct but we have found the political knowledge and political interest does not solely depend on media repertoires. It is somehow related to the socioeconomic status of the media users. The groups having higher income levels appear have political knowledge and interest but less efficacy, and therefore less political participation. The groups with lower income appear to have lower political interest and lower political knowledge, but have been found to display higher levels of political efficacy which in turn tends to increase their political participation. People belonging from lower income levels with richer media repertoires appear to be equally active in traditional and digital media.

Education levels do not seem to play a significant role in influencing political tendencies and attitudes.

Moreover, political efficacy is the significant predictor of political participation. The traditional media is still the initiator of the political information and engagement process while social media comes after in the sequence for further enhancing the political

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