



RESEARCH PAPER

The Impact of Media Coverage on Political Behavior among Pakistani Students: A Case Study of GC Women University Sialkot

¹Nayab Asghar*, ²Dr. Ammara Tariq Cheema and ³Dr. Muhammad Muzaffar

1. Research Scholar, Department of Politics and International Relations, Government College Women University, Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan
2. Lecturer, Department of Politics and International Relations, Government College Women University, Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan
3. Assistant Professor, Department of Politics and International Relations, Government College Women University, Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan

***Corresponding Author:** Nayabasghar71@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of media coverage on the political behaviour of youth in Pakistan by incorporating how different forms of media coverage including biased, sensationalized, neutral and investigative affect the political engagement of university students. In an age dominated by digital connectivity and rapid information exchange, both traditional and digital media have become influential in shaping political awareness, opinions and participation among young people. The quantitative and descriptive approach has been adopted and an online survey was conducted targeting the students of all running semesters of BS and MS from social sciences, natural sciences and administrative sciences at GCWUS. Using Cochran's formula, minimum required sample size was collected 367 and the responses received were 370. The descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data. The findings reveal that while media, especially social media, significantly enhances political awareness, it also exposes youth to emotionally charged or polarized narratives that may lead to confusion, distrust or selective participation. Neutral and investigative reporting was determined to promote issue-based engagement and critical thinking while sensational and biased content gave rise to political division or indifference. It is recommended that cooperative initiatives be employed by policymakers, academic institutions, and media companies to encourage balanced reporting and media literacy, as this will make youth more critically and constructively engage in democratic processes.

KEYWORDS Media Coverage, Youth Political Behaviour, GCWUS Students, Political Awareness, Political Opinion, Political Participation

Introduction

In the contemporary modern age of information and technology, traditional and digital media have become the primary sources through which individuals access political information. Media doesn't only provide information but it also shapes public perceptions and attitudes especially towards political matters. Television broadcasts, newspaper articles, online news portals and social media platforms collectively build people's perspectives on political events and redefine their opinions about leaders and policies. The media acts as a bridge between the government and the public but it doesn't always play its role neutrally. Unequivocally, it has the power to educate, mobilize or even manipulate public sentiments. The way media covers political events, give prominence to certain issues over others, its frame, and the tone it adopts, the narratives presented and the biases embedded can directly impact the understanding and engagement of the people in politics.

For youth, who are often at a developmental stage of their political comprehension, this influence is enamored. The future of the political landscape of a nation depends largely on the enthusiasm, knowledge and participation of its young people. As they grow up and gain more societal responsibilities, the way they engage with political issues whether through voting, activism or even contingent interactions devise the direction of their

societies. The stories they see, hear or read about politics often determine their role in society. The more information and knowledge they have about political events happening around them, they are more likely to take an active part in politics. When the media headlines are dominated by news on social movements or debates on elections or certain policies, it often increases curiosity and engagement among the young audience. For example, balanced, progressive and investigative reporting can encourage youth to discuss political issues with peers, volunteer for campaigns or even mobilize for causes they believe in. However, when media coverage is sensationalized or biased, it can garble perceptions and may create distrust in political institutions. This dual nature of media coverage makes it a hypercritical factor in shaping youth political behavior.

In Pakistan, the role of media is more important as well as controversial. Traditional media such as TV and newspaper is often covertly controlled by the state or influenced by powerful groups which means the information provided can be biased or misleading. Even so media outlets often frame political expatiate in ways that either polarize or mobilize young voters. With social media magnifying narratives at an unprecedented speed, young people are constantly exposed to diverse and sometimes conflicting perspectives. Despite this, it is an indisputable fact that social media provides youth a forum to discuss issues that matter to them and helps them to organize movements for mutually desired changes.

In Pakistan, about 64% of the population is under the age of 30 (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2023). This makes it mandatory to understand the influence of media stories on the youth's political views in the country which helps to see an extensive delineation of media coverage and its impact on democratic participation among youth. The main purpose of this research was to discover the impact of media coverage on the political behaviour of youth in Pakistan. This research provides the impact of media coverage on the students' political behavior at Government College Women University Sialkot (GCWUS). By focusing on young women, the research aims to understand how media shapes their political views and actions. The study takes place in Pakistan, where media can both empower and mislead people. Through this work, the study hopes to provide insights into the complex relationship between media and youth political behavior, offering a starting point for further research and discussions. This research provide valuable insights for the policy makers, educators and media professionals to promote digital literacy, media literacy and unbiased access to information. More, this research isn't for any specific audience but it is beneficial for the general public who are often exposed to various forms of media coverage.

Literature Review

Barbas and Jerit (2009) states that "media coverage is the spread of information through various communication channels, including newspapers, televisions, radio and digital platforms". Media coverage plays an important role in shaping political knowledge of the public by paying public's attention to specific issues and preparing their explanatory references. Increased media coverage is correlated among the public with a high level of policy-specific knowledge. Similarly, Rodsevich (2024) is of opine that "media coverage alludes to the attention and publicity that a business, organization or an individual gain through various media outlets such as newspaper, magazines, television or online platforms". Media coverage actively participates in defining interpretive frameworks, affecting how individuals see and understand various subjects. The way media presents information can greatly affect public perceptions and consumer behaviour, especially related to new techniques.

Political behaviour refers to the actions, attitudes and activities of individuals or groups related to political processes, decision-making and governance (Eldersveld, 1964). It is influenced by number of factors such as social, economic, psychological and cultural elements as well as media and historical contexts. It assists to understand how people participate in politics and how political systems respond to public engagement. In

authoritarian regimes, political behaviour is often restricted by media control and censorship which somehow limit the citizen's ability to form independent political opinions (Linz, 2000). Conversely, in democratic societies, political behaviour is often developed by the citizens' political attitudes as well as their responses to political events, and the political engagement is encouraged through open discourse, elections and policy debates (Putnam, 2000). With the rise of digital media, mass communication and 24/7 news cycles, political behaviour has taken on new dimensions. Political opinions are increasingly shaped by media narratives, online trends, and selective exposure to partisan content (Tufekci, 2017).

Youth who engage with traditional news sources tend to have more informed political opinions and are more likely to participate in political activities like voting. The educated people value the information received from traditional sources more than the digital ones. However, studies also show that traditional media's ability to influence youth political behaviour has diminished with the rise of the internet and social media. Nonetheless, television still holds considerable weight in shaping political opinions in many regions, including Pakistan. Also, traditional media, despite claims of bias, follows editorial guidelines that provide a level of accountability (Bennett, 2008).

Digital media especially social media doesn't only provide everyday news and information to its users but it also provides an opportunity to participate in political discussions and political activities. By providing exposure to diverse viewpoints social media can increase political participation among youth which may facilitate political discussions among citizens. But also the impact of social media is not always positive (Jost et al., 2018). The rise of the internet and digital media has transformed the way youth access information and engage with political issues as well as moulded the patterns of participation in civic life. The online forums and the social nexus empower youth to organize grassroots movements and to press for social change.

The growing influence of social media in electoral politics has reshaped political engagement, particularly among youth. The nature of media coverage is very important in shaping youth political behaviour by framing political events and providing direct access to political information. Twitter emerged as a parallel political space during Pakistan's 2013 general elections which enabled the real-time direct interaction between candidates and voters without the mediation of traditional media filters. This take allowed for more personalized and immediate political communication that encouraged greater political awareness and participation among public (Ahmed & Skoric, 2015).

The participation of young individuals in their country's politics determines the long-term stability and responsiveness of the governance systems. A politically aware and active youth population is a requirement for a strong political framework which contributes to social progress, holds governments accountable and drives political innovation. Young people's political participation varies across societies, depending on socialization, media exposure and institutional frameworks (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Young audiences who are exposed to partisan media is more likely to adopt extreme political views while balanced and neutral coverage stimulate critical thinking and informed decision-making (Carpini & Keeter, 1996).

Biased news reporting, especially in the times of elections can mould public perspectives and may lead Youth to detachment from political processes. For instance, when media coverage portrays political leaders or parties in a negative light, it may discourage young people from voting or participating in activism. While more balanced portrayals may increase trust and engagement among youth (Stroud, 2008). Selective exposure to information that aligns with individuals' preexisting beliefs limits access to diverse viewpoint, a phenomenon known "echo chambers". This pattern of media consumption deepens political polarization and weakens political engagement. In developing countries, like in Pakistan, the rise of digital news platforms has further complicated media

consumption with misinformation and propaganda which influence youth political opinions and trust in democratic institutions (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Distrust in the media leads to reduced consumption. Skeptical individuals do not necessarily consume less news instead they often engage with media to validate their distrust or seek alternative perspectives. The study emphasizes selective exposure where individuals choose news sources that align with their pre-existing beliefs and highlights the importance of motivations for news consumption such as information-seeking or entertainment (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003).

Sensational news triggers emotional responses such as anger or fear among the audience that can either mobilize or discourage political participation among public. These emotions can lead to short-term mobilizations but it may also cause long-term disengagement among public due to the feelings of helplessness or distrust in political institutions (Neuman et. al., 1992). Sensational news in metropolitan newspapers aims to stir emotions and attract readers and has zero concern to inform them objectively. It relies on eye-catching headlines, exaggerated language and a focus on shocking topics such as crime, scandals and disasters. This style of reporting values drama over depth which lead editors and journalists to prioritize public excitement over journalistic ethics. As a result, newspapers influence public perception by repeatedly presenting negative or fear-inducing stories. This approach increases sales but can distort reality and reduce thoughtful public discourse (Hough, 1925)

Women politicians are often subject to biased, sexist and discriminatory treatment by the media. Such coverage tends to emphasize the traditional gender roles rather than qualification and calibre. Women politicians are frequently and disproportionately targeted by abusive measures and gendered disinformation campaigns by both traditional and digital media. These tactics are aim to dishonour and silence women in politics and discourage their participation (Trabelsi, 2023). Women accrue not as much campaign coverage as their counterparts and the coverage they acquire is more obstructive in its nature that reduces their chances of victory. Some news outlets devoted space to covering likeability questions surrounding male politicians (Merrefield, 2024). Similarly, in the case of Pakistan, women politicians often have to face many challenges but the most serious and common threats they counter are online harassment and gender-based attacks which gets a trigger during the election days. This problem has existed for decades but has worsened with the expansion of social media. Due to social media platforms, people got an opportunity to express their opinions on any kind of issue both related to them and irrelevant to their scope of affairs. Several anti-women or pro-patriarchal or extremely conservative and ignorant people emerge on social media and target women politicians with defamation and abuse. In Pakistan every form of media portrays women in politics unfairly. The society, where women live in and try to involve in politics, focuses on their appearance and personal lives instead of their work. Due to these hurdles and challenges many women in Pakistan hesitate to take part in politics (Nazar, Khanum & Khan, 2021).

Digital divides prevail among the rural urban population in Pakistan which highly impact youth political participation in rural areas of Pakistan. Rural urban population is facing disparity in access to digital political content to a great extent. Infrastructural and socio-economic factors are the identified barriers that prevent rural youth from fully engaging in political discourse compared to their urban counterparts. Youth in such areas are excluded from political discourse and lack awareness of democratic processes. This limits the ability of young people to access political content, news, and discussions that are increasingly taking place online (Jamil, 2020). Urban regions in Pakistan benefit from better internet connectivity and access to digital tools while rural areas face challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, low digital literacy and affordability issues. The digital divide exacerbates existing inequalities and limit access to essential services and opportunities for rural populations (Khan, Rahman & Ahmad, 2024).

Media literacy is a very important factor in shaping youth political behaviour. "Media literacy is the ability to critically understand, analyze and evaluate mass media messages by examining the techniques, technologies and institutions behind their production" (Malik, 2008). It involves recognizing how audiences interpret media, and it equips individuals with the skills to comprehend and create media content. Media literacy goes beyond basic reading and writing rather it develops critical thinking to question motives, values, ownership and the impact of media in our everyday lives which people to navigate the complex flow of information in the 21st century. Young people who are media literate can evaluate political messages, recognize bias and engage with political content in a meaningful way. Media literacy programs can improve youth political behaviour to a greater extent (Muzaffar, Chodhry, & Afzal, 2019). This enables youth to effectively navigate the media landscape. In Pakistan, where media literacy is not as widespread, media coverage can either contribute to misinformation or lead to political engagement depending on how young people interact with the information presented to them (Levinson, 2013).

Despite extensive research on media influence on political behaviour, several gaps remain. First, the number of studies on digital media and youth engagement often overlook the role of institutional biases in traditional and digital media. Another gap is the gendered dimension of political media consumption, with insufficient focus on how female students, particularly in conservative societies, engage with political discourse. This study aims to address these gaps by specifically analysing the impact of media coverage on youth political behaviour at GCWUS, incorporating both traditional and digital media perspectives while considering gender-specific influences.

Theoretical Framework

There are number of scholars working on media coverage and they proposed different theories as per their own criteria and experience. The most popular theory about media coverage is given by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw. Few are as under:

- Agenda – setting theory by Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw
- Framing theory by Erving Goffman and Robert Entman
- Uses and Gratification Theory by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumer and Michael Gurevitch
- Cultivation Theory

The first theory is among one of the popular theories given by Maxwell E. McCombs (1938 – 2024) and Donald L. Shaw (1936 – 2021); who were American researchers and journalists. They were most popular for their work "The Agenda – Setting Function of Mass Media" in 1972. They describe that media influence public opinion by deciding which issues receive the most attention. Media often highlights certain topics while ignore others. Media organizations shape public discourse and influence which political issues receive the most attention from the audience (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Agenda-setting theory also includes the concept of priming which means that "media not only tells people what to think about but also influences the criteria by which they evaluate political leaders and issues" (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). Agenda-setting process operates in two levels (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

First-level agenda-setting: This is the level where the frequency and salience of topics reported by the media are concentrated. The higher the topic is reported in newspapers, TV and online media, the higher the issue is perceived to be important by the public. For example, in election campaign periods, if more media coverage is offered to unemployment, the public will rank job creation policies ahead of other policies while casting their votes.

Second-level agenda-setting: This involves framing strategies that influence the way individuals assess political leaders, policies, and occurrences. This includes:

- Positive or negative coverage: A consistent portrayal of a politician as 'corrupt' may increase his haters while his portrayal as a reformer may increase his supporters.
- Language and imagery: terms such as 'terrorist' and 'freedom fighters' shape the events into entirely different channels.
- Issue framing: A protest can be framed as a 'fight for democracy' or 'public disorder' which may affect how people perceive the movement.

The second is Framing Theory which was developed in 1974, by Erving Goffman (1922 – 1982), a Canadian American sociologist. But most of the work on this theory was done by Robert Entman, an American journalist and professor, in 1993. The main contention of this theory is that media not only chooses issues for public debate but also frames the manner in which those issues are viewed. The manner in which information is presented via selection of words, images, and stories greatly influences how audiences understand political events (Goffman, 1974).

Media frames act as interpretative guides that focus on some specific parts of a political issue while downplaying others. These frames can be classified into different types (Iyengar, 1991):

- Thematic framing, which presents political issues in a broader context and links them with social or economic factors.
- Episodic framing, which focuses on isolated events and often present political issues as individual cases rather than structural problems.

The term framing refers to "the practice of thinking about news items and story content within familiar context" (Arowolo, 2017). It is related to agenda-setting theory, but it focuses on how the media presents information, rather than simply what information is presented.

Third is the Uses and Gratifications Theory proposed by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch in 1974. This is a kind of contemporary theory which unlike earlier media effects theories that presumed passive audiences, contends that people actively select media according to their individual needs and motivations (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974). This theory identifies several key motivations for media consumption, including: Information-seeking

- Entertainment
- Social interaction
- Personal identity

Another theory is Cultivation Theory developed by George Gerbner and Larry Gross during the 1970s. The prime argument in this theory is that over time, long-term exposure to media content over years will shape an individual's perceptions of reality slowly. This theory was originally developed with reference to television and it argues that repeated exposure to certain narratives, themes and stereotypes in media can cultivate certain specific worldviews. It includes a concept of 'Mean world syndrome' that believes that overexposure to media, especially the sort of that contains violence or negativity, can lead to perceiving the world as more dangerous and threatening than it truly is. There are first-order and second-order cultivation as particular means by which media affect political attitudes. First-order cultivation refers to overall beliefs regarding the political world, e.g., perceptions of corruption or government effectiveness. Second-order cultivation, on the other hand, relates to specific attitudes toward political figures or policies (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). This theory identifies two primary effects:

- Mainstreaming, where heavy media exposure leads to homogenized political views among different audience groups.
- Resonance, where media messages reinforce pre-existing attitudes, especially if they align with personal experiences.

Conceptual Framework

In this study following conceptual framework was employed.

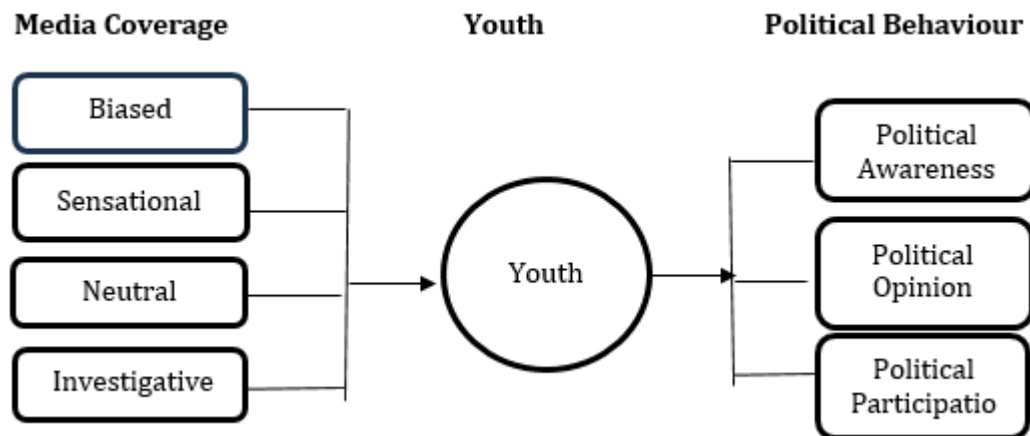


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Material and Methods

Research Design

This basic research is descriptive in nature, and quantitative approach is employed to generalize the results.

Population

As this study concentrates on impact of media coverage on youth political behaviour of the students of GC. Women University Sialkot, thus the population of this study was the students of BS and MS\M.Phil. in the Faculties of Social Sciences, Natural Sciences and Administrative Sciences currently registered in GC Women University Sialkot during the academic year 2025.

Minimum Sample Size

Using Cochran Bach Formula, the minimum sample size required for conducting this study at a 95% confidence level was collected 367 but the responses received were 370.

Procedure of Selecting Samples

This basic research is focused on only one public sector university that is GCWUS. Therefore, a simple random sampling technique was applied to attain the representative sample for this study.

The target population was BS and MS\M. Phil. Students from the Faculties of Natural Sciences, Social Sciences and Administrative Sciences. A survey was conducted from a total of the 370 female students from both the rural and urban backgrounds and from different running semesters of the already mentioned faculties of GCWUS to ensure a diverse representation.

Instruments of the Study

A structured questionnaire consisted of 20 closed-ended statements on five-point Likert type was developed to collect the data. Considering the nature of questionnaire, Likert scale was selected as SA = Strongly Agree = 5, A = Agree = 4, N = Neutral = 3, DA = Disagree = 2, SDA = Strongly Disagree = 1.

Some multiple-choice questions based on media consumption patterns were also added before statements on the questionnaire after a short demographic section.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines were strictly followed throughout the research. Participation of the students were voluntary and no personal identifiers were collected. The respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and were allowed to withdraw at any stage.

Delimitations

This study is conducted in the Government College Women University Sialkot (GCWUS) where there are only female students. Therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to other gender.

Reliability and Validity of Tools

Ensuring the reliability and validity of research instruments is very important as it enhances the quality of study. The validity is of four types: content, predictive, criterion, and construct validity. Keeping in view the requirements of this study, content and face validity of this research report were determined. For which all the items of questionnaire were merged together and developed a plain questionnaire which was distributed for the sake of pilot testing in February 2025 in the department of Political Science GC Women University Sialkot. The face and content validity were got checked by a committee of experts consisting:

- Head of the department of Politics and International Relations, GC Women University Sialkot
- Assistant Professor, Department of Politics and International Relations
- Assistant Professor, Department of English

After pilot testing, the expert committee analysed the results and suggested to exclude some items with poor correlation from the questionnaire to make it reliable. The coefficient value calculated with the help of SPSS was 0.805 as shown in the table below

Table 1
Reliailly satatistics

	N	%
CasesValid	370	100.0
Excluded ^a	0	.0
Total	370	100.0
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items	
.803	20	

Content Validity

The language of these tools was also verified by language experts present in the English Department of Government College Women University Sialkot (GCWUS).

Results And Discussion

Table 2
Population

Sr. No	Faculty	BS	MS\ M.Phil.	Total
1	Social Sciences	2490	396	2886
2	Natural Sciences	3624	433	4057
3	Administrative Sciences	660	260	920
	Total	6774	1089	7863

Source: Registrar office of the Government College Women University Sialkot

Table 3
Age

Age	Frequency	%
18-20	171	46.2
21-23	158	42.7
24+	41	11.1

The table 3 shows that 46.2% respondents were aged 18 to 20 years, and 42.7% were between 21 to 23 years, while only 11.1% respondents were of 24 years or older. It shows that the majority of respondents were younger students.

Table 4
Location

Location	Frequency	%
Urban	191	51.6
Rural	179	48.4

Table 4 indicates that respondents were evenly split between urban and rural backgrounds with 51.6% of the respondents from the urban areas whereas the other 48.4 % belong to the rural areas.

Table 5
Academic Program

Academic Program	Frequency	%
BS	295	79.7
MS\ M. Phil	75	20.3

Table 5 depicts that 79.7% were enrolled in undergraduate (BS) program while the rest of the 20.3% were the students of MS and M.Phil. programs.

Table 6
Faculties

Faculties	Frequency	%
Social Sciences	244	65.9
Natural Sciences	103	27.8
Administrative Sciences	23	6.2

Table 6 depicts that students has participated from all three existing faculties in GCWUS with maximum participation of 65.9% from the faculty of social sciences. While the 27.8% were from natural science facutlies and a very few (6.2%) participants were from administrative sciences.

Table 7
Time you spend on political news daily

Media Consumption Time	Frequency	%
Less than 30 minutes	251	67.8
30 minutes-1hour	85	23
1-2 hours	21	5.7
More than 2 hours	13	3.5

Table 7 describes that 67.8% students spend less than 30 minutes on political news and 23% respondents spend 30 minutes to 1 hours daily following political news. While there are very few numbers of respondents who spend time more than 1-2 hours.

Table 8
Preferred Media Source

Preferred Media Source	Frequency	%
Television	74	20
Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, Youtube)	237	64.1
Newspapers & Magazines	31	8.4
Online News Websites	28	7.6

Table 8 Demonstrates that 64.1% respondents rely on social media platforms for political news, 20% respondents prefer television and 8.4% respondents prefer newspapers and magazines while rest of the 7.6% respondents rely on online news websites.

Table 9
Verification Political news

Cross-Verification	Frequency	%
Always	163	42.44
Sometimes	137	35.67
Rarely	72	18.75
Never	8	2.08

Figure 9 depicts that 52.7% respondents sometimes verify the political news from multiple sources before believing it. 23.8% respondents are those who always verify the news 14.9% respondents are those who rarely cross-check the information while 8.6% respondents never bothered to verify the news they consumed.

<Table No 10>

Mean Score Assessment

Statement No	Mean Score	Statement No	Mean Score
10	4.10	19	3.70
7	4.06		
		15	3.62
6	3.95	14	3.62
9	3.92	2	3.61
17	3.87	5	3.55
16	3.85	8	3.55
13	3.85	1	3.48
20	3.77	12	3.46
11	3.76	4	3.45
3	3.74		
18	3.71		
Mean Average of 20 Statements= 3.731			

Table 10 shows that 2 statements showed positive acceptance level, 10 statements showed intermediate acceptance level and 8 statements showed low acceptance level of respondents. The average mean score of 20 statements remained 3.731, indicating a high level of acceptance among respondents.

Discussion

The questionnaire findings from Government College Women University Sialkot students provide key evidence on the impact of media coverage on youth political behaviour. The results indicate a mixed relationship between media consumption, trust in media, political content exposure and political participation. Most students use social media as their primary source of political information. This shows the changing media landscape where traditional sources of news such as television and print media have been replaced by new digital-based news sources of information, e.g., Instagram, YouTube and WhatsApp. Nevertheless, this ease comes with problems such as misinformation, emotional manipulation, and selective exposure. The salience of social media as a source of information

is in line with the Uses and Gratifications Theory, wherein students consciously seek out media that satisfies their informational and emotional requirements. However, the concurrent distrust of these sources confirms the assumptions of Cultivation Theory and Agenda-Setting Theory, wherein prolonged exposure to sensational content leads to disillusionment, fear, or political disengagement.

Interestingly, important observation is that students who consumed political content more frequently were comparatively more politically aware, yet their trust in media was lesser. This paradox might suggest that politically engaged young people are becoming increasingly aware of the fact that media must be consumed critically. Since all respondents were female students, their proportionately lower active participation in politics might be dictated by wider Pakistan cultural and social norms, with female political activation still being riddled with innumerable constraints.

Conclusion

This research aimed to investigate how media coverage can affect the political activity of youths in Pakistan and focus on targeting students from the Government College Women University Sialkot. The research rested on the perception that media, particularly in their contemporary digital representations, have the potential to impact political attitudes and political participation modes among youths. Literature from a broad array was surveyed that at all times indicated the dual nature of the influence of the media to act as a source of information and as an agent of manipulation. The survey findings verified that even though media outlets like television, print media, and particularly social media have an important role to play in educating the youth about politics, their impact tends to be influenced by the tone, purpose, and framing of the material. Students identified a rise in political consciousness through media exposure, but numerous others indicated that biased, emotive, or sensational material can mislead, confuse, or discourage relevant action.

The research also identified that emotional reactions such as anger, frustration, or hopelessness are typical among young people when they come across politicized or polarizing media content. Even though the media has been able to generate interest in political issues, there exists a huge disconnect between awareness and active engagement. This study corroborates that the media is indeed a strong vector of political socialization, albeit its potency rides on the strength, objectivity, and cohesiveness of the information dispensed. The media has pushed politics into normal life so the youth can hold debates, build opinions, and voice out, but this access must be anchored on media education, critical understanding, and trustable sources of information. It is concluded that media coverage does influence youth political behaviour, but this influence needs to be strategically directed towards building informed, active, and responsible citizens rather than merely emotionally reactive audiences.

Recommendations

- **Empower Comparative Media Analysis as Academic Assignments:** Institutions should encourage scholarly exercises that challenge students to compare how various media entities cover the same political occurrence. This helps teach critical thinking skills and makes the student aware of bias, tone and frame strategies on multiple platforms.
- **Encourage Fact-Based and Neutral Reportage with the Help of Regulation:** Media regulators must create incentives for fact-based and neutral reportage through mechanisms such as institutional ratings, awards or monetary grants to news organizations that have high standards of political reporting.
- **Organize Student-Led Media Awareness Campaigns:** Institutions can arrange student-driven campaigns to create awareness for the identification of fake news, biased

reporting and quality journalism. These campaigns can be carried out through workshops, awareness posters and peer-to-peer learning sessions.

- **Arrange Guest Lectures and Internships with Highly Regarded Journalists:** Having guest lectures, workshops and internships with highly experienced and reputed journalists will introduce students to hands-on media practices, ethical concerns and political reporting challenges.
- **Promote Student-Media Sites:** Universities should provide the space for student-operated blogs, podcasts, online magazines and newsletters. These sites can serve as training grounds for ethical journalism, where students are encouraged to critically examine political issues and media narratives.
- **Organize Student-Faculty Review Committees for Media Review:** Creating shared student-faculty review committees can allow for ongoing debate regarding recent political news coverage. These forums will enable students to consider the role of media in shaping their views and encourage critical assessment of news sources.
- **Hold Political Debates and Simulations to Investigate Varied Points of View:** Model political simulations, interdepartmental debates, and policy role-play exercises must be held to inspire students to explore political issues in-depth and argue on different points of view.
- **Establish Ethical Guidelines for Social Media News Sharing:** Institutions must develop and enforce specific guidelines for students on how to confirm the news prior to posting it on social media. This will reduce misinformation dispersal and promote ethical digital citizenship.
- **Facilitate University Cooperation with the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP):** The ECP should cooperate with universities to facilitate political education and civic activities among students. Such activities could include voter campaign education, seminars on democratic rights and participation in electoral awareness campaigns.
- **Push for Transparent Political Reporting Policies at the Government Level:** The government must be prompted to implement policies that guarantee political journalism transparency and accountability. Such policies must dissuade monetization of sensationalized content and favour public interest over profit.
- **Train Media-Literate Students to Mentor Their Peers:** Institutions ought to identify media-literate students and offer them training to serve as peer mentors. Such students would be able to lead their peers in recognizing biased or manipulative content and making well-informed political decisions based on fact-checked information.

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