

## Female Voting Behaviour: Role of Online Media in the Elections of Pakistan

**Abstract:** *This study focuses only role of online media in female voting behaviour the in the 2018 elections in Pakistan. A survey method is selected to collect data from the female of Pakistan. A simple random sampling technique is used to determine the 600 respondents from all the Pakistan. The following study is related to agenda-setting theory. In the finding, this study explored that social media has a very influential role in the change of female voting behaviour in Pakistan's general election. The political party which used more social media for their political campaign got more votes as compared to the other parties. It is examined that online media significantly impacted female voting behaviour in the 2018 elections as they are more dependent on online media than traditional media. It is also found that online media is considered more reliable than broadcast media. The result further explored that vote casting of rural and urban females is similar. Both residents of females similarly participated in the 2018 elections. It proves that in Pakistan, with time, online media has become more popular, and people are shifted toward it from traditional media.*

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**Key Words:** Female Voting Behaviour, Online Media, Election, Pakistan

### Introduction

Media has an integral and crucial role in democratic societies as it establishes awareness of various political parties among the public and discusses people's problems. It is a significant platform to rebuild society's opinion. It gives information and changes viewers' way of thinking. Media and Politics. Christians (2005). Mass media is used to generate political agenda as Stokes (1986), and Klapper elaborate influence of media in electoral campaigns. In his book "Effects of Mass Communication", he describes political news as a crucial element to change voting behaviour. Whereas in his article 'Brink of

Hope', enrich the idea of media's role and brings new dimensions to the field of research. It throws light that media shapes voters' minds and attains desired results.

Previous studies specified the factors that influenced females' voting behaviour in Pakistan. The most critical is a "classical patriarchal society" where women are men's assistants. They depend on males for news and political facts, so they vote according to the direction of their male partners—secondly, they lack interest in and understanding of politics. Females are not massively a part of political parties or do not have vital roles in the political setup. Thirdly, there is

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an absence of opportunity or lack of motivation to participate in essential policies. This research focuses on the second part, where media, especially online media, can play a valuable role in awareness and enhancing interest. This study explores how online media can affect the voting behaviour of females in Pakistan.

People's voting behaviour and involvement in the electoral system determine democratic development as an initial and influential step to strengthening society (Macomb & Shaw, 1972). Voting behaviour depends on the elements of political issues, awareness, and the importance of voting (Campbell, 1960). In a democratic culture, individuals are ready to know information about the political parties and their activities. They try to develop an understanding of political problems that are considered necessary to flourish in their community. Different studies were conducted on voting behaviour, and scholars agree that voters' male and female participation in elections is the bread and butter of democracy.

Scheffle (2003) explained the role and importance of media in the electoral process. He stated that media could increase political participation among the public and enhance vote casting through awareness, improving political knowledge, and motivation for voting. Kioussis & McCombs (2004) highlighted the significance and effectiveness of news media regarding voters' behaviour as they believed that political issues constantly discussed on mass media become so important that people start thinking about them. News media is used to encourage political debates for better understanding and information, which helps the audience enrich political interest and enhance knowledge (Eveland, 2004) and participation in the electoral process. (Cho et al., 2009). News media operate as a predominant source in the community for political exposure and plays a prominent and crucial part in developing and changing voters' political behaviour directly and indirectly by regulating the mediation process through demography, disposition, and political news exposure

Ahmed et al. (2018) say that media plays an important role to shape voters' choice to elect their representatives. People of Pakistan have excessive use of social media like Facebook and Twitter and it turned the world into a global

village for them. Pakistanis are interacting with people from various cultures through this platform. Social media has a positive influence over its users from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh.

Furthermore, Pakistan is ranked 27<sup>th</sup> among the countries that have excessive use of Facebook. It is calculated that 8,648,000 Pakistanis which is 4.69% of the ratio population used Facebook are youngsters whereas the total population ratio of internet users is 26.69%. It is found that 1,183,640 Facebook users are aged 13-17, 4,278,900 users are from 18-24 years, 1,767,800 users are 25 to 30 years old, 1,135,320 people are among 30-40 years and 503,080 are above 40 years. This research compares the role of social media and other mediums during the election of 2018 in Punjab, Pakistan. It is observed that various political parties use social, electronic, and print media to mobilise their female voters. Shahzad (2019).

Graber & Dunaway (2018) also agreed with Kioussis & McCombs regarding the effectiveness of mass media as the most influential source of political debate and information. They said that when people have no direct experience with current incidents, the facts are essential for them or their stakes. They have no alternative, and there is typically no likely source other than the mass media that could fulfil their needs and has provided them with the required information. In the developed technological era, there are diversified news media and effortless access to online media, and audiences' access to news becomes even more accessible. Effing et al. (2011) pointed out the importance of online media in the upcoming time and why its role has become so convincing in changing voters' attitudes. He disclosed that the winning party successfully launched an online political media campaign in Sweden during the 2010 elections. Social media had a significant impact on the voter's behaviour. The prime minister's political party operated online media more efficiently and captured the voter's attention than any other party. It also launched its manifesto on online media and relied more on it than TV and newspapers. As a result, it got more votes, 30.6%, than in the last general election in 2006, where it got only 20 %.

In Pakistan political discussion is a favourite topic for the public in their gatherings. As per the

Gallup Pakistan survey 2015 73% population like to exchange their views about politics. (Nadeem & Yousaf, 2016) Khan & Musarrat (2014) discover that political discussion is very common among the general people of Pakistan. Campbell (1959) explored that there are many factors like social and environmental which motivate a voter to vote with a free spirit.

Ali & Akhtar (2012) highlighted the problems faced by the female voter in Pakistan. This study precisely explained all issues from the beginning to voting day. In Pakistan approximately 48% population is female but in the political process, their presence is very low due to their less interest in politics and social restriction. They indicate that without the full participation of this 48% of women a democratic society cannot be established.

Safdar et al. (2015) explored that media played a very influential role in the increase in voter turnout in the 2013 election. For this study 200 subjects were selected from Multan, Pakistan to point out the usage of media dependence by the residents. The results revealed that respondents were highly dependent on media and they use it for political socialization and media can affect voting behaviour.

Nadeem (2015) discovered the outcome of political news and media's role in the increase in voter turnout during the general election of 2013. The finding showed that most urban and educated people rely on media for political awareness to choose the political party. On the other hand, rural and uneducated people select a party for a vote on the basis of ethnicity, personal association, belief, baradari and family preference.

Effing et al. (2011) emphasized the significance of online media toward change in voter behaviour. They analyzed online media through which a political campaign was set up in Sweden in 2010. Results highlighted that a successful candidate's political campaign was very influenced by social media. The winning candidate of the prime minister election who used online media more effectively for his campaign secured more votes (30.6%) as compared to the previous election in 2006 (20%). Kittilson (2015) replicate the research of Effing et al., but they just highlighted the role of Twitter in the Turkey

general election in 2014. They found that successful and unsuccessful candidates used Twitter to inform people about their political activities and stance and got a significant increase in their support.

Graham, Jackson & Broersma (2017) conducted extensive research on the impact of online media usage on changes in voting behaviour in the Netherlands and England. They found that people in the Netherlands rely on Twitter more than England's residents to get political information which helps them to select the right person for their votes. Opeibi (2019) explored Twitter's influential role in Nigeria's general elections of 2012 and 2015. Results showed that Twitter is playing a significant role in mobilizing and getting support from the public.

This study focuses on the role of online media to influence female voting behaviour in Pakistan's general election. The most relevant theory about election studies is agenda setting in the mass media discipline.

Mengu et al. (2015) stressed the influential function of online media. Still, they only focused on the role and usage of Twitter by electoral candidates in the local elections of Turkey in 2014. They critically examined the winning and losing contesters tweets. The findings showed that the winners operated twitter more effectively; they regularly updated their political messages and campaigns. They concluded that social media was more efficiently used than traditional media. Graham, Jackson & Broersma (2017) further broader the research on the effectiveness of online media usage in elections and its effect on voting behaviour. Their study selected two countries' parliamentary nominees from the British and the Netherlands. They reviewed how these competitors utilised their Twitter during the 2010 general elections. They chose a content analysis technique for this purpose, and a hand-coded content analysis was used. They revealed that Netherland politicians are busier on Twitter, operated more effectively than UK contesters, and tweeted almost double their British mates. This study also disclosed that the Netherlands voters trusted Twitter more and decided to vote according to it than England voters. Dutch contenders were also better prone to embrace the interactive perspective, and their

residents responded by fascinating more discourse. The researchers found the more traditional mindset of UK candidates, and their results are not so appreciative compared to the Netherlands.

Opeibi (2019) performed a study to analyze Nigeria's politician's election campaigns on online media in 2012 and 2015. They studied the utilization of Twitter and its influence on people. The research explored that Twitter significantly impacted the audience during these campaigns. Politicians used the socio-communicative characteristics of Twitter as a tool to mobilize, support, and promote voters and electorates. He concluded his research by appreciating the role of online media in strengthening democracy. Based on the literature review following research question and hypothesis are developed

### **Research Question**

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- What is the significance of social media towards women's decision-making in the 2018 General Elections in Pakistan?

### **Hypothesis**

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- H1. There is a significant difference in social media consumption as an influencing source in the 2018 elections between urban and rural females.
- H1a There is not a significant difference in social media consumption as an influencing source in the 2018 elections between urban and rural females.
- H2. The political party with more visibility on social media gets more votes.

This research is about the voting behaviour of females during the 2018 elections in Pakistan. The agenda-setting theory is the most repeated and suitable theory for election objectives in the mass media field. This study is also analyzed under the umbrella of agenda-setting theory. Matsaganis and Payne (2005) stated that agenda-setting theory is developed in various phases during election studies. Researchers broadly examined it, and more than 350 analyses were performed after the result of McCombs and Shaw "s in 1972. The agenda-setting theory is defined as a theory that examines and identifies how the news media create a particular crisis or

happening as a "public discussion or agenda." The 'public agenda' is the main focus or prime issue that the society members or people are concerned about (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). This theory describes the connection between the news media's emphasis on the matter and the media audiences or the people's reactions or responses to such a subject (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009).

According to McCombs (2004), we buy second-hand truth, facts, and knowledge constructed by correspondents, media workers, and their organizations while attaching to the world exceeding our family members, neighbours, mates, and workplace. He further explained that news media has its 'boundary lines' due to time limitations and space restrictions; the mass media portrays and concentrates on a selected few issues and incidents that are believed to be crucial and newsworthy. Over time, those aspects and features of public concerns prominent in the news media usually evolved apparent and evident in public views. This power and capability to influence and control which topics, individuals, and matters are perceived as the most significant and noteworthy day are called the "agenda-setting role of the mass media" (McCombs, 2004).

In a democratic set-up, politics and its related news are mass media's bread and butter. The details get by the mass media through politicians are depicted to the audience. The assurances, pledges, and oratory encapsulated in news articles, columns, stories, and editorials comprise most of the information and facts on which a voting decision is made. People acquire most of the news and data through the "second or third" hands of media correspondents or others. The news media push awareness and provide details on specific issues. They can build up the public image and the reputation of political figures. They repeatedly deliver information indicating what individuals in the mass should 'think about,' 'know about,' and have 'feelings about.' Pakistan is a male-dominated country with a diverse history of democracy and dictatorship. Over the last decade, democracy has been gaining ground. Females are starting to get involved in elections. This research used agenda-setting theory to check how online media influenced the voting behaviour of females.

Furthermore, the Quantitative analysis design is finalized for the current study. According to Gay, Mills, & Airasian (2012), a Quantitative study examines numerical data. It begins with data collection and then analyses to "define, clarify, predict, or control variables and the phenomenon of interest." The survey methodology is selected and used to study quantitative data from all the divisions of Punjab. Neuman (2014) said a "survey method is a data collection technique employed in quantitative investigation, and the two well-established and most used categories of the analysis are questionnaires and interviews". In recent research, data from the respondents of all the divisions of Punjab are gathered through a questionnaire. The females of Pakistan are considered a target population in the recent study. However, due to the lack of time and budgetary restrictions, the investigation was limited only to Punjab. Punjab is selected because of its diverse popularity. It is the most populated province with the most dominant share in the National Assembly. The reason behind the selection of females is their less involvement in the electoral process. A survey is conducted in all provinces of Pakistan as it has diverse localities; some divisions are developed, and some are still under the influence of the wadera system. Due to

limited resources, the researcher decided it is the most suitable population which can clear the whole picture of a selected topic. A total of 600 females have been surveyed in Pakistan.

In the recent study, the researcher decided to use a simple random sampling technique to gather and organize the data for the role of online media on the voting behaviour of females in Punjab, Pakistan. Simple random sampling is "a type of probability sampling in which the investigator randomly picks a subset of people from the whole population" Wimmer & Dominick (2011). A total of 600 females are selected from all over the Pakistan whose has an opportunity to vote in the 2018 elections in Pakistan. SPSS is used to analyse and interpret the data and Chi-test is applied in this research for Hypothesis testing. The Questionnaire was gathered over four months (October 2021-February 2022). The data was compiled in software (SPSS), analyzed through tables, and interpreted in English about online media effects on female voting behaviour. The collected information was explained through tables. A correlation test is deployed in this study for hypothesis testing. Cohen et al. (2002) "Correlation quantifies the degree and direction to which two variables are related.

**Table 1.** Do you Use Social Media?

Statement Options	Frequency	Per Cent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	536	89.3	89.3
No	64	10.7	100.0
Total	600	100.0	

Looking at table 1, It is apparent that 536 females used social media and only 64 females said they are not using social media.

**Table 2.** Do you Use Social Media?

Responses	Rural	Urban	Total
Yes	189	347	536
No	30	34	64
Total	219	381	600

#### Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Sig. (P-value)
Pearson Chi-Square	3.33	1	0.068

The chi-square test is not Significant at a 5% Level of Significance.

**Table 3.** How Often do you Use Social Media?

Use of Social Media	Frequency	Per Cent	Cumulative Percent
Rarely	56	9.3	9.3
Once a day, not a frequent user	156	26.0	35.3
Multiple times in a day, I am a frequent user	388	64.7	100.0
Total	600	100.0	

As shown in table 3 388 females said that they used media multiple times a day 156 used once a day and 56 used rarely social media.

**Table 4.** How often do you Use Social Media?

Responses	Rural	Urban	Total
Rarely	17	39	56
Once a day, not a frequent user	73	83	156
Multiple times in a day, I am a frequent user	129	259	388
Total	219	381	600

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	Df	Sig. (P-value)
Pearson Chi-Square	9.82	2	0.007

The chi-square test is significant at a 1% level of significance.

**Table 5.** What is your Major Source of Information for Political News?

Statement Options	Frequency	Per Cent	Cumulative Percent
TV	109	18.2	18.2
Newspaper	50	8.3	26.5
Radio	4	.7	27.2
Internet	152	25.3	52.5
Friends/Family	30	5.0	57.5
Social Media	250	41.7	99.2
Others	5	.8	100.0
Total	600	100.0	

From the table above we can see that 302 females used the internet and social media as a major source of political news. 109 females mentioned

Tv as a source of political news. 50 females used newspapers, 4 radio and 5 used other media as a major source of political news.

**Table 6.** What is your Major Source of Information for Political News?

Responses	Rural	Urban	Total
TV	38	71	109
Newspaper	18	32	50
Radio	1	3	4
Internet	44	108	152



Responses	Rural	Urban	Total
TV	38	71	109
Newspaper	18	32	50
Friends/Family	17	13	30
Social Media	100	150	250
Others	1	4	5
Total	219	381	600

#### Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Sig. (P-value)
Pearson Chi-Square	11.27	6	0.080

*The chi-square test is not significant at a 5% level of significance.*

**Table 7.** Social Media Played a Very Important Role in my Decision-making for Voting.

Options	Frequency	Per Cent	Cumulative Percent
Agree	336	56.0	56.0
Disagree	65	10.8	66.8
Strongly Agree	123	20.5	87.3
Strongly Disagree	35	5.8	93.2
Undecided	41	6.8	100.0
Total	600	100.0	

It can be seen from the data in table 7, 459 females accepted that social media played a very important role in their decision-making for voting while 100 respondents disagree with the statement and 41 remain undecided.

**Table 8.** Social Media Played a Very Important Role in my Decision-making for Voting.

Responses	Rural	Urban	Total
Strongly Disagree	8	27	35
Disagree	24	41	65
Undecided	17	24	41
Agree	112	162	274
Strongly Agree	45	78	123
Total	219	381	600

#### Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Sig. (P-value)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.68	4	0.322

*The chi-square test is not significant at a 5% level of significance.*

**Table 9.** In Your Opinion, Which Party had the Most Visibility on Social Media?

Statement options	Frequency	Per Cent	Cumulative Percent
PML (N)	151	25.2	25.2
PPP	49	8.2	33.4
PTI	387	64.5	97.8
Others	13	2.2	100.0
Total	600	100.0	

The above table is showing that 387 females said PTI had the most visibility on Social Media while 151 said PML (N) and 49 responded that PPP and 13 females said other political parties had more visibility on social media.

**Table 10.** In Your Opinion, which Party Had the Most Visibility on Social Media?

Responses	Rural	Urban	Total
PML (N)	49	102	151
PPP	26	23	49
PTI	138	249	387
Others	6	7	13
Total	219	381	600

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	Df	Sig. (P-value)
Pearson Chi-Square	14.52	3	0.025

*The chi-square test is significant at a 5% level of significance*

**Table 11.** Which Political Party(s) have you Voted for?

Options	Frequency	Per Cent	Cumulative Percent
Not cast their vote	248	41.3	41.3
PMLN	68	11.3	52.6
PPP	37	6.2	58.8
PTI	185	30.8	89.7
Others	62	10.3	100.0
Total	600	100.0	

From the table above we can see that majority of the vote 185 were cast for PTI. 68 respondents voted for (PML N) while 37 voted for PPP and 248 did not cast their votes.

This study set out to assess the important role of online media to influence female voting behaviour in Pakistan's general election 2018. Females' votes are equally important as males' votes in democratic activity. In past, it is

prohibited for females to cast their votes. As a result of many female rights movements now women can cast their vote and even contest the election. Online media is playing a very key role in the political socialization of females.

**RQ1.** What is the significance of social media towards female decision-making in Pakistan's election?



This question is investigated in four supplementary sub-queries in the Questionnaire. The above-explained tables 1,3,5 and 7 showed a quick answer about the influential role of online media in females' decision-making in Pakistan's general election of 2018. Table 1 suggested that 89.3% of females used social media and table 3 told us that 64.7% of females used social media frequently. Table 5 indicates that 67% of females used social media to get information about political news information. Table 7 showed that 76.5% of females accepted that social media played a very important role in decision-making for a vote.

The results are alike to Graham, Jackson & Broersma's (2016) findings in the Netherlands. They choose two separate countries' parliamentarian contestants from England and Netherlands. This research discover that the Netherlands voters were more dependent on social media than English People. They vote for the candidate about whom they get positive information from online media. Opeibi's (2019) findings are the same he investigated Nigeria's election campaigns and public engagement with online media in the 2012 and 2015 elections and found that Twitter has a very influential role to get public support and mobilization. Effing et al.'s (2011) results are also similar as they focused on the significance of online media and its role in exchange voters' behaviour. He discovered that the party which used social media efficiently won the election in 2010 Sweden's election.

### **Hypothesis 1 is Disproved, and its Null Hypothesis is Approved**

The results indicated no difference in the usage of online media among rural and urban females. Women belonging to every community gave equal importance to social media and social media had a very influential role in changing voting behaviour during the 2018 elections in Pakistan. Table 2 highlighted the value of the Chi-Test., the value of scale for social media

exposure among rural and urban areas is .3.33, Df 1 and sig(P-value) 0.068, therefore hypothesis 1 is disproved, and its null hypothesis is approved.

### **Hypothesis 2 Approved**

Table 9 points out that 64.5% of females thought PTI had the most visibility on social media during the general election 2018 in Pakistan. Table 11 showed that the majority of females 30.8% voted for PTI, hence hypothesis 2 was approved.

Due to the increasing use of smartphones, social media usage growth is escalating rapidly in the present era. In Pakistan, most females use social media for political socialization. PTI used social media effectively for their political campaign in the 2018 election and won more seats. Online media is playing a vital role in the change in female voting behaviour.

### **Conclusion**

It is concluded that female participation in the 2018 elections is better than in previous elections in Pakistan. However, it was still much lesser than men. Findings illustrate that only 41.8 % of females cast their vote, which is not a satisfactory rate. Overall in the 2018 elections, more than fifty per cent turned out. It was also found that online media significantly impacted the voting behaviour of females compared to traditional media in the 2018 elections. Women relied more on online media despite its accuracy and reliability being questionable. It is because of the biased coverage of broadcast channels as they became the mouthpiece of the specific party. For example, GEO favoured PML (N), whereas ARY NEWS promoted PTI. The result further explored that there is no difference between the vote casting of rural and urban females. Both residents of females similarly participated in the 2018 elections, which shows that in Pakistan, with time, online media has become more popular, and its availability has become more accessible in village areas.

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