



Impact of TV Talk Shows on Political Efficacy of University Students of Pakistan

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Abstract: *The aim of the study is to assess the impact of political talk shows on television on the political efficacy of the viewers. Mediation analysis was conducted to investigate if trust on political information gained from TV talk shows' affects political efficacy of the viewers. Moreover, how much political perception about political issues, government and politicians influence individuals' political efficacy. The data from 400 university students of Lahore between the ages of 18 to 35 was collected purposively ensuring that the participant is regular viewer of political TV talk shows. The results revealed that watching TV talk shows significantly influence political efficacy. Trust on TV talk shows and political perception about political issues significant impact on political efficacy of the viewers. However, the two variables partially mediate the influence of TV talk shows on political efficacy.*

Key Words: TV Talk Shows, Political Efficacy, Political Perception, Media Trust

Introduction

Political talk shows are a staple of Pakistani television. A substantial share of news engagement of majority of Pakistani citizens springs from such talk shows. The concept of news engagement is understood as more than casual news consumption, essentially involving cognitive and motivational dimensions in news consumption ([Livingstone & Markham, 2008](#)). However, news engagement is less than civic engagement

as the former revolves around news while the latter entails formal participation that may require institutional arrangement ([Lu & Liquid, 2020](#)). Another related concept to news engagement is political efficacy. Political efficacy has two dimensions Internal and external. Internal political efficacy refers to the belief that one can understand politics and can have a meaningful impact on the political system at some level; while, external political

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efficacy refers to the trust on the responsiveness of a political system (Balch, 1974; Coleman & Davis, 1976; Converse, 1972; Craig, Niemi, & Silver, 1990; Niemi, Craig, & Mattei, 1991). News engagement is directly associated with political efficacy specifically the internal political efficacy. The motivation to keep one updated needs a certain level of political efficacy internal and external both (Dilliplane, Goldman, & Mutz, 2013). In the reference, political efficacy enables a passive political participation in the form of news engagement essential for a democratic system (Semetko & Valkenburg, 1998). It is well documented that when people feel confident that they are well informed and can understand the politics they are motivated to keep themselves updated and try to inform others too (Tewksbury, Hals, & Bibart, 2008). Existing research also suggests that trust on media as a credible source of political information impacts the outcome news consumption (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003; 2005) because people tend to pay attention to the sources they trust (Gaziano, 1988; Kioussis, 2001). The recent advances in media effect theory stresses the power of the influence of presumed influence and contends that people believe and act upon their perceptions formed through media (Gunther & Storey, 2003). The feeling and perception that things can be changed and citizens' political participation can make a meaningful difference in political process is referred to as the perception of political efficacy and has significant positive association with news consumption and paying attention to the news (Morrell, 2003). Research has also shown that perceptions are often better predictor of behavior (Beaumont, 2010; Schunk & Pajares, 2004). News media

cultivate political confidence and develop a sense of political agency (Beaumont, 2010). People make their evaluations and judgments based on what they see on news media which they trust and act accordingly.

In Pakistan for majority the prime source of political information is television and TV talk shows often serve as conversation starter in social interactions (Iftikhar & Akbar, 2015; Iftikhar, Ullah, Naureen, & Ali, 2016) and this holds true for the youngsters as well (Iftikhar, Raja, & Khalid, Pakistani Media Users: From Political information Repertoires to Political Participation. , 2020). The study aims to investigate the impact of political talk shows on television on the youth. The study examines the consumption of talk shows among university students and how much they trust such shows as a credible source of political information. Furthermore, the study investigates the extent of influence TV talk shows exerts on the political efficacy of their regular viewers. This study focuses particularly on the mediating role of trust of the viewer's in relation to the influence of talk shows on political efficacy. The population of the study is university students of Lahore enrolled in various public and private universities. The term of talk shows used in the document refers to the talk shows on political affairs shown on television channels.

Objectives

The main objectives of the study are as follows

1. To examine the impact of political TV talk shows on political efficacy level of the university students.
2. To determine if the trust on TV talks shows as credible source of political

information mediates the influence of talk shows viewing on political efficacy.

3. To determine if political perceptions mediate the influence of talk shows viewing on political efficacy.

Research Questions

1. Is there any impact of political TV talk shows on political efficacy level of the university students?
2. Does the viewer's trust on TV talks shows as credible source of political information mediate the influence of talk shows viewing on political efficacy?
3. Do political perceptions mediate the influence of talk shows viewing on political efficacy?

Hypotheses

The hypotheses of the study are as follows:

- H1:** TV talk shows have a significant influence on political efficacy of the viewers.
- H2:** Trust on TV talks shows' fully mediates the influence of TV talk shows on political efficacy of the viewers.
- H3:** Political perceptions fully mediate the influence of TV talk shows on political efficacy of the viewers.

Methodology

Research Design

It was a survey study conducted among students currently enrolled in four public/private sector universities in Lahore: Lahore College for Women University, University of the Punjab, University of Central Punjab, and University of Management and

Technology, Lahore. Purposively 400 students who watch political TV talk programs regularly or frequently were given the survey questionnaire comprising of 19 items.

Variables

For demographic variables included inquiring for gender, age, and education level.

Frequency of watching TV Political Talk Shows

The frequency of watching political talk shows on television was assessed by a single item asking how frequently they watch political talk shows on TV. The response options were on 5 point Likert scale ranged between daily to never.

Political Efficacy

The measure of political efficacy was derived from the scales available in the literature ([Kenski & Stroud, 2006](#); [Lee, 2006](#); [Tedesco, 2007](#)). The two dimensions of the political efficacy, that is, internal efficacy and external efficacy was measured.

Internal Political Efficacy

The internal political efficacy refers to an individual's beliefs about their competence to understand and ability to participate meaningfully in politics. Two items of internal political efficacy (well-qualified and pretty good understanding) were measured by a 5-point Likert's scale ranging from 1 as strongly disagree to 5 as strongly agree. The items were, "I feel that I am well aware of the political issues in Pakistan" and "I feel like I could do as good job in public office as most of the politicians we elect".

External Political Efficacy

The external political efficacy refers to an individual's beliefs about the political system as inclusive, responsive, and democratic serving the needs of the citizens. Three items of external efficacy corresponding to the three beliefs were used in the survey. The items included were as follows; "In this country, a few people have all the political power and the rest of us have nothing to say", "if the politicians want to listen, they will otherwise they do not listen to any one", and "Politicians are supposed to be servant of the people but too many of them try to be our masters". These were measured by a 5-point Likert's scale ranging from 1 as strongly disagree to 5 as strongly agree.

Trust on Political Talk shows' Political Information

The trust on TV talk shows was assessed by asking them to rate the trust on the four dimensions of trustworthiness including how they perceive the information given in such shows in terms of: Fairness, biasedness, relevance, and truthfulness. The *fairness* here refers to the belief that the issues are discussed in an honest and equitable manner giving equal chance to all viewpoints. *Biasedness* refers to the belief that all sides of the issue are discussed in a balanced way without projecting any particular stance. *Relevance* here refers to the confidence that issues discussed in the talk shows are reflective of citizens' concerns and directly related to their interests. *Truthfulness* here refers to the confidence that the information given in the talk shows is truthful. The items to assess the four dimensions were;

"I feel that I can trust political talk shows to report the political news fairly", "Television political talk shows are often biased in its content", "Political talk shows on television are often out of touch with people like me", and "I don't always trust the views and opinions presented in television political talk shows". The response options were on 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

Perception of Political Awareness

The perception was checked that as the TV talk shows are highlighting and discussing political issues therefore increasing political awareness among the audience. Two items in the questionnaire inquired for the perception about how much such talk show are causing increase in one's own political awareness and the perception of the increase in awareness level of others. The items were; "To what extent watching television political talk shows influence your own outlook for Pakistan? , and "to what extent watching television political talk shows influence on people's political awareness? The responses were measured on 4 point Likert scale ranging from; "a great deal" to "not at all".

Perception about Politicians

In the same manner talk shows influence on the perception about politicians were assessed for oneself and for others by two items; "To what extent watching television political talk shows influence your opinions about politicians?", and "To what extent watching television political talk shows influence on people's opinions about politicians?".

Perception about the Government

The two items for the assessing the influence on perception about the government were; “To what extent watching television political talk shows influence your views about the government?”, and “To what extent watching television political talk shows influence on people’s views about the government?”.

Data Analysis and Results

The data collected concluded both genders in

the approximate ratio of 2:1 making male respondents twice as much as female respondents in the survey data. The undergraduates and post graduate students were approximately 10 percent more than the undergraduates. Similarly, according to the percentage of the students below the age of 26 is twice than the students between the ages of 26-35 (Table 1). In this document for brevity sake the term talk shows is used in place of TV political talk shows.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the respondents N = 400

Variable		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	264	66.0
	Female	136	34.0
Education	Undergraduate	179	44.8
	Post graduate	221	55.3
Age	18 to 25	283	70.8
	26 - 35	117	29.0

Frequency of watching TV Talk Shows

The extent to which the university students watch political TV talk shows turned out as

shown in the figure 1 Majority of the students appear to watch political talk shows regularly.

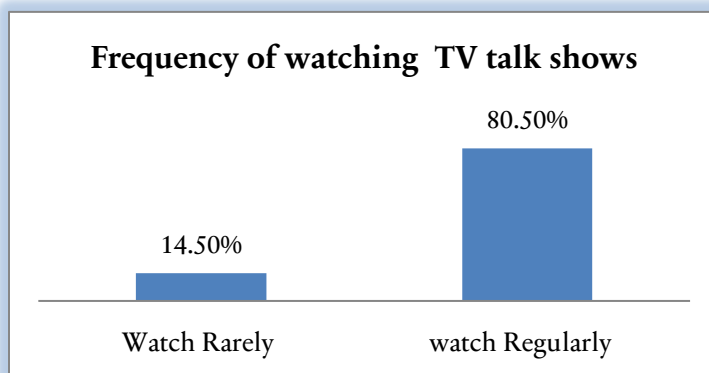


Figure 1: Frequency of watching TV talk shows

Perception of Trustworthiness of TV talk shows

The respondents were asked about their perception of the TV talk shows with respect to the four dimensions of trustworthiness. The results showed that two third of the students believe that TV talk shows are fair, unbiased, and truthful. It is noteworthy, that almost all the respondents think that the issues discussed in such talk shows are not relevant to them as

shown in the figure 2 The descriptive statistics are displayed in the table 2

For further analysis, all the four dimensions of trustworthiness were consolidated to create single variable of ‘trust on TV talk shows’. The scale reliability was good with Cronbach’s Alpha value = .662.

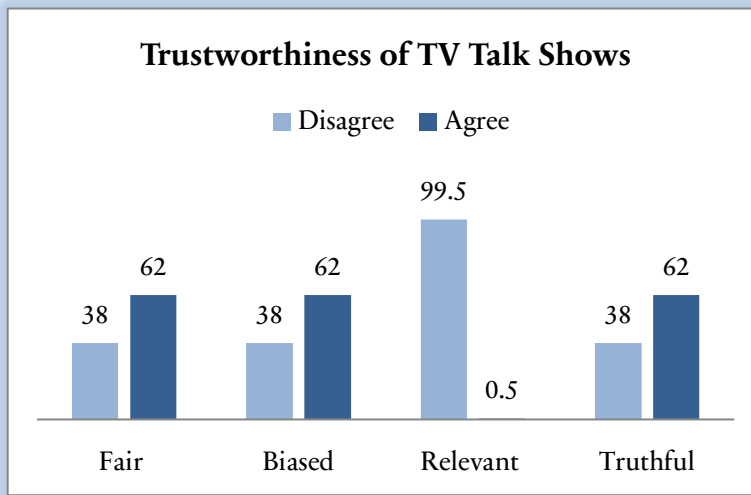


Figure 2: Percentage graph of the perception of trustworthiness of the TV talk shows among the university students with respect to the four dimensions of trust.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the four dimensions of trustworthiness on TV Political Talk Shows (N=400).

Dimensions	Mean	SD
Fair	3.50	0.72
Biased	2.52	0.75
Relevant	3.80	0.41
Truthful	2.57	0.80

The trust on TV talk shows was then analyzed for the trust levels – high, medium, and low trust level as shown in figure 3 The results revealed that two third of the students have

medium level of trust on TV talk shows and one third showed low level of trust. Only 1.5% completely trusts TV talk shows for political information.

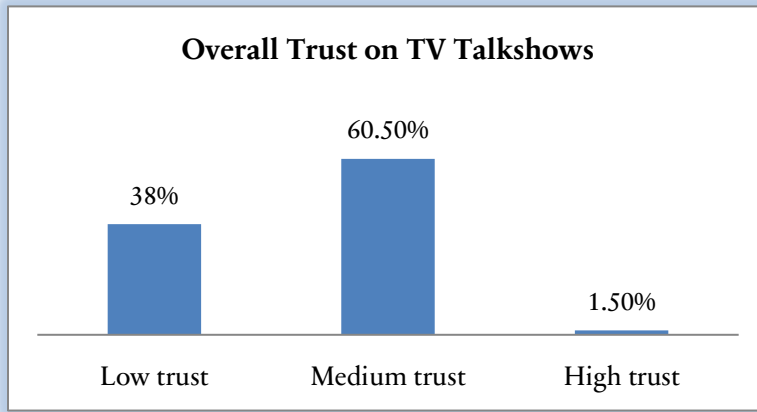


Figure 3. Percentage of Viewers' Trust on Political Talk Shows

Political Efficacy

The political efficacy was assessed for the two dimensions; internal political efficacy ($M = 1.82, SD = 0.40, \alpha = .992$) and external political efficacy ($M = 1.80, SD = 0.40, \alpha = .979$). The percentage responses for both kinds of political

efficacy are presented in the table 3. It is noteworthy that for all the political efficacy items there were no responses as disagree or strongly disagree. The data suggests that the overall political efficacy is low among the respondents.

Table 3. Percentage Responses for Political Efficacy Items

	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Internal Political efficacy			
I feel that I am well aware of the political issues in Pakistan	18.8	81	0.3
I feel like I could do as good job in public office as most of the politicians we elect	18.8	80.3	0.8
External Political efficacy			
Politicians are supposed to be servant of the people but too many of them try to be our masters	2.0	19.5	78.3
In this country, a few people have all the political power and the rest of us have nothing to say	1.8	19.5	78.8
If the politicians want to listen, they will otherwise they do not listen to any one	1.8	18.5	78.8

Influence on the Viewers' Perception

A general perception that by watching TV talk shows audience get better informed about political issues and their comprehension of the politics improves. Similarly, by watching politicians and government representatives on the shows allow them to assess them and make their opinions about them. The responses were analyzed to assess the perceived influence

of talk shows on the viewers' opinions about overall comprehension of political issues, views about politicians and government as well as, perceived influence on other students. The descriptive statistics of perceived influence over political outlook, politicians and government are presented in the table 4 The result showed that there was not much difference between perceived influence on self and others.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of the Perception Items

Influence of Political talk Shows on	Mean	SD
Own political outlook	2.85	0.43
Other's political outlook	3.48	0.74
Own opinion about politicians	3.48	0.74
Other's opinion about politicians	3.64	0.77
Own opinion about government	3.60	0.52
Other's opinion about government	3.65	0.72

All the perception items were consolidated to create a single variable of influence on perception. The reliability of the scale was excellent Cronbach Alpha = .963.

Bivariate Correlations

Bivariate correlations between all main variables are presented in Table 5 Age, gender, and education showed no significant correlation with any of the variable in the study therefore, for clarity sake are not included in further analysis.

The results were statistically significant, positive correlation between the three variables; talk show viewing frequency, trust on talk shows, and political perceptions.

Talk show viewing frequency showed statistically significant strong positive

correlation between political perception ($r = .925, p < .000$), political efficacy ($r = .880, p < .000$) explaining 85.5% and 77.44 % of variance respectively. A significant moderate positive correlation between trust on political talk shows ($r = .575, p < .000$) explaining 33% of variance.

Moreover, results showed statistically significant, strong positive correlation between Trust on talk shows and political perception ($r = .794, p < .000$); and significant moderate positive correlation with political efficacy ($r = .565, p < .000$) explaining 63% and 31.92% of variance. While, political efficacy showed statistically significant, strong positive correlation with influence on political perception ($r = .853, p < .000$), explaining 72.76% of variance in political efficacy.

Table 5. Pearson Correlations between the Study Variables

	1	2	3	4
Viewing Frequency	-			
Trust on talk shows	.575**	-		
Influence on Perception	.925**	.794**	-	
Political Efficacy	.880**	.565**	.853**	-

** $p < .01$

Regression Analysis

A multiple linear regression was conducted to determine how various factors can influence political efficacy in an individual. It was hypothesized that viewing political talk shows on television and viewers' trust on talk shows can affect to a varying degree. To test this hypothesis, multiple regression analysis is used. Results show a suggesting that 97.5% of the variation in political efficacy can be accounted for by the four factors, collectively, ($F(5, 3071.530) = 13.443, p < .000$), with $R^2 = 0.975$, $R^2_{Adjusted} = .975$ (Table 5.6). Looking at the unique individual contributions of the predictors, the result shows that External Political efficacy ($\beta = 0.587, t = 23.943, p = .000$), Internal political efficacy ($\beta = 0.391, t = 12.725, p = .000$) and perception about political issues, politicians, and government positively predict political efficacy ($\beta = 0.449, t = 10.780, p = .000$)

significantly positively predict political efficacy. Furthermore, results indicate that talk shows viewing and trust on talk shows information significant negative predictor of political efficacy. The data suggests that the individuals who frequently watch political TV talk shows and trust the political information gained through talk shows more likely to have lower political efficacy. Whereas, those who have internal and external political efficacy that is, who have confidence in their competency and skills to influence political processes and also have confidence in political system and government's responsiveness and also have fair comprehension of political affairs and have positive perceptions about politicians and government have high political efficacy. The summary results of multiple regressions among variables in this study are presented in the following Table 6

Table 6. Regression Coefficients of the five variables on Political Efficacy

Model	B	SE	β	t	p
(Constant)	-.391	.040		-9.756	.000
Talk shows viewing	-.222	.023	-.273	-9.840	.000
Trust on talk shows	.391	.031	.379	12.725	.000
Internal political efficacy	.587	.025	.604	23.943	.000
External political efficacy	.449	.042	.660	10.780	.000
Political perceptions	-.170	.020	-.420	-8.380	.000

Mediation analysis was performed to assess the mediating role of TTS (Trust on talk shows) on the influence of TSF (talk shows viewing frequency) on PE (political efficacy). The results (see Table 7) revealed that the total effect of TSF on PE was significant. (H1: $\beta = .916$, $p < .001$). With the inclusion of the mediating variable TTS, the impact of TSF on PE remained significant ($\beta = .829$, $t = 28.731$, $p < .000$). The indirect effect of TSF on PE through TTS was also found significant ($\beta = .087$, $t = 3.029$, $p < .003$). This shows that the relationship between TSF and PE is partially mediated by TTS.

Mediation analysis was performed again to assess the mediating role of PER (Political perception) on the influence of TSF (talk shows viewing frequency) on PE (political efficacy). The results (see Table 7) revealed that the total effect of TSF on PE was significant. (H2: $\beta = .900$, $p < .000$). With the inclusion of the mediating variable PER, the impact of TSF on PE remained significant ($\beta = .627$, $t = 10.208$, $p < .000$). The indirect effect of TSF on PE through PER was also found significant ($\beta = .273$, $t = 4.438$, $p < .00$). This shows that the relationship between TSF and PE is partially mediated by PER.

Table 7. Mediation Analysis for Trust on Talk Shows and Political Perception on the Political Efficacy

Total Effect (TSF > PE)		Direct Effect (TSF > PE)		Indirect Effect of TTS on PE				
β	p	β	p	β	SD	t	p	BI
.916	.000	.880	.000	.087	.023	3.029	.003	.025 - .117
Total effect (TSF > PE)		Direct effect (TSF > PE)		Indirect effect of PER on PE				
.900	.000	.880	.000	.273	.042	4.438	.000	.103 - .268

Discussion

The objective of the research was to investigate the extent of influence TV talk shows exerts on the political efficacy of their regular viewers. This study focuses particularly on the mediating role of trust of the viewer’s in relation to the influence of talk shows on political efficacy. Also, the mediating role of political perceptions is observed. The data was analyzed and findings are discussed regarding the answers to the study research questions and hypotheses as below.

RQ 1: Is there any impact of political TV talk shows on political efficacy level of the university students?

H1: TV talk shows have a significant influence on political efficacy of the viewers.

The findings suggest that regularly viewing political TV talk shows strongly significantly influence political efficacy of the viewers. First hypothesis of the study is supported by the data. The research found that majority (80.5%) of the university students watch political talk shows regularly. The demographic variables, age, gender, and education make no significant difference regarding influence on political efficacy. However, it is found that post graduate students watch talk shows more than graduate students irrespective of gender.

It is observed that overall the internal and external political efficacy levels are almost low among the students. Regression analysis showed that talk shows viewing frequency is a strong predictor of having an influence on political efficacy.

RQ 2: Does the trust on TV talks shows as credible source of political information mediate the influence of talk shows viewing on political efficacy?

H2: Trust on TV talks shows' fully mediates the influence of TV talk shows on political efficacy of the viewers.

The data revealed that students have medium level of trust on TV talk shows regarding the political information. The trustworthiness of the talk shows was assessed with respect to the four dimensions that is, fairness, bias, relevance, and truthfulness. It was found that two third of the students believe that talk shows are fair, unbiased, and truthful. That means the information received from them is trustworthy. However, 99.95% believe that the issues discussed in talk shows are irrelevant. Overall, it is assessed that majority (60.5%) of the students deem talk shows moderately trustworthy. More than a quarter (38%) do not seem to trust talk show information. Only a insignificant proportion (1.50%) finds them highly trustworthy.

Regression analysis showed that trust on talk shows is a significant predictor of the influencing political efficacy. However, it is found that demographic variables do not play any significant role in this regard.

Mediation analysis further revealed that trust on talk shows does have a significant influence on political efficacy but it only partially mediates the influence talk shows on

political efficacy. The hypothesis H2 is only partially supported.

RQ 3: Do political perceptions mediate the influence of talk shows viewing on political efficacy?

H3: Political perceptions fully mediate the influence of TV talk shows on political efficacy of the viewers.

On the premise that individuals' political information has a determining role in shaping perceptions and opinions about political issues. Also these are influenced by the perceptions individuals hold about political players such as government representatives and politicians. Considering the phenomenon of "third person effect", the individuals were assessed from two different observational standpoints, that is, the effect of talk show communication on 'themselves' and on 'others' – the third persons. According to the third person effect if the communication is deemed to have negative outcome it's very likely that individuals respond that the greatest impact will be not on 'me' but on 'them' the third persons. In the current study the data showed that the perceived effect of talk shows communication was reported as the same. It shows that the talk shows are not deemed to have negative influence on viewers.

The influence on the perception regarding political issues, the government and politicians were condensed to make a single variable 'political perception'. The regression analysis showed that political perception is a significant predictor of having influence on political efficacy. Mediation analysis, however, showed that it has significant effect on political efficacy but it only partially mediates talk show influence. Therefore, the third hypothesis H3

is partially supported. That means it do mediates the impact but partially.

Conclusion

It is concluded that political talk shows on television have a significant impact on the viewers. Moreover, trust on talk shows and political perception of the viewer's partially mediate the influence of talk shows on political efficacy. Furthermore, all the three variables, political TV talk shows viewing frequency, trust on talk shows, and political perceptions about political issues, government, and politicians are significantly strong predictor of influence on political efficacy. Also, demographic variables play no significant in increasing or decreasing political efficacy.

Limitations of the Study

The major limitation of the study was that the political efficacy was not assessed in relation to particular issues and circumstances for instance, under specific Covid19 related concerns. Secondly, for better assessment the data could have been collected concerning viewership of specific TV talk shows.

Recommendations for Future Research

For future research, it is recommended to take data of the specific TV talk shows' viewership and their impact on viewers' political efficacy should be measured. Moreover, in order to accurately assess the political efficacy of the viewer's their responses should be assessed under specific circumstances and in relation to specific issues.

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