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Information Literacy in the Digital Age: Evaluating the Role of New Media vs. Mainstream Media in Fostering Civic Engagement of University Students in Pakistan

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This study explores Pakistani university students' construction of information literacy skills, and the practicability of these skills in the context of the media scape, information culture, and society. Students (n=450) were selected from Pakistan's largest universities through convenience sampling. Variables were verified through paired-samples t-tests. Findings revealed that the majority of the students perceive information to be definitive and objective, while a minority of students acknowledge the interpretive completion of information. Students were found to be more active participants in interactive media activities than in the critical evaluation of media content. Similarly, mainstream media like Radio and Magazines were found moderately influential in fostering civic engagement, while Television and Newspapers were ranking lower. It is recommended that information literacy and civic engagement be part of university curricula to foster their significance among students.

Keywords: Information Literacy; New Media; Mainstream Media; Civic Engagement; University Students; Pakistan

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Abstract

This study explores Pakistani university students' construction of information literacy skills, and the practicability of these skills in the context of the media scape, information culture, and society. Students (n=450) were selected from Pakistan's largest universities through convenience sampling. Variables were verified through paired-samples t-tests. Findings revealed that the majority of the students perceive information to be definitive and objective, while a minority of students acknowledge the interpretive completion of information. Students were found to be more active participants in interactive media activities than in the critical evaluation of media content. Similarly, mainstream media like Radio and Magazines were found moderately influential in fostering civic engagement, while Television and Newspapers were ranking lower. It is recommended that information literacy and civic engagement be part of university curricula to foster their significance among students.

Keywords: [Information Literacy](#); [New Media](#); [Mainstream Media](#); [Civic Engagement](#); [University Students](#); [Pakistan](#)

Introduction

The digital revolution has changed the communication patterns and civic engagement patterns in society. In this context, the youth, especially university students, are very active in using communication devices and new media platforms for communication purposes in their daily lives. Especially with the rise of New Media such as the various social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram, there is

joint mobilization about information, debate, and mobilization (Zuckerman, 2014). Meanwhile, traditional media (TV, Radio, Newspaper, and Magazine) continue to have a substantive impact on public opinion and civic engagement. Their dual presence begs the question: What are the driving media behind civic participation for students in Pakistani universities? In the context of Pakistan, where a large youth population is digitally connected, the potential of New Media to encourage



political participation, raise social awareness, and strengthen democratic values is increasingly visible. However, the traditional credibility and wide outreach of mainstream media cannot be overlooked, especially in matters of national issues and governance (Mushtaq et al., [2011](#)). The effectiveness of either media form, however, largely depends on how audiences critically access, evaluate, and utilize information. This makes Information Literacy a crucial factor in determining whether media consumption leads to informed, responsible, and active civic engagement (Hao et al., [2014](#)). In local settings, the mediating effect of Information Literacy in this relationship is under-researched. This gap is important to address because improving students' IL skills can enable them not only to discern credible information from misinformation and disinformation but also to engage in active citizenship (Carmi et al., [2020](#)). This study has different keywords that are being elaborated.

Information Literacy

Information Literacy is the ability to know when there is a need for information, to be able to identify, locate, evaluate, and effectively and responsibly use the information for the issue or problem at hand (Griesbuam et al., 2021).

Civic Engagement

Civic engagement is what it sounds like: the ways that members of a society engage with the politics and community around them in order to affect public policy, solve problems, and improve the quality of life. It is composed of private and associative sector actions that seek to detect, isolate, and solve concerns of public interest (Ekman & Amna, [2022](#)).

New Media

New media is a category of digital forms of communication that are widely distributed, affordable, and channel-agnostic, which can accommodate personalization at an individually massive scale, and can additionally enable content and interaction capabilities to scale non-linearly as the number of participants increases. It is two-way, participatory, and user-generated, which gives the audience the ability not just to consume, but also to

produce and share information regardless of the geographical context. Examples include social media, the web, blogs, podcasts, streaming services, and mobile apps. New media is not scheduled or mainstream. It is always live, engaging, and allows audience collaboration regardless of time and space (Crosbie, [2002](#)).

Mainstream Media

Definition Mainstream Media: Mainstream media, sometimes referred to as "old school" or "traditional media," are the outlets that publish and broadcast news and information to mass audiences. One-way communication is a term used to describe communication that is linear and very structured. Mainstream media is typically restricted and depends on traditional authorities as sources of legitimacy, and operates according to fixed formats and schedules (e.g., broadcast news bulletins, newspapers on a daily basis). Unlike new media, it provides less interactivity with the audience but seeks to provide them with relational, authoritative, and curated content (Apuke, [2016](#)).

Information Literacy, Civic Engagement, and University Students

As digital technology continues to sweep through society, information literacy has become a tool to improve civic engagement of university students. Information literacy is the ability to think critically and make balanced judgments about information, which may not have a "right" and "wrong" answer, and encompasses not only the traditional library-based skills of researching and determining credibility of sources, but also the ability to find, use, and grow with new media and tools as they evolve (Nam, [2009](#)).

Accordingly, the present study is an attempt to assess the relative influence of New Media and mainstream media on promoting civic engagement among university students in Pakistan with a focus on the mediating effect of Information Literacy. By studying this relationship, this research hopes to help understand how digital literacies and media use impact young people's democratic participation in the digital era. Keeping in view the literature review, it was assumed that there is a lack of studies for assessing the comparative impact of mainstream

media and new media platforms for fostering civic engagement of university students in Pakistan.

Significance of the Study

University students are very influential in shaping the state's culture through the media. They raise their voices for the betterment of society. Being more literate compared to other persons in society, university students have a huge involvement in the critical evaluation of the media content. They also have good skills and knowledge in operating media technologies. Having diverse experience and exposure, they are more engaged on media platforms for civic promotions. Due to excessive use of media platforms, there is a big risk of spreading misinformation and disinformation. In this context, this study has more significance for exploring information literacy in this digital world and for studying the role of mainstream media and new media for fostering civic engagement in Pakistan.

Problem Statement

Digital platforms have modified the relationship patterns and civic engagement patterns of university students in Pakistan. Communication media technology, especially Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram, provides a space for mobilizing them. Mainstream media like Television, Radio, newspapers, and magazines are still yielding the power of credibility to impact people's thinking patterns. In this scenario, the question arises as to which media platform fosters the civic engagement patterns among university students. Although both media platforms have easy access to the users, it is important to differentiate between them and to explore the information literacy in this regard. However, there is scarce attention in Pakistani research on the mediator role of Information Literacy between media use and civic engagement, indicating a potential black hole within the domain about the possibility of how students' mediated civic engagements through the media could lead to informed citizenship.

Research Question

RQ: To what extent do university students in Pakistan rely on New Media and Mainstream Media for promoting civic engagement?

Literature Review

For reviewing relevant research and finding the research gap, the following previous studies were reviewed as the literature review. It was reviewed that in the digital age, information literacy (IL) and media literacy (ML) are basic competencies for participating in citizenship. UNESCO (2021) noted that media and information literacy (MIL) enables people not only to access and assess information, but also to actively engage ethically and responsibly in civic life. It has been particularly relevant in places like Pakistan, where the Government is in the process of developing a National MIL Strategy to combat disinformation and promote democratic participation (Naseer & Ullah, 2024). New research focused on the role of information literacy in university students' cognition of civic engagement. Celik et al. (2021) stated that civic participation and using new media for social purposes are associated with media literacy. Research studies have been done in Pakistan, such as Information literacy is correlated positively with academic endeavors (Rafique et al., 2025), and student civic participation (Mughari et al., 2025). Findings reveal that information literacy and civic engagement must be part of academia, although there is a variety of curricula in the higher education of Pakistan; however, there is a lack of studies regarding misinformation identification, content assessment, and content generation in Pakistani society (Jamil et al., 2022). Likewise, Wahid (2024) has argued that though information literacy is becoming known in Pakistan, it is being fragmented in its enactment, with minimal faculty development and curriculum uniformity. Near the same period, it had been working to promote the teaching and learning of research within the library; the reality emerged that academic libraries were beginning to provide research education to help students learn how to locate and use information critically; however, the extent of this support varies among institutions (Aslam et al., 2025). The proliferation of new media has affected how Pakistani university students participate in civic and political engagement. A number of recent studies show that social media serves as sites for political consciousness, mobilization, and debate. For example, Salam et al. (2024) noted a significant relationship between social media and political participation among the students of the universities in Punjab. Similarly, Iftikhar et al. (2024) claimed that Facebook and Twitter contributed to the political consciousness of the students and that they served as platforms of streaming activism and debating avenues (Mazahir

& Yaseen, [2025](#)). Misinformation and polarization remain obstacles, as indicated by Nasidi et al. ([2025](#)), which indicates that fact-checking interventions can reduce this misbelief, but the impact is strongly conditioned by trust in news sources, while social media becomes increasingly embedded in students' everyday lives. Similarly, mainstream media is still important to help verify information and gain context, but its civic role is weakened by nagging questions about credulity and professionalism. Ullah et al. ([2021](#)) also observed flagrant violations of PEMRA's code of conduct in the prime-time TV bulletins. Meanwhile, the dictionary of journalism suggests that reform of the ethics is still a dream. Jami and Appiah-Adjei (2023) found that Pakistani journalists are aware of the importance of conflict-sensitive reporting, but they believe structural impediments such as political interference and commercial incentives work against professional practice. These results combined illustrate the news media's capacity, through its moral and transparency performance, to create 'informed civic engagement'. Some new research suggests students straddle a combined information threshold. They often discover and coalesce around new media this way, but if they feel the coverage is reliable, they will look to mainstream media for context and confirmation. Trust is the key, though empirical evidence also shows that veridical corrections will misfire when corrective sources are not trusted (Hassan et al., [2024](#)). This presents a dialectical problem for new media literacy and mainstream media ethics that both must be considered together to foster civic conditions that facilitate informed participation. Secondly, findings indicate that IL in Pakistan must move beyond technical skills and address epistemic and civic roles. Teachers have also been advised to integrate lateral reading, bias detection, and civic engagement projects (e.g., student-led fact-checking campaigns or community reporting) into their curricula (Wahid, [2024](#)). In this way, IL can become a useful thing not only as an academic skill but as a civic skill that can help and prepare students to operate responsibly in both new and old (or "mainstream") media environments." Whiteside ([2024](#)) ensured fact-checking as an important reversal to disinformation, but people are found to have limited knowledge of verification tools, indicating low media literacy and weak critical thinking. Moon and Bai ([2020](#)) explored connections between information literacy, civic engagement, and positive youth development that make the case that new media literacy may enhance civic skills both in universities and outside of them. Cooke-Jackson

([2018](#)) showed how collaborating with non-profit organizations and communities of practice can promote civic voice, information literacy, and health literacy in underserved urban communities. However, Koc and Barut ([2016](#)) presented an intervention protocol for adolescents wherein both critical thinking and resilience in digital environments support ethical media use and civic engagement. Bulger and Davison ([2018](#)), Garcia et al. (2021), Wineburg, and McGrew ([2016](#)) stressed the immediate importance for universities to implement digital civic learning, given the challenges mis-information and partisanship pose to democratic participation. DiGiacomo ([2021](#)) showed that students in one US district are not offered clear and consistent digital civic learning opportunities, highlighting the need to incorporate youths' lived experiences in civic education. Saal et al. ([2022](#)) found that those who are more literate are more likely to search for political information online (controlling for the rest of the composition of the groups), while the less literate tend to turn to television as a source for civic understanding. Greenhow et al. ([2023](#)) summarize social media and learning research and emphasize new literacies, literacies for civic engagement, and the use of professional learning networks as a major force, and acknowledge current challenges as well. Bowyer & Kahne ([2020](#)) found that digital engagement opportunities for learning promote online political activity, whereas digital consumption literacy promotes offline civic engagement, indicating different effects of civic education. Middaugh ([2023](#)) noted that young people often encounter civic media indirectly and relationally rather than through intentional search, thus proposing a dynamic and nonlinear model for civic media literacies. Young people are using new media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram more and more frequently in fundraising, political mobilization, and social issues (Nasir & Riaz, [2024](#)). In Pakistan, qualitative evidence also highlights that digital media promotes civic awareness and involvement that is effective in encouraging youth by creating greater exposure to civic issues and emotional appeal, although it has its own challenges like misinformation and digital divide (Sultan et al., [2024](#)). Likewise, Tufts University research identified that young students get something from digital and local news when it comes to news consumption and preparation for civic engagement (Gustafson et al., [2021](#)). Nevertheless, some new evidence stated that exposure to commercial media alone might be associated with weaker civic values than consuming

public or online news (Rodrigues et al., 2021). Based on a literature review, a research gap was identified.

Research Gap

Previous research highlighted the importance of information literacy (IL) to play a role in civic participation, but it is important to note that there are few studies that have compared in a systematic way the engagement, in which two types of media are used (New versus traditional) among university students in Punjab, Pakistan. But in the universities of the province of Punjab, no study has been conducted by employing the attributes of new media and mainstream media for the promotion of civic engagement and information literacy, both as a single construct, especially in the context of IL. This leads to a notable lack of knowledge on how university students filter through hybrid new media diets that include trust in broadcast media and the conferring capabilities of presumes within new media environments and how these practices shape their sense of civic knowledge and engagement. It is therefore necessary to bridge this gap through the integration of information literacy with the digital and traditional media in Pakistan. To fill the research gap, a hypothesis was developed to reach some results.

Hypothesis

H: It is more likely that university students use new media for promoting civic engagement compared to Mainstream media in Punjab.

Theoretical Framework

By focusing on the requirements of the study, a conceptual and theoretical framework was completed with respect to the concepts and variables of this study.

Diffusion of Innovation

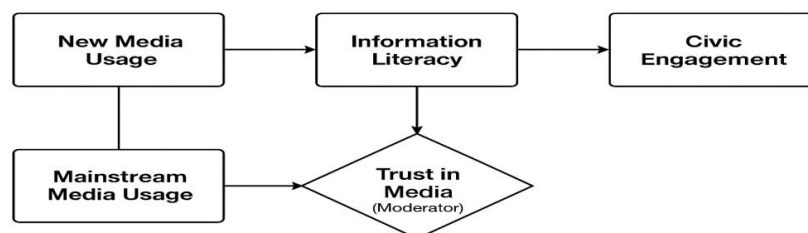
Diffusion of Innovation Theory is a good lens through which to view how new and mainstream media influence university students' civic engagement. The theory draws on the premise that new practices, such as new media platforms and literacy practices, are adopted via social networks and communication links over time (Rogers et al., 2014). University Students will adopt new media rapidly due to media's immediacy, participatory measures, and peer pressure; mainstream media will have steady but slow adoption, due to media's institutional trustworthiness and legacy. In these terms, information literacy is the "change" that allows students to critically choose, select, and use media to engage with civic aspirations. The adoption process also reflects the user categories: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards, each of which symbolizes types of students who adopt digital or traditional media for expressing civic culture in Pakistani universities.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the theory, the study proposes the related model in which the new media use and use of the mainstream media were taken as the independent variables, and the students' civic engagement was taken as the dependent variable. The iterative part of these, i.e., information literacy skills, also mediates access because it is such skills that allow media exposure to be transformed into critical consciousness and responsible actions. Moreover, the trust that people have in media sources is a factor that contextualizes the effectiveness with which people integrate information across channels. Here, new media provides immediacy and mobilization, while mainstream media provides verification and depth. As detailed above, Media Practices provide students with the tools to make thoughtful choices about mixing media and sound information literacy across the curriculum to engage ethically and effectively in civic engagement (Figure 01).

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework of the Study



Methodology

This study has been done in the universities of Punjab Province, Pakistan. There were 450 students of different age groups from 18 years to 30 years and above, belonging to different educational levels, like BS, MS, and PhD, who were selected as a sample by applying the convenience-sampling technique. Quantitative research technique has been used in this study. A standardized questionnaire was distributed among the students for data collection in a survey.

Validity and Reliability

Content validity was established through review by experts in media studies and education. A pilot test of the questionnaire with 30 students was also conducted at universities not included in the sample, to test for difficulties with wording and evidence of comprehension. Reliability was determined by using Cronbach’s alpha, and all scales were found to have values higher than 0.70 as the cut-off point for internal consistency.

Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed in printed and electronic (internet, essay-type questionnaire using Google Forms) form in order to reach as many participants as possible. Approval was obtained from responsible university institutions, and students were approached in classrooms, libraries,

and common areas. Participants were also informed of the principle of confidentiality and anonymity of answers. Attendance was optional, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection.

Data Analysis

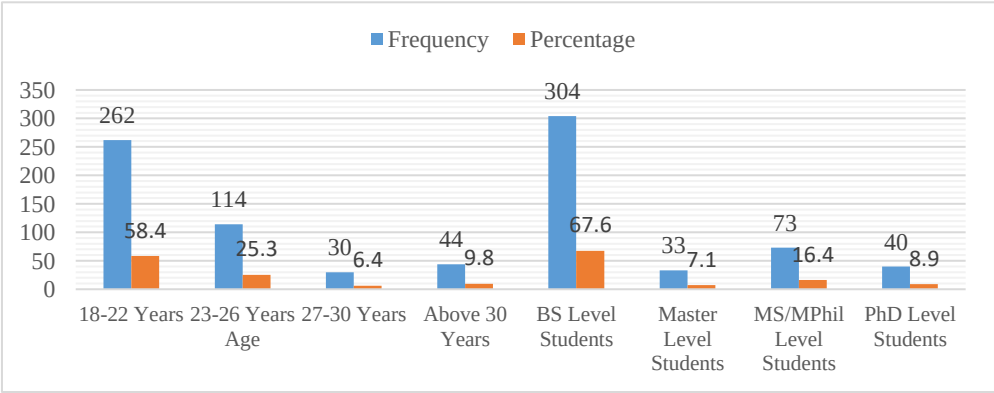
SPSS was used to code and analyze responses. Descriptive statistics: Patterns of use of media, and inferential statistics: Paired sample correlations and Paired sample test were used respectively to test the relationships between New media, Mainstream media, Information literacy, and Civic engagement.

Results:

Descriptive Statistics

There are four age groups for the purpose of this study. These categories are the 18-22 years of age group, the 23-26 years of age group, the 27-30 years of age group, and the more than 30 years of age group. Respondents in certain ages, such as those aged 18 to 30, and those aged over 30, were selected strictly, and their levels of education were divided into four main groups from graduation to post-graduate. In reference to statistical data, the 18-22-year-old age group was extremely highly represented (58.4%) ahead of the 23-26-year-old age group (25.3%). The BS students’ ratio of education level is the highest compared to the students of MS/M. Phil (16.4%) with PhD students (8.9%) as the second one (Figure 02).

Figure 2
Age and Education Level of Respondents



The findings show that most students interpret the term “information” predominantly from a factual and objective-oriented perspective. In their responses, over half of the subjects (56.2%) referred to information regarding “telling others about

people, objects, facts, events, and processes”, showing a strong prevalence in students’ definitions of information as accuracy, truth, and reporting of reality. Meanwhile, almost one-quarter of the respondents (24.4%) interpreted information to be

“a point of view or statement on a particular topic”, which denoted the concept of information as a subjective or interpretative fact. Fewer proportions described information as “a story about people and objects” (7.1%) or as “sharing interesting elements of life” (6.9%), with 5.3% provided with other descriptions. The results show how the information perspective of university students is largely characterized by a traditional factual orientation;

however, a substantial minority also acknowledges the subjective and narrative nature of information. This difference is of relevance in relation to information literacy, since it indicates that students indeed appreciate facts, but the fact that many of them also recognize that information can be colored by standpoints, interpretations, or storytelling techniques is remarkable (Table 01).

Table 1

Students' Perception of Information Concept

	Frequency	%
It is telling others about people, objects, facts, events, and processes.	253	56.2
It is a point of view or statement on a specific topic.	110	24.4
It is a story about people and objects.	32	7.1
It shares interesting elements of life.	31	6.9
Others	24	5.3
Total	450	100.0

Regarding new media consumption patterns, descriptive results indicate that amongst them, “Participation in media information” scored the highest mean ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 1.20$), that is, students spend relatively more time participating and interacting with media content (e.g., commenting, sharing, or contributing) than in other dimensions. In comparison, the highest perceiving media literacy competences, “Knowing how media works” ($M = 2.39$, $SD = 1.12$) and “Evaluating media information” ($M = 2.05$, $SD = 1.15$) were more infrequent, indicating that

participants were less engaged with critical and active aspects of media usage. The lowest mean score was on the “Accessing media information” subscale ($M = 2.04$, $SD = 1.02$), indicating that students are using media the least to just pull or get media content. Findings reveal that university students were using new media platforms actively with an understanding of the technicalities of the media content. They not only participate in the media content, but also evaluate the content and have knowledge of media work (Table 02).

Table 2

Student's Media Literacy

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Accessing	2.04	1.015
Evaluating	2.05	1.145
Participation	2.71	1.198
Knowing how the Media works	2.39	1.116

Significant differences are found between how university students characterize the influence of different mainstream media in fostering civic engagement. Results show that Radio ($M = 2.83$, $SD = 1.28$) and Magazines ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 1.35$) were somewhat higher in rating with respect to the potential of promoting civic engagement in

university students. Newspapers ($M = 2.56$, $SD = 1.28$) were rated somewhere in between, while Television ($M = 2.36$, $SD = 1.31$) received the lowest average rating. It revealed that mainstream media like Television, Radio, newspapers, and Magazines promote civic sense in students, although there was a difference in their acceptability (Table 03).

Table 3*Promotion of Civic Engagement on Mainstream Media by Students*

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Television	2.36	1.311
Radio	2.83	1.282
Newspaper	2.56	1.280
Magazine	2.79	1.349

Results showed that university students used different new media tools for promoting civic engagement, but it has different ratings of promotion. Of these, “other channels” ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 1.52$), which may denote new apps, blogs, or local (new) platforms, received the highest mean, suggesting that students are exploring a range of new digital media spaces outside the mainstream. Similarly, Twitter ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 1.45$) was found to be the most favorite, for providing short updates, debating hot topics, and politicizing civic engagements. YouTube ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 1.40$) was then also in the middle of the pack, indicating that

students go on YouTube for awareness, or perhaps in an act of advocacy. A little lower were ratings of Instagram ($M = 2.73$, $SD = 1.34$) and Facebook ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 1.34$), suggesting that these are still relevant, yet the civic engagement effect on these is a bit weaker within this sample. It suggests that students are showing a strong preference for new media, fast and media-rich (i.e., Twitter, YouTube, alternative channels) over traditional media. This is consistent with a trend at a generational level towards platforms, which enable more personalized and participatory types of civic life engagement (Table 04).

Table 4*Use of New Media Platforms for Promoting Civic Engagement by Students*

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Facebook	2.70	1.336
Twitter	2.84	1.446
Instagram	2.73	1.341
YouTube	2.77	1.403
Other Channels	3.17	1.518

Inferential Statistics

In order to analyze whether university students in Pakistan depend more on new or mainstream media in the promotion of civic engagement, a paired samples t-test was computed. Students indicated greater reliance on new ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 1.21$) relative to mainstream media ($M = 2.64$, $SD = 1.12$), $t(449) = 3.81$, $p < .001$. The relationship between the two measures was moderate ($r = .56$, $p < .001$), suggesting that students who use one form of media extensively also use the other one.

These results are indicative that students are still using both old and new media, but new media (like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube) are barely more likely to have the effect of political engagement than mainstream media (Television, Radio, Newspapers, and Magazines). The magnitude of the small effect suggests that mainstream media may still be relevant; however, the predominant direction remains that more digital and interactive media are utilized for engagement (Table 05).

Table 5

Paired-Samples t-Test Comparing University Students' Reliance on New Media and Mainstream Media for Promoting Civic Engagement

(a) Paired Samples Statistics						
	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean		
NewMedia_Mean	2.8400	450	1.20836	.05696		
Mainstream_Mean	2.6428	450	1.11594	.05261		

(b) Paired Samples Correlations				
	N	Correlation	Sig.	
NewMedia_Mean & Mainstream_Mean	450	.555	.000	

(c) Paired Samples Test								
	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
NewMedia_Mean - Mainstream_Mean	-.19722	1.09889	.05180	.09542	.29903	3.807	449	.000

Paired sample test is significant at $p < 0.05$ level, ($n=450$)

Hypothesis Testing

Table 6

Statistical Significance of the Hypothesis

	Hypothesis	p Value	Conclusive
H	University students rely more on New Media than mainstream media for promoting civic engagement in Punjab province, Pakistan.	(0.001) as $p < 0.05$	Significant

The findings provide some evidence for hypothesis to affirm by the paired samples t-test results (Table 05). These results mean that university students of Pakistan are increasingly dependent on new media rather than mainstream media for the sake of having promotion of the civic engagement. Mainstream media versus new media university students expressed slightly more mean preference for new media ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 1.21$) compared to mainstream, media ($M = 2.64$, $SD = 1.12$), $t(449) = 3.81$, $p < .001$, meaning the contribution of digital platforms is slightly more in the formation of civic participation. Even though the effect size was small, this result indicates a significant preference for interactive and participative media channels in contrast to routine

sources. These findings imply that students perceive new media to be more captivating and influential towards their promotion of civic engagement, which resonates not only with the second-nature interactivity of digital media but also the dynamics that are related to the shifting of each generation towards multimedia-oriented participation (Table 06).

Discussion

The findings of this study also correlate and complement the previous studies on information literacy (IL) and media and information literacy (MIL) in higher education. In line with UNESCO's (2021) model and earlier studies in Pakistan (Naseer

& Ullah, 2024; Rafique et al., 2025), most of the students see information in factual and objective ways, emphasizing accuracy, truth, and reporting reality, while a considerable proportion of them acknowledge interpretive and narrative aspects of it (Table 01). This combined view is consistent with its empirical operationalization, indicating IL as both epistemic awareness and civic-oriented skills/abilities (Celik et al., 2021; Mughari et al., 2025). Consistent with research that has reported a participatory orientation on social media (Salam et al., 2024; Iftikhar et al., 2024; Nasir & Riaz, 2024), students in the present study indicated that they were more actively involved in participatory activities, such as commenting, sharing, and contributing content, as compared to critical assessment or technical understanding of media (Table 02). This trend reflects concerns highlighted by Ejaz (2025) and Wahid (2024) about the uneven development of more complex media literacy competences in Pakistani students. The descriptive results that low engagement with accessing and evaluating media indicate the necessity of integrating into the curriculum the critical thinking and epistemic evaluation, as suggested by Riaz et al. (2024) and Lebid et al. (2020). The findings of mainstream media correspond to previous worries of credibility or responsible reporting (Ullah et al., 2021; Jami & Appiah-Adjei, 2023). The perceived influence of radio and magazines was rated as moderate, whereas television and newspapers were perceived as having low impact on civic participation (Table 03), a trend that can be attributed to a generational sway, which is consistent with global patterns of “networked engagement” (Mazahir & Yaseen, 2025). New media such as Twitter, YouTube, and the next best alternative drew attention to Facebook and Instagram in promoting civic engagement (Table 04). It was also revealing the significance of interactive hybrid media in youth activism in the present era. It further reveals that new media are slightly more dependent upon by students than mainstream media (Table 05), but depending upon different ages, it is similar to findings of previous research on so-called hybrid media diet and trust-dependent verifications strategies (Hassan et al., 2024; Salam et al., 2024). Our study indicates that the civic engagement of Pakistani university students is becoming more digital, but with low

critical and analytical literacy. Such findings lend weight to calls from academia (Wahid, 2024; Riaz et al., 2024; Moon & Bai, 2020) for integrating epistemic, evaluative, and participative practices in the teaching of IL and MIL so that engagement is not just active but critically informed. Several other findings further revealed that in Pakistan's case, the students' dependency on new media ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 1.21$) for civic engagement is higher compared to mainstream media ($M = 2.64$, $SD = 1.12$) $t(449) = 3.81$, $p < .001$, highlighting the increasing importance of digital platforms, although the traditional media continue to play a role (Table 05). This also matches global trends in the sense that throughout the globe, young people are using new media, including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, for fundraising, political mobilization, and social development (Nasir & Riaz, 2024). Qualitative evidence from Pakistan also emphasizes the role of digital media in raising awareness and increasing their participation among youth, including by creating exposure towards civic concerns and emotional appeal despite the continued obstacles of misinformation and the digital divide (Sultan et al., 2024). Another study that Tufts University played a major role in demonstrates again how, to stay informed, to get involved, teenagers are inspired by the use of digital and local media. However, some recent research, including that out of Australia, has sounded a note of caution, relying only on commercial media may be connected to a weaker civic values compared with reliance on public or online news (Rodrigues et al., 2021). The results supported the hypothesis (H) that university students used new media ($M = 2.84$) more intensely than mainstream media ($M = 2.64$) to create civic engagement (Table 05).

Conclusion

In the rapid changes of the digital world, university students are using new media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram heavily. On the other hand, mainstream media like Television, Radio, newspapers, and magazines are also being used. The student has the ability to check and verify the content quality and evaluate the nature of the content, which shows their strong information literacy. Different types of students are also taking part in civic activities, and they are promoting these activities on media platforms. The results of the study showed that new media have

been identified as more powerful and active compared to mainstream media for fostering civic engagement.

Future Recommendations

For recommendations to other upcoming researchers, there must be qualitative or mixed-method research

conducted on the variables. Similarly, another recommendation is to conduct a study like this in other higher education institutions, technical institutions as well, so that comparative findings might be revealed. Finally, it is also suggested to conduct the content analysis on the variable of this study.

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