

Role of Political Talk Shows in Creating Political Awareness among Pakistani Youth: A Case Study of General Elections 2013

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the influence and role of political talk shows in generating political awareness amongst Pakistani educated youth. The researcher aims at measuring the youth's level of political awareness and involvement, and the extent to which these educated youth are persuaded by political talk shows about political affairs. The respondents involved in this study consist of the students of Government College University Faisalabad, Pakistan. The researcher selected 200 respondents from all departments of Government College University Faisalabad. The researcher applied non-probability sampling technique for data collection. Questionnaires were used as a tool for data collection. Findings showed that political talk shows influenced the youth and played a key role in providing political awareness. These findings also revealed that political talk shows have great deal of impacts on youngsters in helping them to get the knowledge about their basic social and political rights.

Keywords: Political Communication; Talk Shows; Pakistani Youth; General Elections 2013

INTRODUCTION

Electronic media play a key role in bringing change and structuring the political institutions and socialising the public on

various political aspects (Kenski & Stroud, 2006). Pakistan has an energetic media landscape, which regardless of political pressures and direct bans periodically subject to from the government, enjoy the freedom to a large extent. In 2002, Pakistani electronic media industry was liberalised and experienced a big media boom.

During his government, General Pervez Musharraf liberalised the electronic media

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sector leading to an explosion of local, privately-owned satellite television channels distributed via cable networks. The Pervez Musharraf government, which constituted the 'Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority' (PEMRA), acted as a watchdog to control this newly liberalised sector. During Musharraf's regime (2000 to 2008), 89 local satellite television channels were launched and 26 foreign channels were granted broadcast rights in the country. On the radio front, 138 FM radio licenses were granted during the same period, of which about 115 were operational by 2012. In the severe competitive circumstances, commercial interests became dominant and quality journalism gave way to socialise the masses.

After 2008, these television channels have formed the conception of political talk shows which is now being devotedly followed by Pakistani nation. These privately owned television channels have complete accessibility to rural and urban areas and for this reason, such talk shows are shaping a silent revolution in the country. The television channels have opted almost similar format for their political talk shows by inviting both ruling and opposition parties for discussing political issues. In Pakistan, several people believe that it is a good thing to set up meaningful discussions between different political personalities and which will eventually lead into a consensus on most important political matters that prevail in the country (Ahmed, 2010).

On the contrary, others argue that such political talk shows have done nothing in

creating and enhancing the political and social awareness because many years have passed since such talk shows started and we still see the same politicians are being elected. For example, Jamshed Dasti was disqualified due to his fake B.A degree and many talk show anchors criticised him, but in the subsequent elections, he got overwhelming victory. These talk shows are becoming a forum whereby participants fight and audience get worthless debate. Many people rate these talk shows as entertainment shows. The input of political entities and members of parliament in such TV shows have added to the reinvigorating effects of these debates on democracy in the country. Pitching this political dialogue to masses has helped in promoting participatory politics, revamp trust and hope in politics and develop the democratic process (Bilal *et al.*, 2009).

Thus, this study evaluates the influence of political talk shows in creating political awareness among the learned youth of the country by discussing political issues. It also measures the level of political awareness among the learned youth based on political information and involvement in general elections. Survey was used as the method to investigate the role of political talk shows and for responding to the research questions.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Pakistan's 10th general election was held on May 11, 2013. This general election was unique in itself that every political party was focusing on youth because almost half the registered voters, or 47.5% of 84.3

million, were under the age of 35. This made Pakistan a comparatively young and energetic nation with a lot of potentials. Surprisingly, this important segment of voters was unnoticed and never focused on by neither political parties nor mass media. Looking back at the history, since the 1970's first general elections, political parties have never took youth as an important asset in elections; however, when the minimum voting age was set at 18 years in general elections, the youngsters have become the apple of all political leader's eye.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The political communication has changed in recent past and in contemporary research studies, the meanings of "Democracy" are being transformed. Media play a key role in contemporary global political affairs (Gamson, 1999). Many scholars of social sciences and communication studies are of the view that coverage of political issues by mass media can create a disparity in political affairs. Many communication scholars believe that the media, particularly TVs, are valued enough in world's political matters (Baum, 2005; Dahlgren, 2009).

Mass media provide a forum to political parties and their candidates to win the trust of their potential voters before and during elections. Yet, there is no upcoming election or political shows that can enlighten people by showing numerous perspectives on the significant political matters. Mass media can perform as a watchdog to keep an eye on public officials in guiding and preventing them from breaching the public trust (Lyangar & McGrady, 2007, 17).

Mcquail (2005) stated that even though television is mostly rated as a medium of entertainment, it can play a critical role in contemporary politics. In fact, it is considered as a major source for information and news for every person and also an important channel of communication which links politicians and their potential voters, particularly during election time. TV has normally remained trustworthy and reliable in its informally allocated role of public informer (p. 35).

A large number of political figures participate in TV talk shows to give their points of view in the discussions concerning community interests (Tolson, 2001). Since 1990s, the appearance of political entities in political talk shows has created huge interest in this genre, inciting mass communication intellectuals to study the political and social impacts of TV talk shows (Timberg, 2002).

The reputation and popularity of TV talk shows is entrenched in their capability to split socio-political borders by dealing with contentious matters and holding political figures and officials answerable to the public. TV talk shows deal with issues of common people and open new horizons that become a source of communication between the public and the leaders. Many political party leaders and their members participate in TV talk shows to give explanation about their viewpoints on numerous public issues. They also appear on such talk shows for coverage, promotion, public relations, and to enlighten the audience regarding their political agendas (Lee, 2002; Bernard & Erler, 2003).

In 2000, Pew Research Centre published a report on the information sources of American youth during election times. The report stated that 34% of respondents aged between 18 to 29 years received information about political issues from late night TV talk shows. The newspapers and television news programmes pointed out this report and showed stories and comments regarding the role of late night shows which serve as a key source of political information for America's youth (Young & Tisinger, 2006).

Robert Lloyd (2009) considers Barak Obama's participation in late night comedy talk show as extraordinary as he became the first American sitting president to appear on such shows. Lee (2002) states that the participation of such political entities and party leaders in TV shows helps to minimise the gap between common people and ruling elite. He also believes that such infotainment shows can help in diminishing the difference in political involvement among the public (Lee, 2002). For that reason, political talk shows can be rated as giving a democratising impact by providing audience unconventional alternatives to gain political knowledge.

Ross (2004) writes that TV signifies the "real public space in which politics occur and through which citizens comprehend the political process". Targeted audience and participants who telephone in such programmes distinguish the political talk shows genre as a "public sphere" where various views are expressed and alternative voices are heard.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To analyse the influence of political talk shows in creating political awareness among the educated youth of Pakistan.
2. To measure the level of political awareness among educated youth based on political information and participation in elections.

METHODOLOGY

To study the role of Political Talk Shows in creating political awareness among Pakistani youth, the researcher used the survey method to collect the required data. Universe for this study consisted of the students of Government College University Faisalabad (Pakistan). The survey is the appropriate method for the present study because the objective of this study is to measure the level of political awareness of Pakistani youth. Therefore, researcher selected 200 respondents (100 males and 100 females) from Government College University Faisalabad, Pakistan, to measure the influence of talk shows in creating political awareness in Pakistan. Due to convenience sampling, equal input of both genders was ensured. The researcher used close-ended questionnaires to evaluate level of awareness among educated youth using the Likert scale method, whereby the value 1 signifies strong disagreement. The quantitative data collected from the survey are meant to explain the different levels of opinion and understanding of political talk shows. It is believed that the more exposure the youth have, the higher the understanding

and awareness they have about political situations in Pakistan.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Do political talk shows influence Pakistani youth in creating political awareness?
2. What is the level of political awareness among educated youth based on political information and participation in elections?

FINDINGS

The results derived from the findings and interpretation of the study are discussed in this section. The results were obtained to answer the research questions which were formulated by the researcher at the beginning of the study.

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that out of 200 respondents, 96 (48.00%) watched political talk shows on a daily

basis. Meanwhile, 64 (32.00%) watched the talk shows once in a week, and 17 (8.50%) watched them twice in a week. However, 23 (11.50%) respondents only watched such shows a few times each month, i.e. whenever they had free time. The amount of talk shows watched by both genders is immensely different, i.e. 144 (72.00%) males compared to only 56 (28.00%) females watching these talk shows. This finding shows that the females are taking less interest in watching political talk shows as compared to their male counterparts.

Table 2 indicates that 103 (51.5%), or the majority of respondents believe that political talk shows provide information to the public, whereas 60 (30.0%) respondents believe that these current affair programmes are useful forums for dialogue. Nevertheless, 12 (6.0%) respondents consider that political talk shows provide entertainment to the masses, while 25 (12.5%) rated these programmes as forum for fights.

TABLE 1
Frequency of watching Political Talk Shows

Frequency	Total	Percent	Male	Female
Daily	96	48.00	75	21
Once a week	64	32.00	48	16
Twice a week	17	8.50	9	8
A few times each month	23	11.50	12	11
Total	200	100	144	56

TABLE 2
Respondents' Opinion about Political Talk Shows

Opinion	Total	Percent	Male	Female
Informative	103	51.5	76	27
Entertaining	12	6.0	4	8
Effective platform for dialogue	60	30.0	37	23
Forum for fights	25	12.5	10	15
Total	200	100	127	73

Fig. 1 below informs the number of respondents who think political talk shows as a source of awareness regarding political matters in the country. Around 44.5 percent of the respondents agreed that political talk shows are creating awareness regarding political matters, followed by 21.5% of the respondents who strongly agreed that political talk shows are creating political awareness. However, 7.5% of the respondents stayed neutral and about 10.0% strongly disagreed with the impression that political talk shows are creating political awareness. The results also showed that most of the respondents (44.5%) believe that political talk shows are providing information, imparting knowledge and awareness regarding political issues in the country.

Fig. 2 illustrates the importance and influence of political talk shows to change the political structure. This figure shows that 40% of the respondents disagreed to the notion that political talk shows are very much significant in changing the political structure in Pakistan. Other 30% of the respondents strongly disagreed that political talk shows can play a pivotal role to change the political structure of the country because they believe that there are certain other factors involved. The political structure in Pakistan comprises election procedures, electoral colleges, political parties, election commission’s guidelines about elections, political parties and institutions like parliament and senate. During the election campaign, TV channels formulate different segments and provide plentiful time space

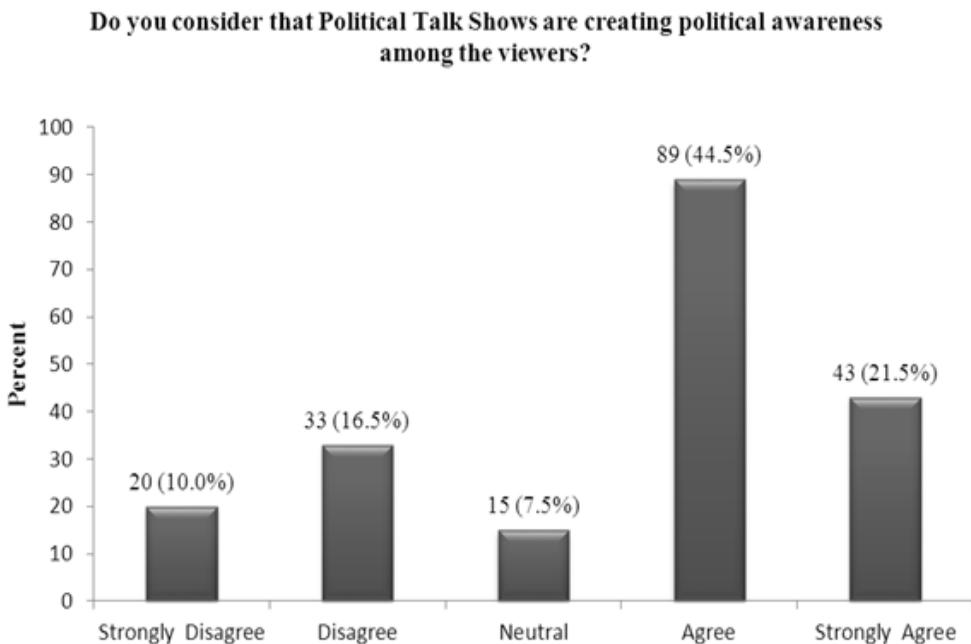


Fig.1: Respondents’ opinion concerning the significance of Political Talk Shows in creating political awareness

Do you consider that Political Talk Shows can be influential to change the political structure?

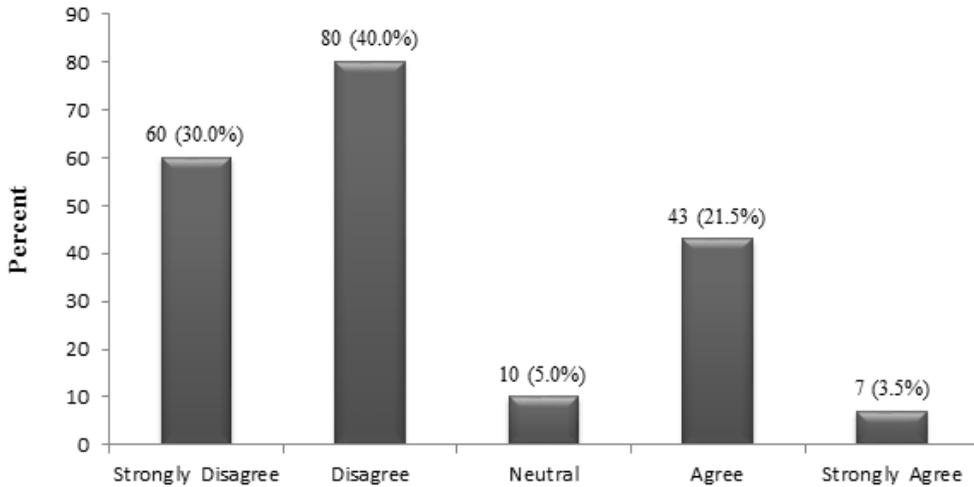


Fig.2: Respondents' opinion concerning the influence of Political Talk Shows in changing the political structure

for the upcoming elections. Almost all the channels design very attractive sets and decorate their studios as election cell and in news and talk shows discuss all the aspects of current and previous political structure to give insight to public.

Fig.3 below indicates that political talk shows are highly influential in motivating youth to connect with any political party or leader and build up their trust in them. This figure shows that 47.5 percent of the respondents agreed to the above said notion. On the contrary, 19.5 percent of respondents disagreed that political talk shows are much influential in engaging and developing trust in a particular political party or a leader. Meanwhile, around 10 percent of the respondents remained neutral with this notion. In Pakistan, the political system is bit different because the people's political

affiliations with politicians are on the basis of personality. They do not care about the manifesto of the political party whom the politician belong to.

Fig.4 below depicts the understanding of the respondents on their knowledge about their social and political rights through political talk shows. The findings revealed that majority (38.5%) of the respondents got awareness regarding their social and political rights through political talk shows, although 26.5 percent of them disagreed to this, and 14.5 remained neutral with the notion. This analysis further identified that most of the respondents are aware of their social and political rights and their "Right to Vote" is their democratic and fundamental right.

Fig.5 below indicates that political talk shows are highly influential in motivating

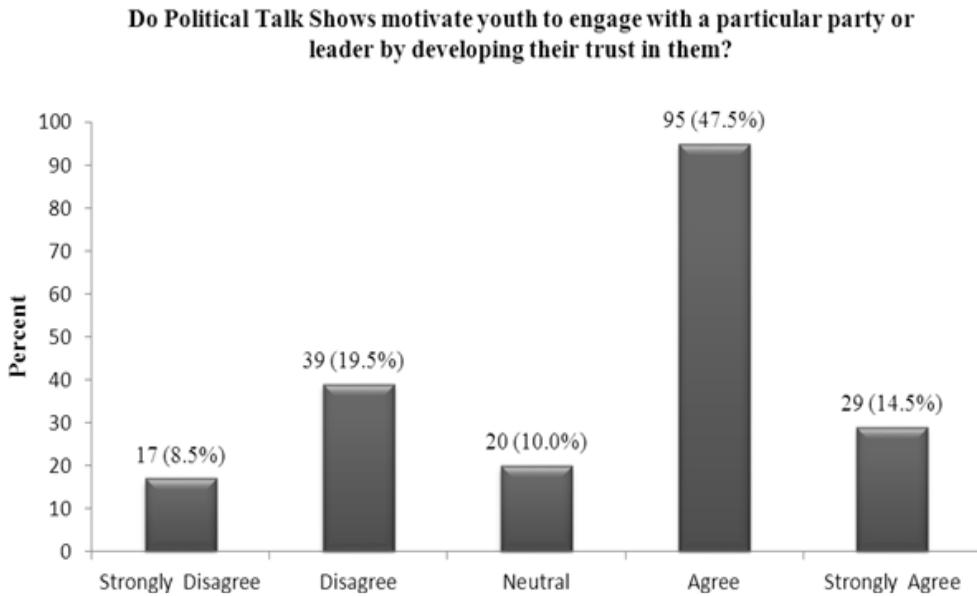


Fig.3: Political talk shows motivate youth in developing trust with any political party or leader

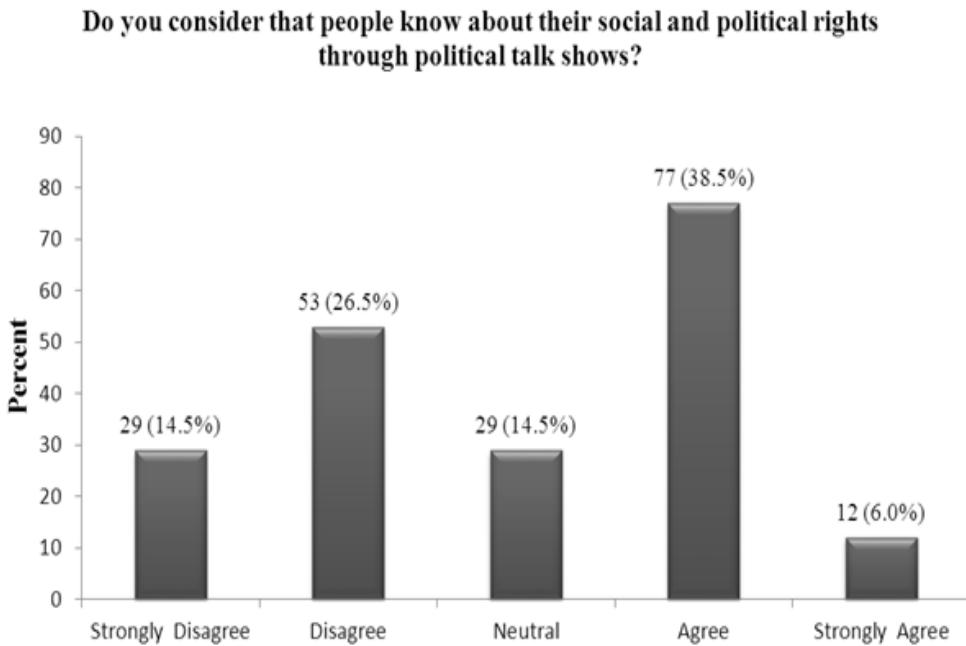


Fig.4: Respondents' view of their knowledge of social and political rights through Political Talk Shows

Do you consider that Political Talk Shows motivate people to cast their vote?

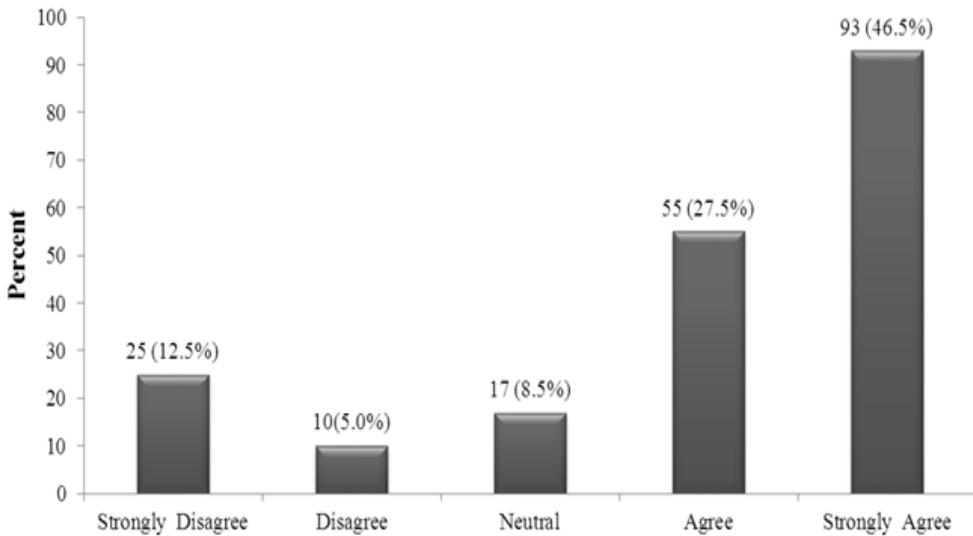


Fig.5: Political Talk Shows motivate people to cast their votes

youngsters to exercise the right to cast their vote in elections. This figure shows that 47.5 percent of the respondents agreed to the said notion. Meanwhile, 19.5 percent of the respondents disagreed that political talk shows are very much influential in engaging and developing trust in a particular political party or a leader. 10 percent respondents remained neutral with this notion. In May 2013, the people of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan went to the general elections to select a new democratic government. In defiance of efforts by the Pakistani Taliban to frighten people from the polls, more than 55% of the approximately 88 million registered voters turned out on May 2013, compared to merely 44% in the general election in 2008.

CONCLUSION

This study is an exploratory study, with the main objectives to identify whether political talk shows are influential in creating political awareness amongst educated youth, political involvement and participation in political process. Political knowledge, issue awareness and motivation to participate in political process are the most important aspects of political awareness so the findings suggested that it is not a myth but a reality that political talk shows are creating political awareness among their viewers. It was also observed from the data that the respondents who frequently watch political talk shows have a tendency to possess more knowledge and insights about their political rights which eventually help the youth to participate in the political process in Pakistan.

Political talk shows bring people closer to the political process by providing them the knowledge and understanding of political process and making them aware that they can make effective contributions by casting their votes. The voter turnout of the general election in 2013 (55%) showed that youth highly participated in political activities because most of them have taken interest in political affairs. The reason for this is that educated youth have the trust and faith in political parties and political system as well. On the contrary, the findings also revealed that political talk shows cannot change the political structure in the country. Political Talk shows have become quite popular in Pakistan. They have given rise to the awareness and although the shows have not helped much in changing the political structure of the country, it is still too early to determine their impacts on the country's political scene. Moreover, the contributions of the Talk shows on many important issues cannot be ignored. In particular, they have huge impacts in creating a noise on the scene about any issue or diverting the public's attention from any critical issue.

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