

## Journal of Peace, Development and Communication



**Volume 05, Issue 1, January-March 2021**  
**pISSN: 2663-7898, eISSN: 2663-7901**  
**Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36968/JPDC-V05-I01-17>**  
**Homepage: <https://pdfpk.net/pdf/>**  
**Email: [se.jpdc@pdfpk.net](mailto:se.jpdc@pdfpk.net)**

<b>Article:</b>	<b>Media Agenda and Voters' Behavior in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: A Case Study of General Elections-2013</b>
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<b>Published:</b>	30 <sup>th</sup> March 2021
<b>Publisher Information:</b>	Journal of Peace, Development and Communication (JPDC)
<b>To Cite this Article:</b>	Ahmed, Imran, et al. (2021). "Media Agenda and Voters' Behavior in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: A Case Study of General Elections-2013" <i>Journal of Peace, Development and Communication</i> , vol. Volume 5, no. Issue 1, 2021, pp. 192-206, <a href="https://doi.org/10.36968/JPDC-V05-I01-17">https://doi.org/10.36968/JPDC-V05-I01-17</a>
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### Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between voters' exposure to media agenda in terms of exposure of different political contents by the all media sources and its consequent impacts on their voting behavior. Data collection has been made with the help of face to face interviews method from 150 respondents (75 male and 75 female registered voters) belonging to province Khber Pakhtunkhwa of Pakistan. Findings explored that in KPK during 2013 general elections, PTI (Pakistan Tahreek-e-Insaf) is perceived as the most favored party over other political parties. Findings further revealed that respondents preferred social media most influential to acquire political information followed by electronic media, social interaction and print media. To measure the change induced through exposure to mass media, findings revealed that majority of respondents opted very much role of media that strengthen the notion of powerful effects of media on voting behavior. The findings further illustrated that to produce change in voting behavior, Facebook identified as most influential source among other social media applications, Talk Shows from TV contents, columns in newspapers' contents and news in radio shown the as most influential in this regard. Respondents' dependency to alter vote choice found less dependent on TV followed by newspapers and almost negligible for radio whereas social media performed a noteworthy role in this context. **Keywords:** voters' exposure, media agenda, talk shows, Facebook, political content, social media

## Introduction

With the emergence and development as a field, political science has been a fundamental question ever “Why people cast their vote?”, multiple theories questioning the determinants that play a central role in vote casting behavior of the voters in a democratic society like social attachments, orientations towards attitudes and different socio-economic interests of the voters as the significant factors influencing voter behavior (Fiorina, 1981; Martin & Lipset, 1967; Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960 and Downs, 1957). In supporting the democratic culture and values in a democracy, responsible and free role of mass media is increasingly required. The fair and impartial media perform a central role in raising political awareness among publics by choosing certain matters and framing these issues. It also provides a platform for discussing and criticizing these issues in a political system.

Media plays a vital role in a proper democratic setup. Discussion about the media role in an electoral process often focuses on the watchdog role of mass media among competitive candidates as well as political parties. Several studies revealed that political communication of the mass media influence the intended voters significantly. In the view of theoretical approaches that propose the impacts of media on public behavior. For instance, the powerful effects model, for example, the third-person effect (Davison, 1983), the hypodermic needle theory (DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach, 1982) and the spiral of silence theory (Noelle-Neumann, 1974). These models advocate that under certain circumstances, media can influence the public at a large.

Citizens acquire knowledge and information concerning government and politics by the news covered by newspapers and television. In recent decades, studies have discovered how the mass media forms the publics’ behavior, attitude and knowledge (James T. Hamilton 2004; Luigi, Zingales and Alexander, Dyck, 2002; Robin Burgess and Timothy J. Besley, 2002). The media contents can persuade the audience with the help of specific reporting (Ethan, Kaplan and Stefano, DellaVigna, 2007) as well as by giving priority toward coverage (Joel, Waldfogel and Lisa, M. George, 2006). Media research and voter learning studies provided conflicting results, some scholars found a strong association between issue information and newspaper reading and on the other hand, some found relatively low or no correlation between media and public information (Weaver & Drew, 1993; Robinson & Davis, 1990 and Robinson & Levy, 1986).

During their everyday composition of political and social reality, media influence the public agenda and its associated concerns in relation to vote-decision and political behavior. Lang and Lang (1981) observed that “influence of the news media extends far beyond the political campaigns”. They further stated that “all news that bears on political activity and beliefs, not only relevant to the vote but also influence in image building of the candidates and political parties, help to emphasize issues subjected to that campaign and will create an atmosphere” (P, 226). According to Cohen (1963), “the press may not be very successful in telling us what to think about; this ability of the mass media to structure audience cognitions and to effect change among existing cognitions has been able the agenda-setting function of mass communication”(P,4).

However, in the view of continuous mushroom growth of news media in Pakistan, especially in terms of newspapers, television channels and the social media contents are considered as the significant sources related to political communication. Moreover, expectations from them in terms of voters’ information, education and opinion building on both national and international issues demands to conduct an objective and systematic study. This study will assist us to determine and evaluate the media role in establishing voting behavior of the targeted voters. The study will use face to face interviews method to draw

meaningful inferences regarding to document the influential role of media in voting behavior during general election-2013 in Pakistan.

### **Literature Review**

Multiple studies have been investigated the existing media role in association with voting behavior and subsequent vote choice. Several models of the voting behavior have been developed on the basis of previous studies such as the sociological model, party identification model (Campbell & al; 1960), the model of the rational model (Down, 1957), etc. Additionally, different determinants and variables have discussed which perform a vital role in the change of voting behavior. These variables include structural variables (Gexic, 1989), demographic variables, cultural variables and socio-economic variables (Blais et al, 2002), psychological variables (Ghiuta, 2014).

In terms of the media effects, previous studies have been identified media's ability to influence and alter the vote-choice of the intended voters as well as to persuade and mobilize new voters. In Spain, during the period of the 1996 general elections, results showed the more positive images of three leaders who were significantly portrayed by the media as compared to other leaders (McCombs, 2000).

Multiple studies around the globe recognized significant association between the public and media precedence, such as Dearing and Rogers 1996; Ghanem 1996 and McCombs and Shaw 1993. The available literature about political information concentrates on a broad range of concerns such as relationship analysis between dependence on diverse shapes of media sources and the consequent political information stage of the exposed public (Berkowitz & Pritchard, 1989), comparative significance of different media sources and its resultant level of political information (Chaffe & Kanihan, 1997; Chaffe & Frank, 1996) and its influence on the valuation of the candidate (Weaver, 1996).

The media impact regarding political involvement has been examined in US extensively (McComb & Shaw, 1972; Weaver, 1996; Tedesco, 2001; Golan & Wanta, 2001; Chaffe & Kanihan, 1997; Tolbert & McNeal, 2003). In shaping political involvement, the media role has been considered from three key perspectives; media role as political information tool (Culbertson & Stempel III, 1986; Berkowitz & Pritchard, 1989; Weaver, 1996; Chaffe & Kanihan, 1997; Chaffee & Frank, 1996), 'agenda-setter' function of media (Golan & Wanta, 2001; Tedesco, 2001; McComb & Shaw, 1972), and the media function for provision of political debates, discussions and participation platform (krueger, 2002, 2005; Hook, 2011).

While Prichard and Berkowitz (1989) identified print media as significant indicator of acquiring political information augmentation, Kahnihan and Chaffe (1996) found the television as a more influential source as compared to print media under certain situations. However, in a study to investigate the role of television and newspapers in the context of political knowledge Frank and Chaffe (1996) concluded that the newspapers are basic information medium for the persons who are "vigorously looking for information". Whereas television is a more influential tool of political knowledge about the persons who have "less political knowledge".

In a longitudinal study conducted by Bartels (1996), it was found that there is a sovereign impact of media over the political agenda. Cook and colleagues (1983) drew an inventive study design and found that the television news heavily influenced the policymakers and they considered the issues more important that were covered more by the TV news. The studies conducted on election campaigns effect found with different outcomes as compared to studies carried out on routine time politics. However, in the electoral process, election campaigns are recognized as an integral part of the political system. In the view of Panebianco (1988), 'undecided voters' make their vote-decision urgently just one day prior or on the day of election.

In a study of general election 2008 conducted by Noman Yasir (2010), findings revealed that respondents used electronic media to acquire political information as compared to other sources of information like newspapers and radio. Neglecting the influence of community leaders in vote casting behavior, most respondents preferred media to get political information. The conclusion revealed that television paid the most significant role in the vote casting behavior of the respondents.

### **Methodology**

As per requirement and nature of this study, quantitative research technique survey research with the help of a well-structured questionnaire was implemented to determine and scrutinize the impacts of the media contents on voters' behavior in Province KPK. Survey was conducted to measure the subsequent voters' perception and behavior owing to media's political contents exposure.

Diverse media political contents from all media sources including electronic media, print media, radio and social media were included. Comparison among these media contents to influence the voters' behavior assisted us to understand and measure the significance of these contents in formation of public opinion.

### **Universe of Study**

The universe of study was comprised of registered voters belonging to Peshawar (capital of KPK), who participated in general election 2013. Purpose and requirement of the study is to identify the impacts of media exposure on their voting behavior.

### **Unit of Analysis**

In this study, unit of analysis are the male and female registered voters from province Khber Pakhtubkhawa.

### **Sampling Technique**

Stratified sampling technique was adapted to explore and identify such a correlation through their demographic characteristic gender (Male/Female). By dividing the respondents into said strata, purposive sampling technique was adopted for data collection on the basis of stratum aforesaid. In terms of purposive sampling, targeted respondents were the registered voters who participated in election-2013 and used their right of vote. Stratum was in possession of equal opportunity in terms of quantity division like equal respondents from both genders male and female.

### **Sample Size**

As per nature and requirement of the study and to explore meaningful outcomes and inferences, a sample set of 150 respondents (75 male and 75 female) was surveyed.

### **Data Collection Instrument**

Data was collected with the help of well-constructed questionnaire. To keep unambiguous data collection, questionnaire was prepared in English as well as in national language Urdu which assisted the respondents to understand the real context and nature of the question for fair response. All of the questions were close ended to obtain clear and transparent statistical data collection and to draw meaningful inferences.

### **Research Hypothesis**

- 1) It is assumed that the electorates obtain significant political knowledge from social media instead of electronic media.
- 2) It is assumed that the electorates obtain significant political knowledge from social media instead of social interaction and print media.
- 3) It is expected that social interaction is more significant to get political information than the electronic and print media.
- 4) It is more probable that significant change induces in vote choice due to media exposure instead of inconsequential.

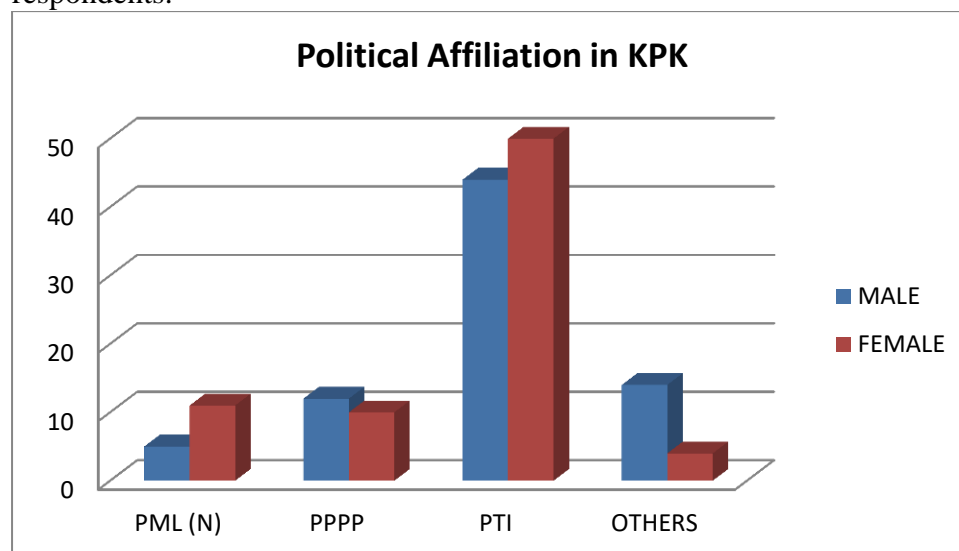
- 5) It is more probable that the vote choice is impacted more from social media than the other sources.
- 6) It is more anticipated that Facebook influences voting behavior more than other sources of social media.
- 7) It is assumed that Talk shows influence the voting behavior more than the other selected contents of television.
- 8) It is expected that front and back pages of newspaper influence more the voting behavior than columns and editorial.

## Findings and Results

### Political Affiliation

Findings of the study to measure political affiliation of the voters who casted their votes in general election-2013 revealed that PTI (Pakistan Tahreek-e-Insaf) is perceived as the most favored party over other political parties in KPK (Fig 1.1). Outcomes of the empirical study have shown that maximum respondents either from male and female preferred PTI with the response ratio of 40 (53.3%) male and 50 (66.7%) female respectively.

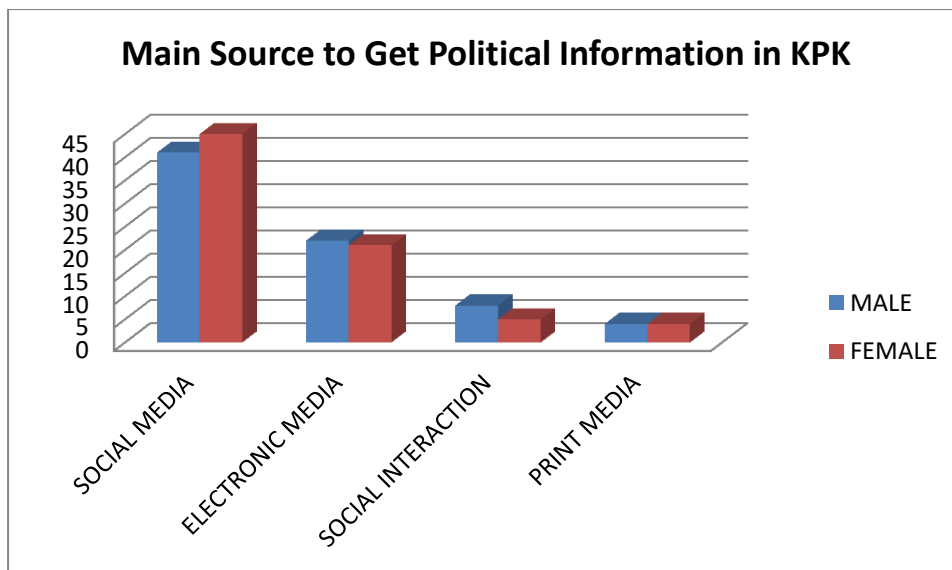
These findings are further followed by PPP (Pakistan People Party Parliamentary) which received a respondents' attention by the 12 (16%) male and 10 (13.3%) female accordingly. PML (N) recognized as the third significant party that received voters' attention of 5 (6.7%) male and 11 (14.7%) female voters. Others (combination of diverse small political parties) found with the response consideration of 18 (24%) male and 04 (5%) female respondents.



**Graph 1.1**

### Main Source to get Political Information

In term of major source to get political information, findings of the study concluded that respondents ranked social media as a main source to acquire political information with a significant difference to other mediums of information followed by electronic media.

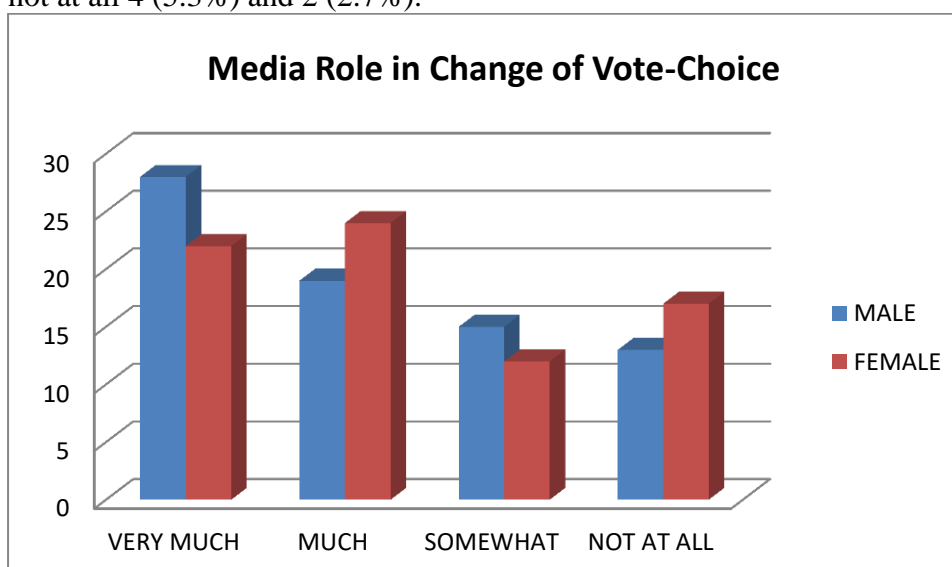
**Graph 1.2**

Findings illustrated that male and female respondents opted social media 41 (54.7%) and 45 (60%) respectively. Electronic media opted by both male and female genders as 22 (29.3%) and 21 (28%) correspondingly. Social interaction remained at third effective source with the ratio of 8 (10.7) and 5 (6.7) by the male and female candidates. And the least importance is given to print media which gained a score of 4 (5.3%) and 4 (5.3%) similarly by the both genders (Graph 1.2).

#### **Change Induced in Vote-Choice owing to Media Exposure**

To measure the intensity of changed induced through media exposure, study's findings concluded that a reasonable number of respondents favored influential role of media in this regard (Graph 1.3). Among respondents, majority of them preferred to opt 'very much' with the ratio of 28 (37.3%) male and 22 (29.3%) female respondents followed by 'much' 19 (25.3%) male and 24 (32%) female respectively, somewhat acquired response ratio of 15 (20%) male and 12 (16%) female and lastly 'not at all' response category achieved a consideration of 13 (17.3%) male and 17 (22.7%) female respondents.

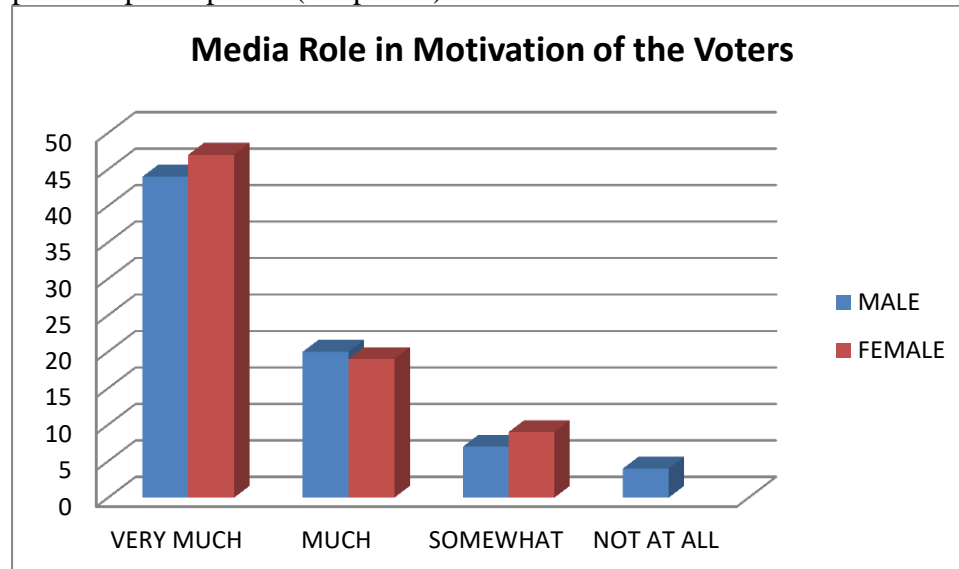
Media role in terms of political leaders' evaluation, empirical findings of the research illustrated that comparatively more respondents identified the media role as very much 42 (56%) and 43 (57.3%) followed by 18 (24%) and 26 (34.7%), 11 (14.7%) and 4 (5.3%) and not at all 4 (5.3%) and 2 (2.7%).



### Graph 1.3

#### Media Role in Motivation of the Voters

By evaluating the role of media in motivation of intended voters, findings concluded that among majority of the respondents emphasized on powerful effects of mass media in this regard. Findings illustrated that among respondents, 44 (58.7%) male and 47 (62.7%) female respondents mentioned 'very much' role of mass media towards their motivation regarding political participation (Graph 1.4).

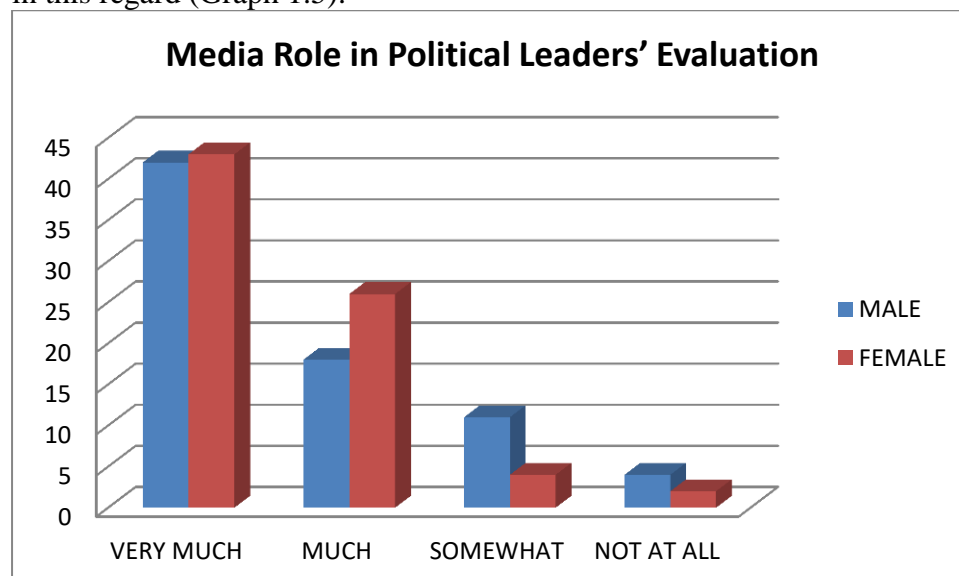


### Graph 1.4

Findings further revealed that 20 (26.7%) male and 19 (25.3%) female respondents pointed out 'much role' of mass media in this context followed by 'somewhat role' as preferred by 07 (9.3%) male and 9 (12%) female respondents. Lastly, 'not at all role' was identified by merely 4 (5.3%) male respondents only (See table 1.5).

#### Media Role in Political Leaders' Evaluation

To measure media role in evaluation of the political candidates/ leaders during general elections-2013, it is evident that most of the respondents identified 'very much' role of media in this regard (Graph 1.5).



### Graph 1.5

Findings concluded that 42 (56%) male and 43 (57%) female respondents preferred 'very much' role of media in political leaders' evaluation. Findings further illustrated that 18

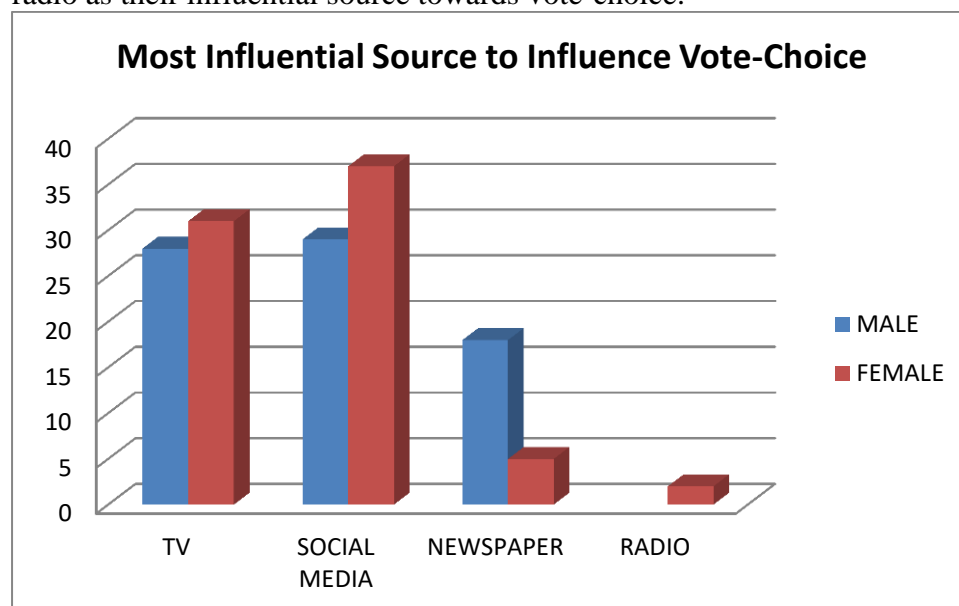


(24%) male and 26 (34%) respondents noted 'much role' of media in this context. 'Somewhat role' acquired a respondents' consideration of 11 (14%) male and 04 (5%) female respondents followed by 'not at all role' that received response consideration by the 04 (5%) male and 02 (3%) female respondents.

### Most Significant Media Source to Influence Vote-Choice

To find out and document most influential media source that performed a significant role in affecting vote-choice of the intended voters during general elections-2013, it is shown that social media is perceived as the most influential source in this regard. These findings are further followed by television, newspaper and radio respectively (Graph 1.6).

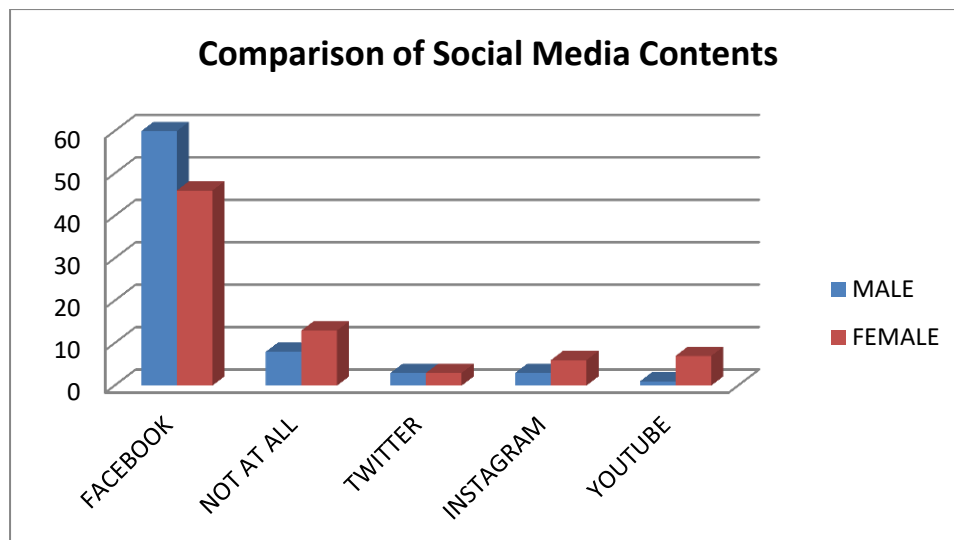
Findings of the study depicted that among respondents of the study, 29 (38%) male and 37 (49%) female preferred and pointed out social media as their most influential media source in formulation or alteration if vote-choice. Findings further revealed that 28 (37%) male and 31 (41%) female respondents identified television as their primary source that influenced their vote-choice. Newspaper acquired a response consideration of 18 (24%) male and 5 (6%) female respondents followed by radio that received least attention by the respondents in this context. Among respondents, only 02 (1%) female respondents considered radio as their influential source towards vote-choice.



**Graph 1.6**

### Comparative Analysis of Social Media Contents

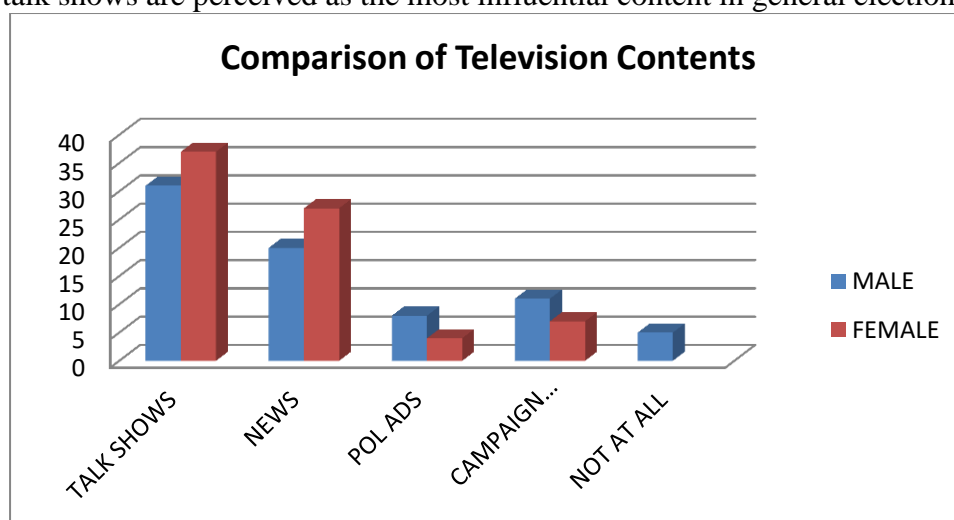
By comparing and evaluating different social media sources that played a significant role in change of voting behavior in this election, findings of the study concluded that facebook received most significant consideration by the respondents (Graph 1.7).

**Graph 1.7**

Among respondents, 60 (80%) male and 46 (61.3%) female respondents recognized facebook as their most significant to influence voting behavior. Findings further revealed that 'not at all' role obtained a response ratio by the 08 (10%) male and 13 (17%) female respondents respectively. These findings are further followed by Instagram that received and noted by 03 (4%) male and 06 (8%) female respondents. Youtube considered by the 01 (1%) male and 07 (9%) female respondents and least attention is achieved by Twitter that acquired a respondents' consideration of 03 (4%) male and with similar ratio 03 (4%) female respondents.

### Comparison of Television Contents

To measure and compare impacts of television contents on voting behavior, it is evident that talk shows are perceived as the most influential content in general elections-2013.

**Graph 1.8**

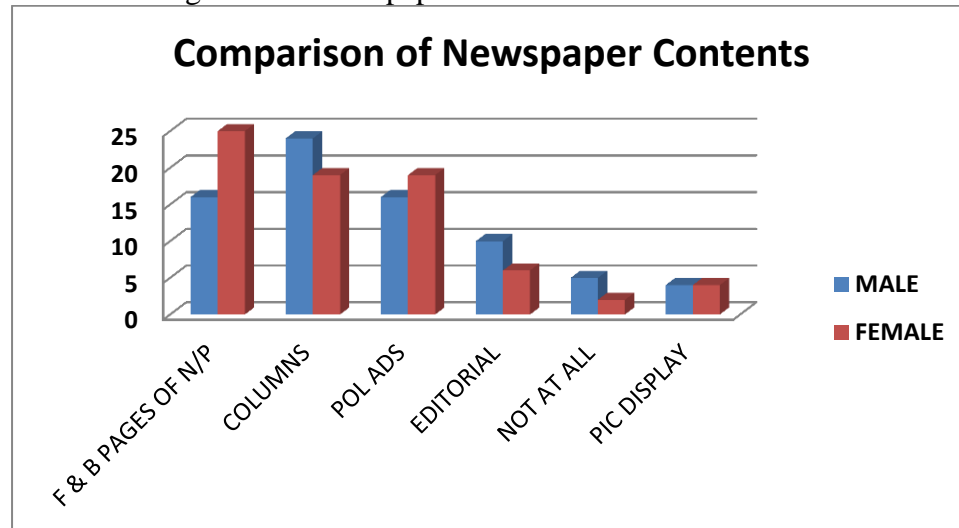
These results are followed by political news, campaign coverage, political advertisement and not at all role respectively. Findings concluded that 31 (41%) male and 37 (49%) female respondents pointed out talk shows as their most significant content among selected television contents (Graph 1.8).

Political news of television found as second influential content with a respondents' attention of 20 (26%) male and 27 (36%) female respondents. It is further shown that campaign coverage obtained a consideration of 11 (14%) male and 07 (9%) female respondents followed by 'political advertisement' that acquired response ratio of 08 (10%)

male and 04 (4%) respondents respectively. Among the selected response categories, least attention is given to 'not at all' role by the respondents that obtained a response ratio by the 05 (6%) male respondents merely.

### Comparative Analysis of Newspaper Contents in Voting Behavior

To measure and analyze the role of newspaper contents in voting behavior during election-2013, it is found that majority of the respondents preferred 'columns' as their most influential content among selected newspaper contents.



**Graph 1.9**

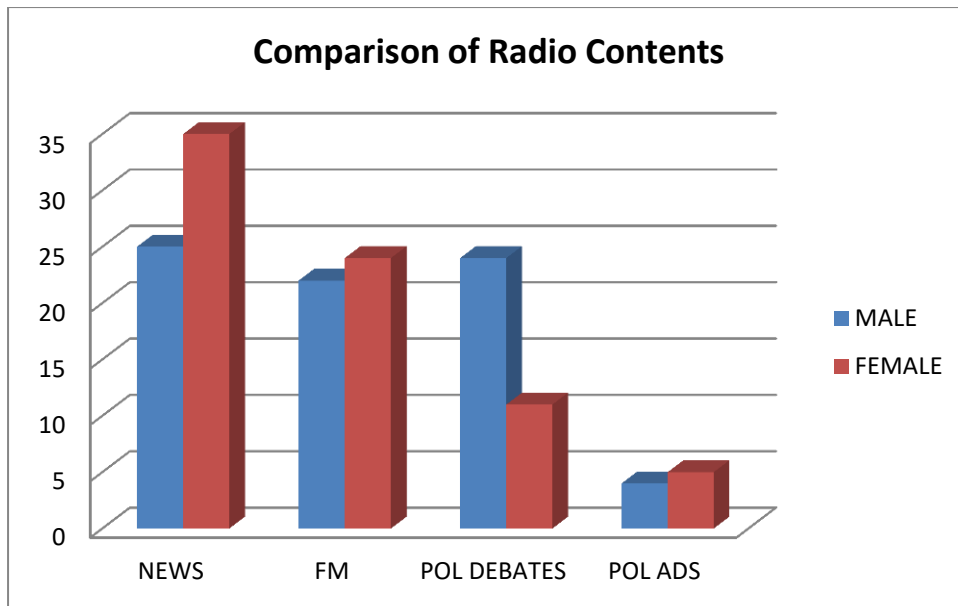
These results are followed by front and back pages of newspaper, political advertisement, editorial, pictorial display and not at all role respectively (Graph 1.9). On the basis of findings, it is evident that columns received respondents' consideration of 24 (32%) male and 19 (25%) female respondents followed by the front and back pages of newspaper with the response ratio of 16 (21%) male and 25 (33%) female responses. Findings further indicated that political advisement received attention by the 16 (21%) male and 19 (25%) female respondents.

Editorial acquired obtained response consideration of 10 (13%) male and 06 (8%) followed by pictorial display with a response ratio of 04 (5%) male and with similar proportion 04 (5%) female respondents. Least importance is given to 'not at all' role that obtained recognition by 05 (6%) male and 02 (3%) female respondents merely.

### Comparison of Radio Contents

Findings of the study to measure and quantify the impacts of radio contents in formulation of voting behavior during this election, it is explored that radio news found as the major content in this regard. These findings are further followed by FM channel, political debates and political advertisements respectively (Graph 1.10).

Findings illustrated that among selected radio contents, political news acquired response consideration of 25 (33%) male and 35 (46%) female respondents followed by FM channel that is considered by the 22 (29%) male and 24 (32%) female respondents accordingly.



**Graph 1.10**

Political debates found at third stage of influence among selected radio contents with a response ratio of 24 (32%) male and 11 (14%) female respondents and minimum consideration is given to political advertisement by the respondents with recognition of 04 (5%) male and 05 (6%) female responses.

### Summary and Conclusion

With the help of study's outcome, an effort has been made to explore the effects of media agenda in terms of its political contents and consequential voting behavior of the intended voters during general election-2013 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Pakistan). Major study's objectives include quantifying the media role that influenced voting behavior of the electorates in this election. In addition, to identify most significant media source responsible to bring this change as well as recognition of highly influential media contents among all mediums of information.

Findings of the study regarding quantification of voters' political affiliation revealed that PTI (Pakistan Tahreek-e-Insaf) is perceived as the most preferred political party as compared to other selected parties. Findings of the study further followed by PPP (Pakistan People's Party Parliamentary), PML (Pakistan Muslim League, N) and others (combination of different small political parties) respectively. To identify the major source to acquire political information, findings illustrated that social media is found as the most imperative source in this regard. These results are further followed by electronic media, social interaction and print media accordingly.

Findings of the study in this regard, supported the study's hypotheses, "It is assumed that the electorates obtain significant political knowledge from social media instead of electronic media" and "It is assumed that the electorates obtain significant political knowledge from social media instead of social interaction and print media". "It is expected that social interaction is more significant to get political information than the electronic and print media". In terms of print media, it was partially supported as social interaction was found more significant to acquire political information as compared to print media and partially rejected as electronic media was found more dominant as compared to social interaction in this regard.

In the measurement of change induced owing to media exposure in this election, findings revealed that majority of the respondents favored to opt 'very much' role of media in this regard. Findings are further followed by 'much', 'somewhat' and 'not at all' role respectively. Findings of the study in this view, confirmed the powerful media impacts over

voters' behavior in election-2013. Results in this context, supported the research hypothesis: 'It is more probable that significant change induces in vote choice due to media exposure instead of inconsequential'.

To measure and recognize most influential media source responsible to alter or strengthen vote-choice, findings of the study depicted that social media is considered more significant by the majority of the respondents. These outcomes are followed by television, newspaper and radio correspondingly. In this view, social media identified and perceived as the most influential media source which performed a vital role to influence targeted audience. On the other hand, radio found with a minimal or almost negligible impacts on vote-choice as compared to other selected mediums. The study's findings, in this view provided full support to hypothesis of study, 'It is more probable that the vote choice is impacted more from social media than the other sources'.

To identify and document the most influential source of social media that influenced voting behavior at large in this election, facebook is perceived as the most significant source by majority of the respondents. Facebook is further followed by 'Not at all', 'Instagram', 'Youtube' and 'Twitter' respectively. Study's outcomes according this context, approved the research hypothesis, 'It is more anticipated that Facebook influences voting behavior more than other sources of social media'.

To find out most significant content among television contents, findings depicted that talk shows found as major content among selected television contents which performed a noteworthy role in this regard. These findings are further followed by political news, campaign coverage, political advertisements and not at all response categories accordingly. In this view, study's results approved and fully supported hypothesis, 'It is assumed that Talk shows influence the voting behavior more than the other selected contents of television'.

In terms of most influential contents among newspaper contents, findings concluded that columns in newspaper found most significant content that influenced voting behavior at large as compared to other selected newspaper contents in the study. These results are further followed by front and back pages of newspaper, political advertisement, editorial, pictorial display and not at all response categories.

Study's outcomes in this view extended to partial support the study's hypothesis, 'It is expected that front and back pages of newspaper influence more the voting behavior than columns and editorial'. It is partially supported as front and back pages of the newspaper influenced more than editorial and partially rejected as front and back pages of the newspapers influenced more than columns.

To identify most influential content of radio towards voting behavior, findings explored that radio news are perceived as the most influential content as compared to other selected radio contents. Political news is further followed by FM channel, political debates and political advertisement respectively.

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