

Effects of Selective Exposure of GEO TV and ARY TV on the Perceptions of Viewers regarding the Electoral Rigging Issue in Pakistan: An Assessment

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the relationship between selective exposure and partisan media effects on the university students' perception. The analysis is based on a survey of opinion of a carefully selected sample of 185 students from the University of Gujrat. The findings reveal that although the students have become more politically active and choosy in channel selection during electoral rigging issue in Pakistan, yet they don't avoid contradictory information. Selective and diverse exposure, both are prevailing among the students. They are not only watching GEO TV, but also ARY TV for electoral rigging information. However, multiple linear regression results found GEO TV as a predictor in shaping pro PML-N attitude. On the other hand, ARY TV is a predictor for shaping pro-PTI perception.

Keywords: Selective Exposure, Electoral Rigging, Pakistani Media, GEO TV, ARY TV.

Introduction

Selective exposure is a debated topic in mass communication and media. Concept of selective exposure suggests that People usually favor to their interest and oppose the contradictory information.¹ Therefore, people usually like to watch like-minded media. They tend to watch their favorable media and ignore unfavorable media.^{2, 3} Selective exposure and the reinforcement of existing predispositions during Political campaigns have been a familiar theme and common belief in research since the ground breaking study People's Choice.⁴

On the other hand, role of media partisanship in political system has also become an interesting debate among communication researchers. As 68

¹ Baran, Stanley, & Dennis Davis, Mass Communication Theory: Foundations, Ferment, and Future, Nelson Education, 2011.

² Smith, Eric RAN. What Americans Know about Politics and Why It Matters, *Political Science Quarterly*, 112, no. 2 1997, pp. 314-316.

³ Stroud, Natalie Jomini. Polarization and Partisan Selective Exposure, *Journal Of Communication* 60, no. 32010, pp. 556-576.

⁴ Lazarsfeld, Paul Felix, Bernard Berelson, & Hazel Gaudet. *The people's Choice*. 1944.

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percent of the American public believe that the media is politically biased.⁵ Similarly, media leanings are also being observed in other countries. Levendusky demonstrates that partisan media polarize the electorate by taking relatively extreme citizens and making them even more extreme.⁶ Partisani media shows only favorable aspects of a candidate or party and tend to avoid unfavorable aspects of that candidate or party.⁷ The aim of present study is to analyze the relationships among selective exposure, media partisanship, and perceptions of university students about political parties. It examines how partisan media reinforce students' perceptions about their political parties.

Electoral Rigging Issue – 2013

Rigging during elections has been an interesting phenomenon in the political history of Pakistan. It has been observed that electoral rigging came into account after every elections starting from 1977 to elections 2008.⁸ Elections 2013 were unique in a sense that a massive political mobilization among youth was observed. Another important aspect of election 2013 was the inclination of the people toward a third political party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), as compared to the previous trend of bi-party elections. During elections, youth was very enthusiastic and they were participating in rallies and conventions. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf emerged as a 3rd political force all over the Pakistan. The party was of the view that they are about to clean sweep election 2013 by seeing the interest of youth and participation of the class which never participated in elections before.

All these dynamics were the factors, which made leadership of PTI confident about their political victory. Unlike these predictions, results of the elections 2013 were quite different. Although PTI got reasonable number of seats in National assembly and was able to establish its government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), province of Pakistan, yet PTI could not get results according to its expectation.

PTI raised electoral rigging issue, and blamed Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) leadership for rigging. They claimed that a systematic rigging was done in election. Leadership of PTI demanded to open

⁵ Devaney, Haley, *Perceptions of Media Bias: Viewing the News Through Ideological Cues*, A Senior Honor, Thesis, University of California, San Diego 2013.

⁶ Levendusky, Matthew S. Why do Partisan Media Polarize Viewers? *American Journal of Political Science* 57, no. 3 2013, pp. 611-623.

⁷ Bernhardt, Dan, Stefan Krasa, & MattiasPolborn, Political Polarization and the Electoral Effects of Media Bias, *Journal of Public Economics*, 92, no. 5-6 2008, pp. 1092-1104.

⁸ Gilani, I. S. *How Elections are Stolen and the Will of the People is Defeated*, Gallup Pakistan, 2008

four constituencies for check the level of rigging in elections. Street protests were started right after elections. On August, 2014, PTI started grand protest against rigging. Imran Khan started “Azadi March” towards Islamabad, and decided to stage sit-in until his demands were not fulfilled. During sit-in, Imran Khan blamed that under the present Prime Minister free and fair investigation of rigging is impossible. PTI demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

During whole movement against electoral rigging, media role had become very interesting. During the movement, Imran Khan came into direct confrontation with chief editor and owner of Geo TV & daily Jang group, Mir Shakeel-ur-Rahman. During all this, PTI found support from ARY TV that emerged as an opponent and competitor of Geo TV. It was the starting point of media partisanship. The projection of electoral rigging issue was drawn in different ways by both media houses. Media was observed as divided on the electoral rigging issue in Pakistan. Geo TV became pro-PML-N and ARY had become pro-PTI channel. Both TV channels coverage was observed contradictory to each other. This study intends to demarcate the level of media partisanship and its impact on viewers.

Selective Exposure and Polarization

Selective exposure suggests that people only tend to watch, hear or read information which supports their preexisting attitudes, and they avoid contradictory information. As Feiler, Goeree, and Yariv experimental study shows that people read more that political news which in favor of their proffered politicians.⁹

Previous work on selective exposure illustrates that people do not compete attitudes challenging information because of their social environment and awareness of such information.¹⁰ People with strong beliefs are more motivated and conscious to defend their opinions. People having strong predisposition, are more accept the challenge to defend their opinions.¹¹ But it is also an argument, that media is promoting fragmentation and diversity of views. This thing is making audience more choosy and active

⁹ Feiler, L. E., J. Goeree, & Leeat Yariv. *An Experimental Study of Selective Exposure. Working Paper*, California Institute of Technology, 2006.

¹⁰ Sears, David O., & Jonathan L. Freedman. Selective Exposure To Information: A Critical Review, *Public Opinion Quarterly* 31, no. 2 1967, pp. 194-213.

¹¹ Ditto, Peter H., & David F. Lopez. Motivated Skepticism: Use of Differential Decision Criteria for Preferred and Non Preferred Conclusions, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 63, no. 4 1992, p. 568.

in selection of media.¹² Similarly, Garrett described, although people tend to expose themselves towards selective messages, yet they don't avoid contradict views. His argument suggests, selective exposure and diverse exposure, both are essential for working democracy.¹³

On the other side, Niven claims people do view things from different perspectives, and can easily be influenced by a number of factors such as their background, partisanship, religion and so on.¹⁴ Gerber, Karlan, and Bergan also revealed that voter's opinions and predispositions are much effected by the type of news they read, they listen and they watch.¹⁵ Many studies revealed that people with greater political information have more strong results on their political behavior predispositions.¹⁶ It indicates when the people's political knowledge increases, people's attitudes and choices towards their beliefs become more rationale if they are fully informed.

Keeping in view the electoral rigging issue, selective exposure theory seems relevant with the watching habits of GEO & ARY TV in district Gujrat in Pakistan. These channels have a variety of programs on different issues. Several viewer prefer to watch the TV channels for authenticity, some favor channels for their spreading harmony. Further people watch different programs on channels that satisfy them. Several have a preference to watch that programs which are in favor of their interested political party. It signifies that watching exposure of TV channels depends on preferences of viewers. Present study focuses on the effect of selective exposure of audience toward partisan media channels; GEO TV and ARY TV. What are the factors that can influence audience to select and watch partisan media (either GEO TV or ARY TV)? Therefore, following statements are hypothesized.

H1: GEO TV viewers are likely to have more positive perception about PML-N as compared to PTI regarding the electoral rigging issue in Pakistan

H2: ARY TV Viewers are likely to have more positive perception about PTI as compared to PML-N regarding the electoral rigging issue in Pakistan.

¹² Kohut, Andrew, Media Myopia: More News is Not Necessarily Good News, *New York Times*, 2004.

¹³ Garrett, R. Kelly, Politically Motivated Reinforcement Seeking: Reframing The Selective Exposure Debate, *Journal of Communication*, 59, no. 4 2009, pp. 676-699.

¹⁴ Niven, David. Tilt, *The Search for Media Bias*, Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002.

¹⁵ Gerber, Alan S., Dean Karlan, & Daniel Bergan, Does the Media Matter? A Field Experiment Measuring the Effect of Newspapers on Voting Behavior and Political Opinions, *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 1, no. 2, 2009, pp. 35-52.

¹⁶ Baron, Robert S., Sieg I. Hoppe, Chuan Feng Kao, Bethany Brunsman, Barbara Linneweh, & Diane Rogers, Social Corroboration and Opinion Extremity, *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 32, no. 6 1996, pp. 537-560.

Methods & Measures

The design of present study based on cross-sectional survey design. Quantitative survey approach was used to examine the exposure patterns of university students and their link with partisan media exposure. Population of the study was the University students. Data was collected from purposively selected 200 respondents, including both male (100) and females (100). Criteria for sample selection was; a) regular student of university, b) having age between 18 to 25 year, c) viewer of GEO TV or ARY TV. All respondents were accessed personally, and Data was collected through face to face administration. After data collection, descriptive and inferential statistics were applied to data by using SPSS version 20. Two hundred questionnaire were administered out of which 185 were returned to the researcher. Therefore, response rate was 92%.

Measures of Study

Demographic information was collected through demographic sheet, asking questions about respondents' gender, education, age and university enrollment. While scales for exposure on both televisions and respondents perception about PML-N and PTI were developed.

Scales for GEO TV Exposure & ARY TV Exposure

Firstly, partisan media was categorized in two media channels; Geo TV and ARY TV. Then five items were constructed to check the respondent watching habits of the Geo TV. Then same five questions were asked about watching ARY TV. All items were asked with relation to electoral rigging issue. These Items included; time spend on channel, channel support to democracy, channel fairness, channel spreading harmony, channel authenticity. All responses were measured at five-point Likert scale; from strongly agree to strongly disagree (Annexures I, II). Reliability was observed; Geo TV scale (Cronbach alpha $r = 0.9$), ARY TV scale (Cronbach alpha $r = 0.9$).

Scale for Perception about PML-N

A 10-item scale was developed to check the viewers' perception about PML-N. All these items were positive statements about PML-N government. Items included; PML-N is biggest party, fair party, appropriateness of Sharif brothers' rule, Democratic Party, other parties protest is unjust, fairly elected party, elimination of corruption during PML-N rule, *Istehkam-e-Pakistan* rallies, infrastructure development, and help of flood victims. Responses were measure at five-point Likert scale, from strongly agree to strongly disagree

(Annexure III). Scale responses were computed by using SPSS. Reliability was observed Cronbach alpha $r = 0.9$.

Scale for Perception about PTI

Similarly, a 10-item scale was developed to check viewers' perception about PTI during electoral rigging issue. All these items were positive statements about PTI. Items were included; PTI protest is just, PTI brings awareness, PTI demands are reasonable, recounting of votes justified, PTI laid foundations for free & fair elections, PTI integrated nation, PTI improved police system in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, rigging will prove, KPK government better than federal government, PTI is popular party. Responses were measure at five-point Likert scale, from strongly agree to strongly disagree (Annexure IV). Scale responses were computed by using SPSS. Reliability was observed Cronbach alpha $r = 0.9$.

Results

This study uses descriptive and inferential statistics for testing hypothesis. As previously noted that four scales were developed and computed with the help of SPSS version 20. Data codification values were assigned as; 1) Strongly disagree, 2) disagree. 3) neutral, 4) Agree, and 5) Strongly Disagree. Four scales were; Scale for GEO TV Exposure, Scale for ARY TV exposure, Scale for PML-N Perception and Scale for PTI Perception. Study found that the respondents tend to watch ARY TV more than GEO TV regarding electoral rigging issue (Table 1). Similarly, respondents perception towards PTI is better than PML-N (Table 1).

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of Scales (N=185)

	a	k	Range	Min	Max	M	SD
Scale for GEO TV Exposure	0.9	5	20.00	5.00	25.0	12.93	6.00
Scale for ARY TV Exposure	0.9	5	20.00	5.00	25.0	17.05	5.44
Scale for PML-N Perception	0.9	10	40.00	10.0	50.0	27.33	10.77
Scale for PTI Perception	0.9	10	40.00	10.0	50.0	33.76	12.64

Note: a = Cronbach alpha reliability, k = number of items, M = mean, SD = Standard deviation

Independent sample t-test were executed to check the effects of gender and age groups on these scales. Findings indicates that in case of PTI perception

scale, mean score of age group 21 to 25 year is significantly high than mean score of age group 18 to 19 year (Table 2).

Table 2 Age Differences in GEO TV Exposure, ARY TV Exposure, PML-N Perception and PTI Perception

	Age Years	N	Mean	SD	t value	Significance
GEO TV Exposure Scale	18 to 21	123	13.35	6.10	1.32	0.19
	22 to 25	62	12.11	5.75		
ARY TV Exposure Scale	18 to 21	123	16.58	5.75	-1.82	0.07
	22 to 25	62	18.02	4.67		
PML-N Perception	18 to 21	123	28.20	11.17	1.53	0.13
	22 to 25	62	25.63	9.78		
PTI Perception	18 to 21	123	31.56	13.29	-3.76**	000
	22 to 25	62	38.13	9.97		

** Mean score of two age groups is significantly different at 0.01 level.

Moreover, gender differences are very significant in effecting all variables of study. Mean score of female respondents is significantly higher than male respondents in exposure towards GEO TV. On the contrary, male respondents mean score is significantly higher than female respondents in exposure towards ARY TV (Table 3). Similarly, Female respondents are more inclined towards PML-N government as compared to male respondents and male respondents are more inclined towards PTI as compared to female respondents (Table 3). In this way, study highlighted that there are significant gender differences in media selection and polarization among students.

Pearson correlation results indicate that audience is not only watching ARY TV but also GEO TV during electoral rigging issue. Furthermore, audience perceptions towards PML-N and PTI are also covariate side by side (Table 4). Correlations among all variables, provides reason to apply multiple linear regression test for testing hypothesis. Linear regression was used to assess the ability of two measure (GEO TV exposure and ARY TV Exposure) to predict levels of perception towards PML-N.

Table 3 Gender Differences in GEO TV Exposure, ARY TV Exposure, PMLN Perception and PTI Perception

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t value	Significance
GEO TV Exposure Scale	Male	81	11.53	5.929	-2.86**	.005
	Female	104	14.03	5.855		
ARY TV Exposure Scale	Male	81	18.22	5.527	2.60**	.010
	Female	104	16.15	5.230		
PML-N Perception	Male	81	23.19	11.697	-4.74**	.000
	Female	104	30.57	8.772		
PTI Perception	Male	81	38.77	11.487	5.06**	.000
	Female	104	29.87	12.164		

** Mean score of two age groups is significantly different at 0.01 level.

Table 4 Relationships among Selective Exposure and Media Choices

	ARY TV Exposure	PML-N Perception	PTI Perception
GEO TV Exposure	-.384**	.629**	-.472**
ARY TV Exposure		-.564**	.630**
PML-N Perception			-.696**

** . Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Preliminary analysis was executed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity and homoscedasticity. Then linear regression test was applied by taking, PML-N perception scale as a dependent variable and GEO TV exposure and ARY TV exposure as independent variables. The total variance explained by the model was 71.9%, $F(2, 182) = 97.4$, $p < .001$. Although, both measure are predicting PML-N perception, however, GEO TV exposure scale recording a higher beta value (beta= 0.48, $p < .001$) than ARY TV exposure scale (beta = -.38, $p < .001$).

Similarly, linear regression test was applied again by taking, PTI perception scale as a dependent variable and GEO TV exposure and ARY TV exposure as independent variables. The total variance explained by the model was 45.9%, $F(2, 182) = 77.3$, $p < .001$. Although, both measure are predicting PTI perception, however, ARY TV exposure scale recording a higher beta value (beta= 0.53, $p < .001$) than GEO TV exposure scale (beta = -.27, $p < .001$).

Discussion

Partisan media role in strengthen preexisting attitudes and perceptions of audience has become an interesting area of research in media sciences. Present research found that Pakistani media has become partisan and different viewers watch different media channels according to their needs

and preferences. As Kohut explains that people watch media according to their political preferences.¹⁷ It is also evident that people with strong political motivation, use only their like-minded media and tend to avoid contradictory information.¹⁸ On the other side, Garrett argues that although inclined towards like-minded media, yet they don't avoid contradictory information.¹⁹ This study also found support for Garrett argument, because GEO TV and ARY TV exposure both were found correlated with one another (Table 4). This suggests that selective as well as diverse exposure both walk side by side among university students during electoral rigging issue. Moreover, GEO TV exposure and ARY TV exposure both correlate with PTI perception and PML-N perception (Table 4).

On the other hand, multiple linear regression results indicate that GEO TV exposure is strong predictor of PML-N perception as compared to ARY TV exposure. Similarly, ARY TV exposure is strong predictor to PTI perception as compared to GEO TV. Therefore, findings support the argument that partisan media strengthen preexisting attitudes (Bernhardt et al., 2008; Devaney, 2013; Gerber et al., 2006; Levendusky, 2013; Smith, 1997; Stroud, 2010). It also indicates that PTI fans inclined towards watching ARY TV, and PML-N fans inclined towards watching GEO TV. It relates with the argument of selective exposure that people tend to watch like-minded channel, and avoid to watch contradictory channel.²⁰ Hence, H1 and H3 find support for confirmation.

It is argued that partisan media of Pakistan is able to strengthen and reinforce political perception of public. It played a crucial role in making PTI workers and PML-N workers more confident about their political parties and leadership. As scholars found that partisan media role is crucial for gaining

¹⁷ Kohut, Andrew, Media Myopia: More News is not Necessarily Good News, *New York Times*, 2004.

¹⁸ Smith, Eric RAN, What Americans Know about Politics and Why It Matters, *Political Science, Quarterly*, 112, no. 2 1997, pp. 314-316.

¹⁹ Garrett, R. Kelly. Politically Motivated Reinforcement Seeking: Reframing the Selective Exposure Debate, *Journal of Communication*, 59, no. 4 2009, pp. 676-699.

²⁰ Baron, Robert S., Sieg I. Hoppe, Chuan Feng Kao, Bethany Brunzman, Barbara Linneweh, & Diane Rogers, Social Corroboration and Opinion Extremity, *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 32, no. 6 1996, pp. 537-560.

Feiler, L. E., J. Goeree, & Leeat Yariv, *An Experimental Study of Selective Exposure, Working Paper*, California Institute of Technology, 2006.

Feldman, Lauren, & Vincent Price, Confusion or Enlightenment? How Exposure to Disagreement Moderates the Effects of Political Discussion and Media Use on Candidate Knowledge, *Communication Research* 35, no. 1, 2008, pp. 61-87.

Luskin, R. C. 2003. *The Heavenly Public: What Would a Fully Informed Citizenry Be Like?* In M MacKuen & G. Rabinowitz Eds, *Electoral democracy* pp. 238-261. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

political confidence. Media in Pakistan has become vibrant and diverse. It is presenting not only pro-government but also pro-opposition views freely. This is a healthy indicator for working democracy in Pakistan. People have also become more fragmented in their preferences and choices of media selection. They are free to select content according to their political preferences. Selective and diverse exposure both were found among university students. However, role of partisan media in reinforcement of political attitudes cannot be underestimated.

Conclusion

It is concluded that university students of Gujrat district, have become politically active and choosy in their selection of media according to their political preferences. During electoral rigging issue, selective exposure as well as diverse exposure was observed. Mostly, audiences watch both news channels for getting information about electoral rigging. However, this study provides considerable evidence for effect of partisan media in strengthening preexisting attitudes and beliefs of audience. Heavy viewers of GEO TV, were found more inclined towards PML-N. On the other side, heavy viewers of ARY TV were found more inclined towards PTI. During electoral rigging issue in Pakistan, media partisanship has too much increased and respondents preferred that media which supports their beliefs and predispositions.