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## **Political Advertisements & Voters Behaviour in 2013 General Elections of Pakistan: Exposure vs Impact Analysis**

### **Abstract**

The paper evaluates the impact of advertisements of three leading political parties of Pakistan; Pakistan Threek-e-Insaf (PTI), Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) on the voting behavior in 2013 General elections. The data was collected through survey from 200 registered voters from the Punjab Province, Pakistan. This study concludes that "vote and support" and "advertising liking" have strong association as the result of loyalty of voters to their respective political party. In addition, the voters' loyalties for their respective political party were also an important factor that reduced the advertising influence. This study reveals that there is no association between "advertising exposure" and "advertising impact" on voter behavior. This study also maintains that there is no relationship between "information richness of advertisements" and "existing political knowledge of respondents."

**Keywords:** Pakistan General Election 2013, Political Advertisements, Media Effects, Media Exposure, Voter Behavior

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## **Introduction**

There are no anecdotes found stating that Pakistan ever had Electronic Political Campaigns during any of its previous elections, however in elections 2013, Pakistani Political Parties dynamically took refuge in electronic medium for bridging the gaps and conveying the information. This changing trend within a country like Pakistan is defiantly of interest, especially when there are urban voters who could access the medium, and in addition to that mostly people are party loyalists, who barely change their opinion no matter to what extent they are exposed to such advertisements.

Despite these facts the party's ran far-reaching campaigns spending large amount of wealth depending on their capacity. Instead of directly dealing with the electorates as well as producing more printed material for distribution, they intentionally or unintentionally shifted their course of action, focusing more on social media websites along with electronic media instead of opting for other mediums with lesser impact. Believing medium is the message it should have been a gigantic influential stunner and so this paper attempts to find out an answer to it.

Every channel without a doubt broadcasted political ads during their prime time regardless of any support and with complete objectivity; indeed it was in favor of them both party and channels, for media it aided in profit articulation similarly sponsors paying extravagantly as it was supposedly one of the best mediums for acknowledging the electorates.

The basic objective of this study is to measure the effectiveness of political ads in changing the voting behavior while focusing on three major political parties running neck to neck in 2013 General Elections in Pakistan including PPP (Pakistan Peoples Party), PTI (Pakistan Threek-e-Insaaf), and PML-N (Pakistan Muslim League -Nawaz). It proposes three questions including: what extent the voting behavior changed after being exposed to political advertisements. In addition gratification factor is covered while keeping in view the transmission of information to the ambivalent and Non-ambivalent voters. Lastly the connection between loyalists vote and support to a certain party and their fondness for that specific party's ad was also observed. All three questions asked leads to measure the exposure vs. effect of political advertisements during election campaign of 2013.

### **Defining Political Advertising**

Advertising is the structured and composed non-personal communication, usually paid for and commonly persuasive in nature, about products (goods, services and ideas) by identified sponsors through various mediums (Arens, 2008, p. 7). Similarly, the basic notion of a political ad revolves around the same definition it is paid, persuasive but instead of promoting certain product it promotes an idea. Correspondingly in Political advertisements specifically to maintain the “Interpretive Dominance” (Smith, 2008, pp. 598-608) is challenging. However, undoubtedly most of the scholars agree to the fact that political advertisements which are having a strengthened interpretive dominance works best. Electronic ads (Political advertisement on TV channels) become the foremost means of communication by the parties to persuade ambivalent voters, and to make sure that they turn up and vote in their favour on the Election Day. A greater turn over or an unexpected shift in votes on an Election Day ultimately also insures the success of an ad (Tedesco, 2002, p. 38).

### **Fundamentals of Successful Advertisements**

The success of an ad banks on an efficient communication model; where perceived message is exactly the same as that of what is conveyed. For instance, according to Hyme a communicative competence is essentially important, using language that is comprehensible by the general masses and socially appropriate to be accepted (Hyme as cited in, Siddique, 2013, p. 27). A success of an ad is when denotation and connotation has no difference, more precisely denotation working as a Hypodermic Needle striking firm changing the political belief of a voter (Ridout, 2007, p. 467).

Associating it with Marshal McLuhan’s “Medium is the Message theory” (MCluhan, 1964, p. 9) Steven Roberts approves the phenomena of medium dominating in the success of a message according to him television is the most efficient medium of the times, not just that it has been one since long (Roberts as cited in, Caywood, 1987, p. 16). The electronic advertisements are being used in US immensely since quite a long time, and the number of dollars spent since past 25 years ascertains the significance(Caywood, 1987, p. 16). Not just that it is increasing two folds annually(Ridout, 2007, p. 465).Koch (2008) also states that television advertisements perhaps have become the most significant means of communication for the parties to the voters (p. 609).

Two key apprehensions confronted in munificent communication include, firstly uneven exposure to the data provided in terms of conception, correspondingly in addition to that finding out the total number of people was being exposed to that disseminated information. Secondly the disparity in information perceived and delivered are poles apart (Ridout, 2007, p. 467). The fundamental aspect for a successful ad is the one termed by Jacob and Shapiro as “Crafted Talk” i.e. using words which are popular enough and can lead to uniform attachment, close relation to public opinion (Jacob and Shapiro, 2000, as cited in, Jamieson, 2003, p. 147).

Language used in advertising has significant importance in making advertisement successful. Language in verbal context is indeed crucially important aspect not to be ignored as in Gramsci view it is a major tool leading towards hegemony, (Gramsci, 1999) agreeing Sapir and Whorf states language is a greater force in building a social reality. (Siddiqui, 2013, pp. 16, 32) According to Butler Language should also be analysed critically as it is not just what we hear it has many hidden meanings underneath (Siddiqui, 2013, p. 16). Be it Gramsci view of language control over others mind (Siddiqui, 2013, p. 17) or Said’s ideology of language playing part in politics both leads to lone rudimentary conclusion that it has a lot to do with power and the significance of it should not to be ignored (Herman, 1978, p. 8). Moreover even certain structural aspects like that of building an individual’s ideology some way or the other strongly relates to language. Language has a power which can change things unknowingly smooth enough but still coercive in nature. As Said and Chomsky states language can easily be used for manufacturing consent where a consumer has no free will of his own (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, pp. 14-15). The success of an ad not just relies upon the structure but its trajectory (non-verbal) is equally significant and noteworthy, as according to Mac Erickson advertising is “Truth well Told” (Arens, 2008), presenting a non-tangible political idea to advocate oneself truthfully, ethically and creatively.

#### **Advertisement as a medium**

There is no doubt in claiming that a voter is going to collect its information from either television talk shows or advertisement before stamping a ballot paper (Kruse, 2001), the case is different if one has a direct link with the party, is an active member, or having a strong family affiliation which is indeed a common practice within Pakistani voters. Their loyalties don’t permit them to use rational while stamping

a ballot paper. In the primary case where no affiliation is found and voter is dependent on a medium it is all upon the elites (lobby) to set an agenda according to their own good, catering their interest solely shaping the minds of a voter to believe and follow blindly.

In election 2013 Pakistan similar strategy was applied where every party served their own agenda showing what was in favor of them instead of following the required course of action, but the here question still remains does it added anything good in to their vote bank? The candidates will never spend money on advertisements if these ads are not buying them votes in return (Ridout, 2007, p. 466). Contrastingly the Two Step Flow of Communication where the opinion has to be built through an opinion leader, a third party involvement denies the first ideology as the findings states personal influences/interactions changes the voting pattern more than any media outlet (Katz, 1957) explicitly implies too in a country like Pakistan where majority is dependent on third party to seek political information.

In rare cases there are voters who manage to escape from the trap laid by advertisers through framing/priming of certain idea. These are the voters who use their own rationale while stamping the ballot paper; one of the reasons could be an increased exposure to the advertisements (Sadoulet, 2007). The reality is that repeated telecasts of the ads help evaluating a party more conveniently (Tedesco, 2002). In contrast to the first rational awakening aspect there is one another, although being skeptic is a good sign but when voters become cynic about things and have lost all the hopes in betterment which is indeed a negative aspect, they would never believe in new amended policies of the parties to present in coming days (Robert & Jackson, 2009, p. 58). Thorson et al. (2000) notifies that negative advertisements leads greatly to cynicism instead of skepticism hence effectiveness in the end will defiantly suffer (pp. 55-59). It can be referred to voters who are media literate audience and could actually connect the dots and build a real image of the party. Researcher Goudbout and Belanger named such voters as Pocketbook evaluators who evaluate through all the pros and cons before selecting a candidate (Bélanger, 2007, p. 541). Similarly the electronic polls and the two way engagement of the voter enhances the voters confidence and leads to more logical decisions with full understanding as active contributors in a public sphere (Howard, 2005, p. 153).

The whole process of communication flow goes hand in hand specially in encoding source, message, and receiver all are equally

important for successful campaigning. Inculcating the whole procedure three most chief encoders involved are first sponsor by whom the message is forwarded to author (Middle Man), finally handling it to persona (verbal communicator) where in case of PTI they used Imran Khan the leader himself and PPP Bilawal Bhutto Zardari the next emerging leader of that specific party, whereas PML-N used narrator instead.

The literary type of messages can be categorized into three major parts autobiographical example is of PTI and PPP, while narrative was used by PML-N, and third is dramatized which wasn't used. Final stage involves the receiver (actual/masses) perceiving the message. Integrating it in the Pakistani political ads scenario, sponsored by the parties themselves unquestionably as a substitute the money should have been spent on permeating better electoral policies and election logistics than on electronic ads. Nevertheless the significance can't be ignored of the electoral campaigns, Informing and determining the simulated achievement of competing entrant (Traugott, 1987). If it is purely an ad genuinely targeting masses to inform, instead of just sponsors identification, which was immensely practiced by all the political parties in Pakistan.

Persuasion being the most essential element for an advertiser can be acquired and trailed for the success through different means, be it negative tactics or emotions. The defaming ads sometimes enjoys vital support by media more than the positive ones and also are easy to memorize with subject to voters (Smith, 2008, p. 598), the two approaches discussed related to this specific negative campaign includes "Demobilization Theory" by Ansolabehere and Jyengar (1995) (Geer, 2003, p. 69) and second "Stimulation Theory" by Finkel and Geer (Goldstein, 1999). The first approach states that negative advertisements might lead to backlash in terms of voter's turnout instead of impacting positively (Travis & Ridout, 2004) and second defines the stimulation process where one remembers an ad with more convenience due to them being negative ultimately increasing the vote bank. It also might pin point some hidden aspects of the opponents, hence increasing logical votes (Robert & Jackson, 2009, p. 56). One another strategy is "Issue Ownership" focusing majorly on what they are planning to work or done already and very tactfully being salient on their weaker sides (Owen & Abbe, 2003).

Lastly emotions added in an ad enhances the affectivity as according to Kern emotional aspect of an advertisement is essentially imperative; it plays the major role in persuasion (Tedesco, 2002, p. 38). Boeney's and Paletz's five variables of influencing the voting behavior also include emotions being vital in stimulating the decision of an individual but in few cases resulting in cynicism (Tedesco, 2002, p. 39). The exposure if persuade on one side can also escalate the process of resistance towards certain ad (Ridout, 2007). To sum up, review of literature can be summarized as follows. (1) Advertisements are effective means of communication when message efficiently communicated to target population. (2) Negative advertisements are easily retained but it demobilize the voters and creates cynicism. (3) Emotional advertisements are effective but it creates skepticism among neutral/silent majority of voters.

### **Methodology**

In this study survey method was employed to collect data from 200 respondents (Registered Voters) by applying simple random sampling technique from Punjab Pakistan. The questionnaire was based on close ended questions that ranked on five point scale including 1 being lowest and 5 being highest. The data was selected before elections to avoid any kind of influence of post-election results on the perception of respondents. All electronic media advertisements telecasted by PPP, PTI and PML-N during 2013 elections are included for measuring the voters response. The data was interpreted by using SPSS 17 version.

### **Hypothesis, Discussion and Results**

#### **H1: Does excessive exposure of advertisements leaves a significant impact?**

Many studies proposes that amplified exposure to advertisements aids in exposing off a certain party's agenda with greater affluence and hence leads to more skepticism in a voters mind. It indeed works as a positive stance and ultimately results in rational decision while stamping a ballot paper instead of prioritizing loyalties. Furthermore, a media literate consumer should also utterly reject the idea of defaming ads, no matter how interesting they seem ethicality should be considered first and foremost. For example, the PPP advertisements mostly carried emotional and propaganda themes and targeting loyalists instead of general public. Such ads according to scholars are baptized as "Comparative Ads", these are consumer oriented which helps in

promoting party's own idea while demoting others for no reason (Robideaux, 2002). Various studies discuss in review literature argues that such ad's success could be measured through two basic approaches, first according to Ansolabehere and Jyengar (1995) the process is known as demobilization hypothesis (Ansolabehere & Jyengar, 1995; Geer, 2003, p. 69), that despite of negative campaigns being informative enough are indeed less effective and demobilizes the general voters (Goldstein, 1999). Whereas critiques like Finkel and Geer talks about the stimulation theory, and maintain that the exposure to certain negative message increases the electoral turnout (Goldstein, 1999). The PPP advertisements were emotionally pumped because it used the images of Benazir Bhutto's speech just before her assassination while playing background music in Sindhi with the lyrics being "Qaoum Ki Beti aye thi" [Daughter of Nation] portrayed her as someone who gave up her life for the nation. This ad emotionally charged the party's workers but failed to motivate general voters. Despite of emotional ads PPP also used propaganda ads to defame its competitors when PML-N and PTI launched a negative campaign against it.

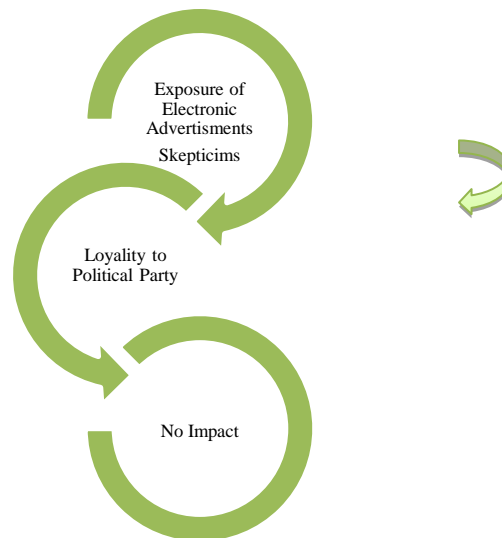
The ads presented by PTI were also filled with rhetoric vowing for a better future of Pakistan and motivation for higher voters turnout. At the end of the tunnel it majorly influenced women and children while using emotional appeal. Especially, right after the accident of PTI leader -Imran Khan, the party's political campaign was based upon emotional advertisements to get empathy vote. Similarly, PTI also used "Comparative Ads," technique to defame its competitors. On the other hand, PML-N ads focus more on its accomplishment during their reigns. The party succeeded in highlighting the issue of public concerns and ultimately managed to get a greater lead in terms of votes in comparison to the two above mentioned political parties. The PML-N continuously focusing the problems of a common man and claiming that they know the issues, correspondingly they are deeply concerned about them tried gaining votes playing with the emotions. They promised to deliver and solve voter problems like that of electricity production which is one of the most important issues in Pakistan. Some of PML-N ads were also created negativity for its competitors.

The quantitative finding ascertains that advertisements had no significant impact on the voting pattern of the voters. It is clearly described in the Figure 1 which shows how exposure leads to skepticism but meanwhile loyalties galore and ultimately had no effect. To sum up, in the context of 2013 elections in Pakistan, the quantitative



findings support the demobilization theory because lots of mud-sling was observed in the advertisement by all three political parties that lead to skepticism among voters. The quantitative findings stands on two main questions asked and analyzed, including: first question was of total time of the exposure while watching a television and second the advertisements being the reason of support to a certain party. The higher percentage of respondents being on the lower side proved the hypothesis. This was in result to those loyalties which were set already and was given priority to their respective political party as shown in Figure 1. The fact further could be verified through Figure 3 which is our third question of this paper, in that the liking and disliking of the ad was asked which was highly dependable on the support and vote.

**Figure 1.**



**Table 1: Exposure vs. Impact Analysis**

Scale	Advertisement Exposure						Total
	1 (Low Impact)	2	3	4	5 (High Impact)		
	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently	Very Frequently		
1	8	12	23	32	15		90
2	1	2	13	18	7		41
3	0	6	11	10	8		35
4	0	5	2	14	3		24
5	1	2	4	1	2		10
Total	10	27	53	75	35		200

Table 1 indicates that the higher chunk of the voters rated advertisement not being the reason of support which is shown as “1-Low Impact” and is the lowest value nearly equal as that of saying “No”. Indiscriminately the results are same for all the three parties surveyed in this study. It ascertains that how mind set dominates over perception and no matter how often one is exposed to the advertisement no rational decision is taken. The response somehow clarifies the point this paper has to validate that political advertisements in 2013 General elections were not very effective to change the mind-set of voters. The voters loyalties to their respective political parties plays more significant role instead of advertisement influence.

**H2: Was Information Richness of PPP, PML-N and PTI Advertisements efficient enough in contributing to Existing Political Knowledge of voters.**

Table 2 indicates that PPP, PML-N and PTI advertisements were not efficient enough in contributing to Existing Political Knowledge of voters. The questions asked were firstly how informative these ads were in general and secondly specifying it further how informative each party’s advertisement was individually. The questions were responded separately while selecting an option ranging between the scales of 1-5 (1 being the least).

Acceding to Jamieson (2003) advertisements are the most significant source of information for the voters (p.145).However results for Pakistan Election 2013 contradicted the statement, for the first question which was asked very less number of people agreed to the fact

that these ads enhanced or even added a bit to their knowledge rest were unsure opting for may be and large majority of respondents picked for a simple “No” being sure short that they knew everything already which was shown to them for so many days repeatedly.

In this study only least values discussed i.e. “1 and 2” focusing on the category of people who knew the information already. The results were quite same as even here mostly respondents tilt was on the lowest side which starts from “1” & “2” in case of PPP 87.5% + 3.8% people opted for first two least values believing nothing as much of significance was added to their knowledge. The trend of greater chunk being on the lowest side was independent of voters being knowledgeable or unaccustomed. Although not to be denied, research suggests that advertisements might leave an impact on the ambiguous voters if not whom to vote but at least enhances the political party’s knowledge (Green, 2008).

Likewise for advertisements of PML-N party the results were same, higher percentage opted for “1” & “2” while claiming nothing was added to their knowledge, accustomed respondents also largely supported the idea of ad not being informative at all. In case of PTI the knowledgeable respondents again opted for the least option “1”, however here a new trend was evident as 25.7% of ambiguous uninformed respondents opted for “4” which is the second highest illustrating an approval of PTI ads being slightly informative.

Comparing PPP, PML-N and PTI advertisements most informative ad was of PTI in terms of audience feedback, second in line was PML-N. Majority of voters considered PPP ad was not informative at all. These ads might have raised skepticism within voters to some extent but couldn’t persuade them enough to use rationale (Figure 3).

Not to blame one side, the mistake was committed at both verges though greatly leaning over the party’s side who never thought of conveying information objectively following the statement “Truth Well Told”, and in case of audience many of them already decided and intentionally never paid any heed to what was presented to them. The loyalists here led the results to No Affect state.

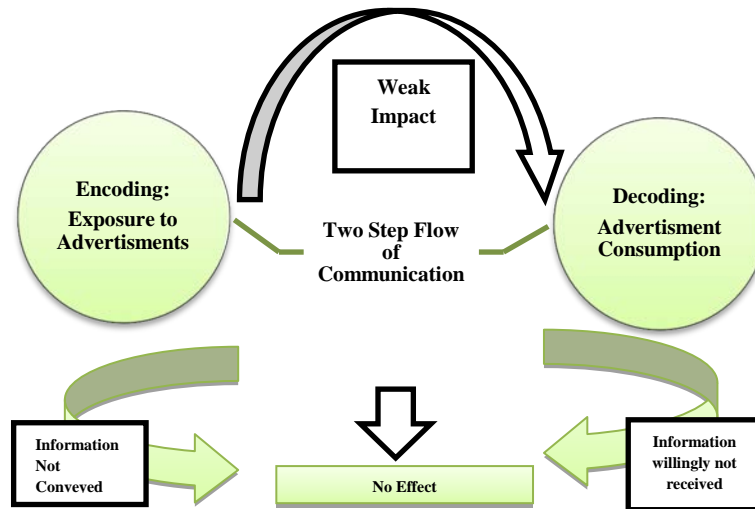
On the other hand, in Pakistan, there are the higher percentage is of rural voters. They have low education rate and are under the influence of strong family and feudal dominance that limits the advertising influence and increases the socio-political and economic pressures in

choosing political parties and candidates. Therefore, access to the medium and direct exposure lacked, information conveyed never directly reached instead there is always an opinion leader involved as a third party forming certain perception of these voters, which is named as Two Step Flow Theory. It indeed works most efficiently in such a society.

**Table 2: Comparative Analysis of information Richness of PPP, PML-N and PTI Advertisements vs. Existing Political Knowledge**

Information Richness of Advertisements				
Existing Political Knowledge	Scale	PPP	PML-N	PTI
	1 (Less Informative)			
Response	5 (Highly Informative)			
Yes (N=104, 100%)	1	<b>91 (87.5%)</b>	<b>44 (42.3%)</b>	<b>44(42.3%)</b>
	2	<b>4(3.8%)</b>	<b>32(30.8%)</b>	<b>22(21.2%)</b>
	3	6(5.8%)	17(16.3%)	16(15.4%)
	4	2(1.9%)	9(8.7%)	12(11.5%)
	5	1 (1%)	2(1.9%)	10(9.6%)
No (N=35, 100%)	1	<b>26 (74.3%)</b>	<b>10(28.6%)</b>	<b>9(25.7%)</b>
	2	<b>5(14.3%)</b>	<b>8(22.9%)</b>	<b>8.22.9%</b>
	3	0	9(25.8%)	6(17.1%)
	4	<b>4(11.4%)</b>	<b>5(14.3%)</b>	<b>9(25.7%)</b>
	5	0	3(8.6%)	3(8.6%)
May be (N=61, 100%)	1	49(80.3%)	18(29.5%)	26(42.6%)
	2	3(4.9%)	20(32.8%)	14(23%)
	3	7(11.5%)	14(23%)	12(19.7%)
	4	2(3.3%)	6(9.8%)	7(11.5%)
	5	0	3(4.9%)	2(3.3%)

**Figure 2.**



The Figure 2 depicts the two step flow theory where the decision relies solely on the opinion maker the third party. No direct communication either it was due to lack of information delivered by the source or not accurately decoded by the receiver probably due to lack of capabilities to comprehend or intentionally not willing to perceive the message due to their loyalties, gratification of television as well as advertisements plays less significant role in 2013 General Elections in Pakistan.

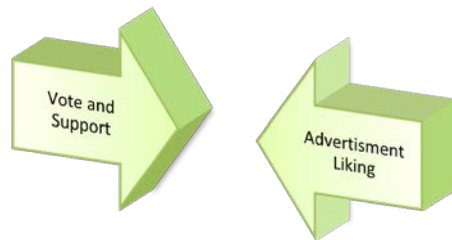
**H 3: Is the best ad in terms of audience response was same that of their vote and support?**

Table 3 indicates that the greater number of the respondents kept their loyalties at the top and selected the same ad as best of the party they planned to vote. This trend indicates that political advertisements on electronic media had least effect on voters' behaviour in General Elections 2013 of Pakistan. The number of people liking PTI ad which was 81 were the ones who opted the same party to vote and support, same was the case with PML-N. The chi square analysis reveals that this trend is statistically significant as  $X^2 = N=200, 251.766, p=.000$ .

**Table 3: Support and Vote vs. Advertisement Liking (Best Ad)**

Advertisement Liking (Best Ad)		PPP	PMLN	PTI	Total
<b>Support and Vote</b>	PPP	7	0	2	9
	PML N	0	84	3	87
	PTI	1	14	<u>81</u>	96
	Others	1	1	6	8
<b>Total</b>		9	99	92	200

**Figure 3.**



**Conclusion**

Scholars like Freedman, Franz, and Goldstien (2004, p. 725) claim that advertisement is meant to inform, increase the interest, and develop stakeholder behavior leading a voter to take part actively on the election day. The findings in this study suggest that electronic media’s political advertisements though being the most suitable way of communicating, persuading and activating the voters in a state like America (Ridout, 2004, p. 1) not very much successful in amending the voting behavior of the electorates in Pakistan. No matter how often they were exposed to these advertisements it had no impact over them instead the mindset continued and people even the ambiguous ones who knew nothing blatantly followed the third party opinion instead of

using own logic. In a country like Pakistan where we vote certain party and not an individual which scholars call personalized voting (Hayes, 2009, p. 234) is not practiced at all where a voter knows the candidate instead they just vote one party no matter who so ever is representing it in their constituency. The voters' loyalties for their respective political party were also an important factor that reduced the advertising influence in 2013 General elections. In addition, this study concludes that vote and support and advertising liking have strong association as the result of loyalty of respondents to their respective political parties. This study reveals that there is no association between advertising exposure and advertising impact on voter behavior. This study also maintains that there is no relationship between information richness of advertisements and existing knowledge of respondents. The advertisements weakly contributed to the knowledge of respondents. To sum up, in 2013 General elections of Pakistan political advertisements' exposure and affect on voters behavior has no direct relationship.

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