
Mass Media vs. Primary Groups Influence on Voting Decision in 2013 General Elections of Pakistan

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Abstract

This study compares the influence of the mass media and primary groups on the voting decision of the Islamabad based voters. The survey was conducted after the general elections of 2013 held in Pakistan. It concludes that the primary groups exercise more influence than the mass media on the voting decision. This study also discloses that the voters who spent more time with family members showed stronger family members influence on their voting decision. Similarly, more time spent with the close friends increased the influence on the voting decision as well. In addition, study also claims that Time duration of Media Exposure has direct impact on voting decision of Pakistani voters.

Introduction

The voting decision of an individual is the outcome of personal attitudes, family and friends influence and media persuasion and effects. The general assumption is that the voters cast the vote on the basis of their wisdom and objectivity whereas the political candidates and the political parties spend huge

amount to navigate the vote casting decision of the voters. They target the voters as any business organization influence the costumers through advertising to buy their product. Political campaigns on the mass media are run during the elections by spending huge amount of money to influence the decision of the voters during the vote casting.

The aim of this study is to compare the influence of primary groups and mass media on the voting decision of the voter living in Islamabad the capital city of Pakistan. It will also discuss the influence of family and friends on voting decision. In addition, this study will explain the relationship between time duration of media exposure and voting decision with reference to 2013 election elections of Pakistan.

Literature Review

Foladare¹ studied the effects of the primary groups and the reference groups on the voters' behavior and concluded that the individual's greater exposure to his or her group members will influence the political behavior. McClosky, and Dahlgren² discussed the relationship between the primary groups and the political behavior and maintained that the primary groups like family, friends, and the occupational peers have more influence on voting decision than the party loyalty and mass media. Beck, Dalton, Greene and Huckfeldt³ claimed that social contexts and personal traits of democratic citizens are important in shaping their voting decisions. They further reveal that Interpersonal discussion outweighs the media in affecting the vote choices.

Franz and Ridout⁴ investigated the influence of the presidential and senate elections' advertisement on voters' behavior. They studied that whether such advertising influences the evaluations done by the voters about the candidate and the choices made by the voters at the ballot box. They did the survey and found that the advertising persuades. They further found that the impact of the advertising varies on the basis of the characteristics of the viewers. In addition, Kaid and Postelnicu⁵ asserted that political advertisement regarding candidates on web

provided more effective information to the young voters than the television. Jamieson⁶ maintained that advertisements are the most significant source of information for the voters. Moreover, Freedman, Franz, and Goldstien⁷ claimed that advertisement is meant to inform, increase the interest, and develop stakeholder behavior leading a voter to take part actively on the election day. Volanteno and Williams⁸ revealed that the least aware voter will be more affected by the persuasion of the political ads. Similarly, McLeod, Glynn and McDonald⁹ argued that television reliant voters use candidate image characteristics in making their voting choices more than do the newspaper reliant. Druckman & Parkin¹⁰ investigated the press slant of campaign coverage and its effects on voters and reveals that editorial slant strongly influences voters' decisions. Green¹¹ maintained that advertisements leave an impact on the ambiguous voters if not whom to vote but at least enhances voters' knowledge regarding the political party's agenda. Perloff and Kinsey¹² examined the general perception about the advertising, the voters' psychology, negative ads, images, issues and the normative beliefs. The close ended survey was done from the political consultants and the journalists. The political consultants claimed that the political spots have the strong effects, whereas the journalists said that majority of the people turned off by the political spots assuming that they are frequently misleading. Generally advertising has impact on voting behavior.

Pinkleton, Um, and Austin¹³ examined the effects of the negative, positive, and negative comparative kind of political advertising on the voter decision making process. The participants which were exposed to the political advertising found it least useful. Finally it was concluded that negative ads contributed in disgusting the campaign. Roddya and Garramone¹⁴ examined the effectiveness of the negative political advertising. The negative response questions were evaluated less favorably and negative response found more effective to discourage the voting for the attacking candidate. Meirick¹⁵ compared the negative and other political advertisements with regard to the cognitive responses by

their viewers. The negative ads found with more derogations. The comparative ads found carrying more supportive arguments than the negative ads and were watched more. Garramone, Atkin, Pinkleton, and Cole¹⁶ argued that the positive and the negative commercials have the sound effects on the voting behavior of the voters. In addition, Merritts¹⁷ conducted the study to examine the effects caused by the negative type of political advertising through voters' survey revealed that the political advertising of the negative kind generate the negative effects both for the sponsor and the opponent. This study reveals that negative advertising also have considerable impact on voter. Faber, Tims and Schmitt¹⁸ measured the involvement level of the voters in the television and the newspaper to gain the political information. The regression analysis was done. It was found that the television news and the situational involvement both increase the negative effects of the negative ads and the test shown that the reading of the newspaper reduced the negative effects. Kaid¹⁹ conducted an experimental study with the sample of 283 members. The sample was taken from the college students and civic group. The results showed that the type of the commercials posed the significant impact on the evaluation of the candidate. It was also revealed that some kind of political commercials increase the likelihood of the voters when placed to specific type of the programming.

Therefore, it is concluded that family, friends and social groups have influence on vote casting decision. Media is also effective in this regard. Various studies related to political advertising reveal that advertising has significant impact on voters but negative advertising creates chaos regarding voting decisions. In addition, positive and negative advertising have impact on voting behavior.

Theoretical Framework

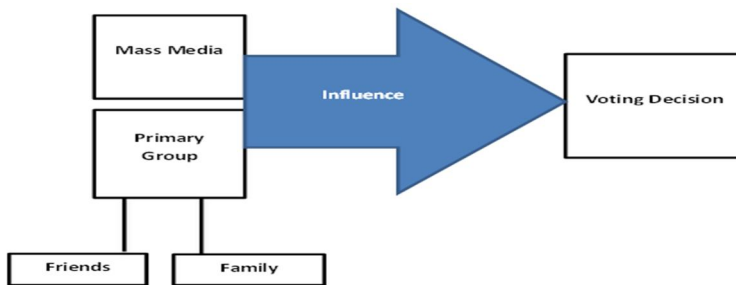
Political Homogeneity of the Primary Groups

This theoretical concept was introduced by the Berelson, Mc Phee and Lazarsfeld.²⁰ They proposed that the family pose the strong influence upon the formation of voting decision. The

friends' influence was ranked at the second. The family and the friends were considered as the primary group. They intended to study the mass media influence on the vote decision formation of the voters. The study was aimed at looking the mass media as the important contributor in the decision making process by the voters in the elections. But the results found amazingly adverse.

The primary groups revealed having more influences on the voting decision than the mass media. The majority of the voters followed their fathers in the voting decision. It was concluded that the family has the strong influence on the voting decision making. The friend's influence was ranked at the second, whereas the mass media influence was found very less. Finally, they proposed the theoretical concept of, "the political homogeneity of the primary groups" based upon their study of the voting decision formation. In this study, primary group is comprised of Friends and Family. It also explains direct influence of Mass Media and Primary Group on Voting Decision (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
 Mass Media and Primary Group Influence on Voting Decision:
 Relationship Model



Methodology

This study was done on the Islamabad voters. The simple random sampling technique was used for the collection of the sample. The sample was comprised of 100 voters eligible as per age who casted the vote in the recent 2013 general elections of

Pakistan. The survey technique was used to take the responses from the voters. The data was entered in the SPSS version 17. The Spearman correlation test was used to measure the direction and the strength of relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The multiple regression test was applied to find prediction of the variance caused by the independent variables in the dependent variable.

Results

H1. Primary groups have more influence on the vote casting decision then the mass media

Table 1
Time Spend with Primary Group vs. Voting Decision

| Spearman correlation | | Time Spend with Primary Group | Voting Decision |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|
| Time Spend with Primary Group | Correlation Coefficient | 1.000 | .650** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | . | .000 |
| | N | 100 | 100 |
| Voting Decision | Correlation Coefficient | .650** | 1.000 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | . |
| | N | 100 | 100 |

The relationship between the "Time spent with primary group" and "Voting Decision" was investigated by using the spearman correlation. The preliminary analyses were performed to make sure no violation of the assumptions of linearity, normality and homoscedasticity occurred. There was found a strong positive relationship between the two variables, $r = .650$, $n = 100$, $p < .0005$.

Table 2
Time Duration of Media Exposure vs. Voting Decision

| Spearman correlation | | Time Duration of Media Exposure | Voting Decision |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| Time Duration of Media Exposure | Correlation Coefficient | 1.000 | .385** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | . | .000 |
| | N | 100 | 100 |
| Voting Decision | Correlation Coefficient | .385** | 1.000 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | . |
| | N | 100 | 100 |

The relationship between the “Time Duration of Media Exposure” and “Voting Decision” was investigated by using the Spearman correlation. The preliminary analyses were performed to make sure no violation of the assumptions of linearity, normality and homoscedasticity occurred. There was found a medium positive relationship between the two variables, $r = .385$, $n = 100$, $p < .0005$.

Table 3
Multiple Regression

| Model | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Collinearity Statistics | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|-------|-------------------------|-------|
| | | Beta | | Tolerance | VIF |
| 1 | (Constant) | | 7.891 | | |
| | Time Duration of Media Exposure | .201 | 2.163 | .728 | 1.374 |
| | Time Spend with Primary Group | .497 | 5.353 | .728 | 1.374 |
| Dependent Variable: Voting Decision | | | | | |

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to predict the overall variance caused in the dependent variable “Voting Decision” by the independent variables including “Time Duration of Media Exposure” and “Time Spend with Primary Group.” The

"Time Spend with Primary Group" was found causing 49.7% variance in the "Voting Decision" whereas the "Time Duration of Media Exposure" found predicting 20.1% of variance in the dependent variable -"Voting Decision." β is .201 for "Time Duration of Media Exposure" and .497 for "Time Spend with Primary Group" respectively. Therefore, findings of Table1, Table 2 and Table 3 have substantiated the H1.

H2. Primary group and Mass media both have influence on the vote casting decision.

The findings of Table1, Table 2 and Table 3 have validated the above mention hypothesis. The both independent variables "Mass Media" and "Primary Groups" have influence on the dependent variable the "Voting Decision."

H3. Increase in the time spent with close friends will increase the influence on the vote casting decision.

Table 4 indicates that the increase in the time spent with the close friends increased the influence on the vote casting decision. The voters who spent 5 hours or more with their close friends were more influenced in their voting decision in 2013 general elections of Pakistan. In addition, majority of 26% voters found spending their 5 hours or more with their close friends having more influence on their voting decision. The findings confirm this hypothesis

Table 4

Time Spend with Friends vs. Friends Influence on Vote Casting Decision

| Crosstabulation | | | Friends Influence on Vote Casting Decision | | Total |
|-------------------------|------------------|------------|--|------|-------|
| | | | Yes | No | |
| Time Spend with Friends | 1 Hours and Less | Count | 14 | 7 | 21 |
| | | % of Total | 14.0% | 7.0% | 21.0% |
| | 2 Hours | Count | 13 | 5 | 18 |
| | | % of Total | 13.0% | 5.0% | 18.0% |
| | 3 Hours | Count | 18 | 3 | 21 |

| | | | | | |
|-------|-------------------|------------|-------|-------|--------|
| | | % of Total | 18.0% | 3.0% | 21.0% |
| | 4 Hours | Count | 5 | 3 | 8 |
| | | % of Total | 5.0% | 3.0% | 8.0% |
| | 5 Hours and Above | Count | 26 | 6 | 32 |
| | | % of Total | 26.0% | 6.0% | 32.0% |
| Total | | Count | 76 | 24 | 100 |
| | | % of Total | 76.0% | 24.0% | 100.0% |

H4. Increase in the time spent with the family members will increase the influence on the vote casting decision.

Table 5 showed that the increase in the time spent with the family members increased the influence on the vote casting decision. The voters (44%) who spent 5 hours or more with their family had more influence on their voting decision in recent elections. The findings validate this hypothesis.

Table 5
Time Spend with Family vs. Family Influence on Vote Casting Decision

| Cross tabulation | | | Family Influence on Vote Casting Decision | | Total |
|------------------------|-------------------|------------|---|------|-------|
| | | | Yes | No | |
| Time Spend with Family | 1 Hours and Less | Count | 9 | 9 | 18 |
| | | % of Total | 9.0% | 9.0% | 18.0% |
| | 2 Hours | Count | 8 | 4 | 12 |
| | | % of Total | 8.0% | 4.0% | 12.0% |
| | 3 Hours | Count | 8 | 0 | 8 |
| | | % of Total | 8.0% | .0% | 8.0% |
| | 4 Hours | Count | 12 | 5 | 17 |
| | | % of Total | 12.0% | 5.0% | 17.0% |
| | 5 Hours and Above | Count | 44 | 1 | 45 |
| | | % of Total | 44.0% | 1.0% | 45.0% |
| Total | | Count | 81 | 19 | 100 |

| Cross tabulation | | | Family Influence on Vote Casting Decision | | Total | |
|---------------------------|----------------------|------------|--|-------|-------|--------|
| | | | Yes | No | | |
| Time Spend with Family | 1 Hours and Less | Count | 9 | 9 | 18 | |
| | | % of Total | 9.0% | 9.0% | 18.0% | |
| | 2 Hours | Count | 8 | 4 | 12 | |
| | | % of Total | 8.0% | 4.0% | 12.0% | |
| | 3 Hours | Count | 8 | 0 | 8 | |
| | | % of Total | 8.0% | .0% | 8.0% | |
| | 4 Hours | Count | 12 | 5 | 17 | |
| | | % of Total | 12.0% | 5.0% | 17.0% | |
| | 5 Hours and Above | Count | 44 | 1 | 45 | |
| | | % of Total | 44.0% | 1.0% | 45.0% | |
| | Total | | Count | 81 | 19 | 100 |
| | | | % of Total | 81.0% | 19.0% | 100.0% |

Conclusions

This study concludes that both mass media and primary group have significant impact on the vote casting decision but the primary group influence is stronger than the mass media. It reveals that the both family and friends have influence on voting decision of Islamabad based voters. In addition, this study also suggest that more time spending with family and friends resulted in higher influence on voting decision.

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