Exploring the Relationship Between News Media Exposure, Hegemonic Masculinity, and the Political Efficacy of Women: A Case of Pakistan

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Abstract

News media has become a fundamental source of influence to affect the political efficacy of people in modern democratic regimes. This study was designed to assess the influences of media outlets on the political opinions and practices of Pakistani female voters, who are 48.5% of the total population. This research work aims to explore women empowerment in Pakistani socio-political context with a focus on political efficacy and decision making of female voters. Qualitative research design was employed in this study and data was collected through in-depth interviews. Findings of this study revealed that political efficacy of women is influenced by the factor like media exposure, age, education level, socio-economic status, and the political engagement and persuasiveness of male members of a family. The overall political system is another key determinant of political behavior and a key predictor of women participation in the electoral process. It is assessed that though years of state-based failures have eroded female voters' perceptions of Pakistani political system, yet recent media exposure has enhanced the female involvement in the overall political discourse in the society. Results of this study are significant for researchers, political analysts, and academicians, interested in understanding female political participation processes in developing countries, particularly in the political milieu of South Asian countries.

Keywords: Political Participation, Political Efficacy, News Media, Opinion Leaders, Female Voters, Voting Behavior, Pakistani Politics

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Introduction

The ideal notion of democracy advocates provision of equal rights to all citizenries including women, in economic, political, socio-cultural terms and recognizes them as active members of society. It is advocated that democratic systems must provide "a better world for all" by granting equal rights to political participation to all the sectors of population even the marginalized ones. It is observed that democratic systems can only function effectively if they have gender equilibrium and every sector of population including women are equally privileged to contribute and get benefits in all spheres of life. As democratic system advocates for equal rights for all it is believed to be more gender inclusive, more politically independent, and minimum gender disparities issues. These impartialities are among the drastic barriers for nondemocratic societies to function as well as grow at national and international level. Democratic nations create initiatives to ensure provision of rights to marginalized proportions of society including women and eventually this gender mainstreaming leads to positive outcomes for their system as whole.

The role of woman in any democratic, socio-cultural set up is often considered to be among the most vital component for effective functioning and development. Modern democratic world advocate for freedom, independence, equality, and provision of rights to all. Free society means there must be freedom for all institutions and building blocks of society as well including media. Media has become a potential source of information, awareness, education, and opinion formation for people. People rely on media to acquire information about current affairs, political and economic concerns. Media sets agendas for people by highlighting the significant issues and make them think about them in certain ways. Media professionals use communication strategies to present themselves as opinion leaders to audiences. News coverage of media play a significant role in setting political agendas of people (Sun et al., 2020; Wen et al., 2013).

It is asserted that the basic notion of political efficacy as the impression that socio-political changes are possible at the national level and that individuals can influence these changes (McPherson et al., 1977). The more the political efficacy more the individual will be active politically, thus this gives them the power to determine and reshape the political scenarios of their system. Experts have signified the importance of gender in voting decisions by elucidating how the American elections of the nineties were heralded as the "Year of Woman" participation of women in electoral processes (Atabey & Hasta, 2018; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017). The historical time marked the concern of voters by revealing that since the female candidates raised related issues in the political campaigns, the voting turnout was surprising (A. Ahmad et al., 2019). It demonstrated that women support women candidates who raise issues like sexual harassment, abortion, and others. Women voters supported women candidates in the senate and house elections, demonstrating that gender-related concern plays a significant role in their voting decisions (Mvukiyehe, 2017). Historically gender was marked as the determinant in voting decisions by people, primarily female voters. This demonstrated that the gender of the political candidate could be a key determinant in the voting decision-making of voters.

Media serve as one of the pillars for effective functioning of democracy and impacts of media on people's political concerns are evident. Media shape political behaviour of people by serving as opinion leader to them (Astuti, 2016; Effing et al., 2011).

The present study is aimed to explore the role of political news coverage of media through bulletins and talk shows in shaping political behaviours of Pakistani women. Pakistani socio-economic, cultural, political, and religious values are believed to be transitional and more patriarchal in nature. Hence, it cannot be denied that even if media has any influence on Pakistani female voters it is mediated by their male family members (Hassan Shehzad, 2014; Tariq et al., 2022).

The term hegemonic masculinity refers to certain values, attitudes, beliefs, behaviours or practices in the nature of men demonstrating gender discrimination (Benstead, 2021; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Rawat, 2014). This framework proposed that some men possess dominance in their nature in a way that perpetuates power on woman as well as some other (submissive/marginalized) men also (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Donaldson, 1993). This concept has been extensively discussed and analyzed by scholars and critiques of social inequality studies (Benstead, 2021; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Rawat, 2014). It also serves as an analytical instrument to recognize the factors behind the patriarchal patterns of social system which support male dominant attributes (Jewkes et al., 2015).

The idea of this hegemonic masculinity of males got its foundations from scholarly contributions of Gramsci and demonstrated that patriarchal mindset is embedded deeply in peoples' minds (Bates, 1975). This can be seen clearly that mostly social system and mind set of people even the oppressed women support male dominance and hegemonic masculinity unintentionally (Mouffe, 2014). Because the cultural ideal of manhood of men is so profoundly rooted in the mind sets of people even in women's mind that they unintentionally support patriarchy themselves in their support for the male counterparts of family (Riley, 2011). Hegemonic masculinity is a social theory which explains disparities among gender which create an imbalance in the social order of system (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Jewkes et al., 2015). This theory suggest that men must have some traditional personality traits which make them superior and dominant on women. They are expected to have some masculine individualities as emotional and physical strength, power, wealth, success, invulnerability, control, competitiveness and most importantly rejection of feminine attributes and strength of women. Experts have criticized hegemonic masculinity by stating that hierarchal supremacy of dominant men subjugate not only women but also other men and society (Jewkes et al., 2015). Men who exhibit tough, aggressive, firm behaviours are believed to have idealist manhood factor in their personalities. This leads to the increase of gender oppression in the social system. This masculine hegemony creates a gender imbalance where men exercise their dominance and power oven women to direct them about their life decisions. This makes them ultimate authority in the life of female members of their family and they see women as commodity.

Experts have highlighted the significant relationship between gender equality, thriving democracy, and political representation of both genders (Benstead, 2021; Tadros, 2014). It is advocated that it must be a system that strengthens gender balance and reasonably supports independence, empowerment, and civic space for both men and women. It must ensure equal opportunities for women to decide on their political representatives by voting using their own will and without intense pressure from their male counterparts. Gender inequality is not a new or recent global issue, but it was identified by

many people even two decades today (Alexander et al., 2018; Benstead, 2021) This imbalance refrains growth and successful development of nations, social systems and individuals. The state of world population report highlighted the grave issues of gender imbalance and brought the issue into the mainstream light to take this issue seriously (United Nations, 2022). It urged people to realize the urgency to deal with this issue and find solutions to problems to focus on development by addressing gender issues and prioritizing human development. The modern civilization of the world has achieved remarkable growth and development in recent years. However, there is still a long way to go for gender equality and gender equity to ensure equal opportunities, endowments, decision-making authorities and much more for women (Bolzendahl & Coffé, 2009; Katrin Arens & Watermann, 2017).

The political system of Pakistan has historically been ineffective in providing equal rights to all women and ensuring electoral participation for all women without racial discrimination. Pakistani women faced grave issues in voting and electoral participation due to deep rooted gender-based discrimination and prohibition of decision-making in the political processes (EasleyGiraldo, 2016; Hassan Shehzad, 2014). Males have been seen creating barriers for women to get equal political participation and voting rights to maintain their status quo and keep the decisionmaking in their hands. The dark fact of female marginalization in voting and the electoral process shows how the socio-political structure of Pakistan is fraught with male dominance and patriarchy, leading to female marginalization in politics (A. Ahmad et al., 2019; Hassan Shehzad, 2014). Women are primarily dependent on their male counterparts economically, socially, religiously and politically, which impedes independent decision-making. Most of them lack their right of choice in political terms and voting decisions due to gender biases. The electoral results with male dominance demonstrate that Pakistani politics are gender exclusive for women. These determinants lead to poor political voice and representation of women in Pakistani elections (A. Ahmad et al., 2019; Hassan Shehzad, 2014).

Inception of new media outlets in the political arenas of Pakistan have drastically transmuted political activities and has become a potential source of information, awareness, education, and opinion formation for people (Ali & Inam ur Rahman, 2019; Hassan Shehzad, 2014). People are gradually becoming more media-dependent to form their opinions and to acquire information about current affairs and political and economic concerns. The media plays crucial role in setting the political agendas for people by highlighting significant issues and making them think about them in specific ways. According to a report by International Gender Equality Survey-Pakistan, males predominantly hold the right to take more than 74% of decision-making roles in the family (Rutgers Pakistan, 2018). The male members advise women of their families about the crucial decisions in their life. So, women's struggle gets even more difficult in a male dominant patriarchal social setting. It is a belief among the masses that today women are independent in every aspect worldwide. However, studies have found that even contemporarily in today's modern era, there are many obstructions for women in Pakistan.

It is reported that patriarchy constraints for women in Pakistan are among the darkest facts in the country (A. Ahmad et al., 2019). Pakistani women have to face it in their domestic, social, economic, cultural and religious affairs. Several pieces of evidence have

confirmed that Patriarchy is deeply embedded into Pakistani society (T. Ahmad et al., 2019). It is a set of social relations with the material base that enables men to dominate women. It is social stratification based on sex/gender, which provides material and non-material advantages to males while simultaneously placing severe constraints on the roles and activities of females. Media has changed the power paradigms to a greater extent, but the roots of patriarchal values have not been completely abolished.

Traditionally, women were not only allowed but encouraged by their male members to come forward and participate in the electoral voting process. Consequently, the female voter turnout and women's electoral participation demonstrated a remarkable change in some districts of Pakistan. Notably, in a few remote areas of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province, where elections of 2017 were annulled by the Election commission of Pakistan due to a lack of women's participation in voting. Facts and registration figures in 2017 demonstrate that one of the main reasons for the gender gap between male and female voters is CNIC's requirement for voting, as women have to depend upon their male members in this patriarchal and conservative society (Election Commision of Pakistan, 2017). They faced restrictions on mobility, education, and right of expression. Due to its patriarchal social setup, years are still required to bridge these gender gaps in Pakistan.

Electoral management bodies sometimes fail to acquire the basic skills and knowledge to cater for the hindrances to women's participation. Especially in remote areas, polling stations' locations and environments are unsafe for women, so they do not come forward to vote. Pakistan has the credit of electing Benazir Bhutto as the first female Prime Minister in 1988 as head of government (Histroy.com, 2022). Additionally, 60 of 342 seats of the National Parliament and 128 of 728 provincial parliaments are reserved for women, but female participation lags far behind men. Because patriarchal norms of Pakistani society enable men to think that they are the guardians and that their female counterparts are just like property to them, they are the supreme authority to decide their limitations. So, they are the decision-makers to determine women's voting in their families (Szołtysek et al., 2017).

The idea of this hegemonic masculinity of males got its foundations from the scholarly contributions of various scholars who demonstrated that the patriarchal mindset is embedded deeply in peoples' minds (Riley, 2011). This is observed in most social systems and mind set of people. Even the oppressed women support male dominance and hegemonic masculinity unintentionally because the cultural ideal of the manhood of men is so profoundly rooted in the mindsets of people, even in women's minds, that they unintentionally support patriarchy themselves in their support for their male counterparts of a family (Bates, 1975).

Hegemonic masculinity is a social theory which explains disparities among gender, which create an imbalance in the social order of the system (Demetriou, 2001)This theory suggests that men must have traditional personality traits that make them superior and dominant over women. They are expected to have some masculine individuality as emotional and physical strength, power, wealth, success, invulnerability, control, competitiveness and most importantly, rejection of feminine attributes and strength of women (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Donaldson, 1993; Jewkes et al., 2015). Men are believed to be more potent if they possess an uncompromising, angry young man attitude

toward their female counterparts. Therefore, they have the authority to take decisions about their lives as well.

It is reported that the popular notion of hegemonic masculinity is a societal pattern in which male traits are idealized as dominant, assertive, authoritative cultural ideals (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). It is stereotypically believed in this societal pattern that men are meant to have a dominant and authoritative power to exercise their control over women and other inferior groups. The dominant cultural institutions reinforce these traits. Hence, the patriarchal mindsets and societal patterns create a situation of gender disparity in which women have to strive for fundamental rights.

Experts have criticized hegemonic masculinity by stating that the hierarchal supremacy of dominant men subjugates not only women but also other men and society (Demetriou, 2001; Jewkes et al., 2015). Men exhibiting challenging, aggressive, firm behavior are believed to have idealist manhood in their personalities. This leads to an increase in gender oppression in the social system. This masculine hegemony creates a gender imbalance where men exercise their dominance and power over women to direct them about their life decisions. This makes their ultimate authority in the life of female family members, and they see women as commodities. The trend of dominance and subordination keeps increasing the marginalization and glass ceiling in the genders. The drastic effects of this hegemonic masculinity extend to institutional, organizational, socio-political and economic spheres of societies and perpetuate gender disparities within the genders. So, the effects are far-reaching, and the long term eventually becomes a barrier to socio-political, economic and human development. Therefore, there is strong need to initiate awareness programs, social debates, public reasoning processes and media campaigns to educate people on the positive aspects of gender balance in the social system because that is the only way to have a fairer society where every gender can contribute to a better, secure, prosperous society for all.

Pakistani women are mostly treated as less intellectual, second-class citizens and weak in their socio-political decision-making. The core reasons behind this treatment are pervasive patriarchal mindsets and Pakistani culture's cultural norms. Efforts have been made by different stakeholders, institutions, organizations and government bodies to support and empower women against these stereotypical beliefs and to help them to get more vital in socio-political scenarios.

ECP has declared it mandatory to have at least one female election commissioner in each district (Election Commision of Pakistan, 2017). The government supports women as candidates and voters with ever-increased women-centric laws and programs. Indeed, it will take a long time to deal with gender imbalance and disparities in Pakistani culture, but still, there are optimistic chances that the issues will be resolved if the society prospers with a positive mindset (Gul et al., 2017; Tariq et al., 2022).

Experts have claimed that media visibility and the coverage given to political candidates also enhance their popularity in public (Van Der Pas & Aaldering, 2020). Media visibility enhances the chances of success for political campaigns and politicians. People consciously or unconsciously think and discuss more the popular political candidates who are covered excessively by mainstream media and talk shows (Kiousis & McCombs, 2004). Thus, the political parties and candidates being popular in media are popular among voters

also. This is the significant reason that now every political candidate tries to get media attention and is observed to be prompt and active in mainstream media and their social media accounts.

It is reported that Pakistani socio-cultural and political structures have gender imbalance and masculine hegemonic patterns in various forms (Javed & Haq, 2021). However, one of the most fundamental and central variants is the political disparity among Pakistanis. This is so central that if it gets rectified, it may not only help but will undoubtedly address all other deviations. The significant constituents of gender imbalance and disparities in Pakistan's political structure include barriers to political participation, barriers for women to take their political decisions independently and to get representation as political leadership in governance and policymaking as legislative or parliamentarians. It is reported that there are about 106 million registered voters in Pakistan, among which 45 % are women (Election Commision of Pakistan, 2022a) .

Research Objectives

This study focused on how media serves as a potential source of opinion formation for women. It also highlights the phenomenon of information flow from men as an influencer to women being influenced by the dominant male members and discusses the role of media for women voter's rights awareness through brainstorming and the influence of the dominant male family members**.** The study's primary objectives were as follows: -

- To explore the role of news media exposure in developing the political efficacy of female voters in Pakistan.
- To understand the influence of male family members on the political participation of women in Pakistan.
- To identify the factors that shape the political decision making and political efficacy of Pakistani women.

Research Questions and Key Assumptions

Following were the fundamental questions of this research work: -

- What is the role of news media in developing the political efficacy of female voters in
    Pakistan?
- How the male family members influence the political participation of women in
    Pakistan?
- What are the key factors that shape the political decision making and political efficacy of Pakistani women?

The preliminary research assumptions of this study were as given in the following: -

- Educated women who are exposed to news media regularly get less influenced by the dominant male family members in making their political decisions as compared to the less educated women in Pakistan.
- Unmarried women who are exposed to news media regularly get less influenced by the dominant male family members in making their political decisions than married women.
- First time female voters who watch news media regularly get less influenced by the dominant male family members in making their political decisions than the female voters who have already participated in electoral process.

- Working women who watch political news programs regularly get less influenced by their male family members in making their political decisions than housewives.

Methodology

The research design of this study is based on the qualitative approach using the method of 'in-depth interviews' as preferred data collection technique (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Williams, 2007). In-depth interviews were conducted to gain insight in the minds of female voters and understand the factors that influence their political decision making and political efficacy. Interviews with the female voters were conducted to understand their know-how and experiences regarding political participation and exposure to news media in the Pakistani context. In total, 27 female voters were interviewed, which included 12 married women, 15 unmarried women.

For the purpose of this study, multiple interviews were conducted with female voters and famous female political leaders of Pakistan to investigate the notions of political efficacy, political decision-making, media and its impact on female political behavior, and role of male family members as opinion leaders in the political conduct of Pakistani women. The respondents included common female voters, political workers and leaders from all the leading political parties (Election Commision of Pakistan, 2022b), including Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), Pakistan People's Party (PPP), Pakistan Muslim League, Nawaz (PMLN), Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), and Pakistan Muslim League, Quaid-e-Azam (PMLQ).

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria for the Interviewees

For the selection of study participants, all female voters above the age of 18 years were considered. The technique of convenient sampling was used to select the respondents (Breen, 2006; Powell, 2018). The female voters of Lahore were the targeted population of this study. Since Lahore is the second largest metropolitan city in Pakistan, with heterogeneous population, so women from diverse demographic and psychographic backgrounds participated in this study.

Objectives of In-depth Interviews

The main objective of these interviews was to explore how the female voters perceive the phenomena of 'political participation', 'role of media in politics, and 'hegemonic masculinity' in their personal context. These focused but open discussions were also intended to acquire a broad and well-informed knowledge of the phenomenon political efficacy of women and their consumption patterns of political news and political programs as aired by various media outlets in Pakistan.

Data Collection

All interviews were audiotaped with the prior permission of the interviewees.

Interviews Data Analysis

For the data analysis purpose, all the interviews were transcribed word for word. Using the thematic analysis technique, the qualitative data was analyzed for the underlying themes and patterns. Thematic analysis, being one of the supple methods to analyze qualitative data, was performed to procure the underlying themes. It is termed as an effective method for identification, analysis, and interpretation of themes laying within qualitative data (Burns, 2018;

Guest et al., 2017; Mortensen, 2019; Tuckett, 2005; Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019).

Results and Discussion

Interviews with the female voters were conducted to understand their know-how and experiences regarding the phenomenon of hegemonic masculinity and political efficacy of female voters in the Pakistani context. The analysis of the interviews data resulted in the recognition of subsequent themes:

1. Understanding Political Efficacy in the Context of Pakistan
2. Assessment of Political Efficacy of Women
3. Effect of News Media Exposure on Political Efficacy
4. Understanding Hegemonic Masculinity in the Context of Pakistan
5. News Media Agenda Setting of Political Issues
6. Marital Status and Political Participation
7. Role of Educational Background
8. Socio-economic Status and Political Participation

All the themes identified during the analysis of in-depth interviews with female voters are shown in the figure below:

Figure 1 : *Key Themes: In-Depth Interviews*
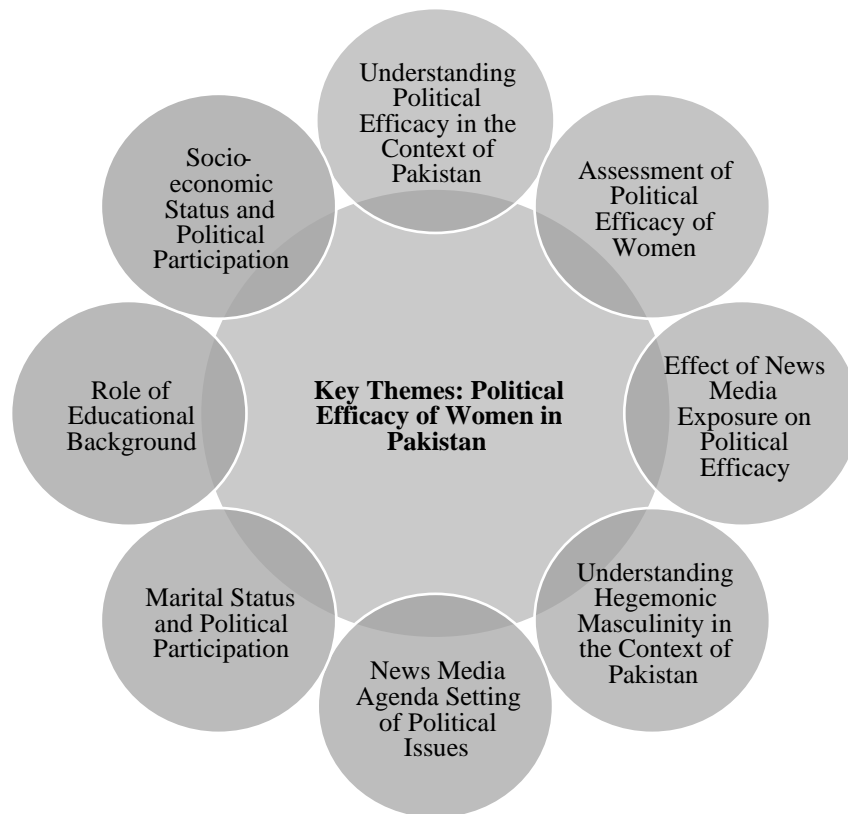
The key themes, in the percentage of respondents, are presented in the following table:

Table 1 : *Key Themes: In-depth Interviews (Highlighted in Percentage of Respondents)*

S No	Media Literacy Themes	Percentage of Respondents
1	Understanding Political Efficacy in the Context of Pakistan	74 %
2	Assessment of Political Efficacy of Women	63%
3	Effect of News Media Exposure on Political Efficacy	61%
4	Understanding Hegemonic Masculinity in the Context of Pakistan	49%
5	News Media Agenda Setting of Political Issues	43%
6	Marital Status and Political Participation	39%
7	Role of Educational Background	35%
8	Socio-economic Status and Political Participation	27%

Key and Subthemes: In-depth Interviews

The key and subthemes of the interviews analysis are presented in the following table:

Table 2 : *Themes: In-depth Interviews*

Key Themes	Subthemes
	Significance of political efficacy among women
Political Efficacy of Women	Impact of active participation of women in voting and electoral processes
	Responses of ordinary Pakistani women to political campaigns
Hegemonic masculinity	Independence of Pakistani females for taking their daily life decisions
	Leadership qualities among Pakistani women
	Decisive authority in terms of professional and family aspects/matters
Political Efficacy and Hegemonic Masculinity	Commitment as a decisive individual or dependent on male members for final decision
	Do women cent per cent follow the instructions of their male family members or take different decisions as well
	Political participation of women as an independent individual
Political Efficacy and women Media Exposure	Role of news media in determining political efficacy among

Political Efficacy of Women in Pakistan

The idea of political efficacy among women is one of the most critical determinants for the prosperity and development of nations. This political efficacy has a strong relationship with her self-efficacy as well (Heger & Hoffmann, 2019). Her political awareness, active participation, and sense of responsibility being a concerned citizen all matter in shaping and transforming the sociopolitical scenario of her nation. The responses

of all the twelve interviewees about their opinion regarding the political efficacy among Pakistani women are narrated below:

A female political leader from JI shared her opinion by saying that:

"Women are named as a better half and are considered a part of men that complement him and the system. She is a functional unit of society just like her male counterparts, so she must participate equally in socio-political activities."

The second part interviewed three well-known and popular political leaders of PPP.

"I think contemporary female politicians and ordinary Pakistani women must have proper political efficacy. Politicians must be clear and well aware of their objectives for opting for political activism as the field. Pakistani women need to be mindful of political systems and their significance."

Another political leader from PTI claimed it to be a significant factor by responding as

"Political efficacy is just as necessary and substantial for women as it is for men. Women are not less than men in any aspect. The role played by women for socio-political transformation, sustainability and development is even stronger than men."

Another political leader of PPP in Punjab shared her opinion by saying:

"Women would only be able to play an active and effective role in society when she had proper political sense and efficacy. She needs to understand who she is as an individual and responsible citizen and whom she will vote for. What are the pros and cons of her voting support to her family and society".

PTI leader highlighted the role of media in increasing political efficacy among women.

"Contemporarily when media plays a vital role in educating and empowering women now they are politically informed and learned enough to be active and can effectively differentiate between right and wrong".

It is suggested that higher female voter turnout and active participation of women as voters can be strong enough to plan and execute female rights-oriented policies that align with distinctive female preferences. In the other case, their lack of participation can risk their voices being unheard, and they do not get representation in the socio-political scenario. While discussing the Impact of active participation of women in voting and electoral processes, One female voter aged 32 shared her opinion about the significance of female voting turn out as:

"Election process can never be effectively completed without active participation and emotional involvement of females. Women constitute 50% of the total population, so they have a major and substantial role in the whole political system and elections. Fair elections can never be successfully executed without women".

"Women's active participation in electoral voting plays a decisive role. Their vote is significant because comparatively, Pakistani population have more women than men so undoubtedly they play a crucial role in determining political scenario in the country".

A female political leader from PMLN shared her opinion by saying that:

"Their vote is just as important as men as a member of society. Women must not be active in the political domain only, but as per my belief, they must be well aware and cautious of their political system and representatives. We are representatives of these

common Pakistani women, so we urge them to be active and participate vigorously in the election process so that they can select representatives of their choice".

"Certainly, the Political system cannot flourish without the involvement of both men and women at an equal level. If women do not show active participation in the electoral process, the whole process is questionable, so she must come forward and participate vigorously in electoral process voting process".

Another political leader from PPP shared her opinion by saying that:

"Women are 48.76 per cent of the population of Pakistan. So, its significant for them to be politically aware and decisive". They are the majority of the Pakistani population. If they do not vote, the actual representation is impossible."

A female voter, (age 28 years) responded to a question related to political campaigns as following.

"During the campaigns, the trends of political efficacy and their responses are just according to the culture of Pakistani society. Women express their opinions and reservations freely and straightforwardly, saying that they will decide their vote as per the consent of their husbands and other family members. Usually, as candidates, our political workers and we already know family backgrounds, inclinations and affiliations of men of that family."

A female voter from Lahore, age 33 shared her opinion by saying that:

"My experience regarding political campaigns and direct interaction with women have been very positive. Because I think their response is potentially affected by us, who are their inspiration as female political leaders and influencers. So our communication and socialization skills play a crucial role in getting positive responses from our female supporters during our election campaigns and support as voters. So females listen very carefully and respond very positively when we treat them with respect as an important member of our society."

Another interviewee stated that:

"Yes, women listen carefully and treat us with hospitality. Their overwhelming behaviour encourages us in our political campaigns. When we treat women with respect and ensure that we have come to respect their individuality and right to select a true representative, they treat us with respect in return."

One of the female political leader from PLM(Q) shared her opinion by saying that:

"Women and specifically" house oriented women" are primarily not interested in listening about politics. they ask us to discuss such "big" thing of politics with the men of their homes. Direct interaction with female voters is a very amazing experience. It enables us to observe the socio-political patterns of our society. Most of the time, women simply say they will seek the permission of their male family heads. Sometimes they do not even have any personal opinions about political matters. They observe the orders of their male family members. Only a small fraction of women who are educated, professionally sound and socially active have their opinion, but even they have to face hurdles and resistance from their male counterparts".

Hegemonic Masculinity in the Pakistani Context

It is argued that hegemonic masculinity promotes the legitimacy of patriarchal order and ensures women's treatment as commodities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). It does

not allow the woman to be recognized as an individual and curbs her right to independent thinking and decisions making. In this regard, a female politician from PPP stated that:
"I think it is infrequent for Pakistani females to take important or even daily life decisions solely without any influence or involvement of their male family member."

One female voter (aged 27 years) shared her opinion by saying that:

"No, as far as I have observed, Pakistani woman is still not independent enough to make their own decisions. Pakistani social system has a patriarchal setup, and hegemonic masculinity is the most influential and dominant factor here. Even today, this patriarchal system does not let her take important decisions according to her own will as an individual."

Another participant said:

"No, I do not feel independent at all. Even today, when society has changed a lot, decisionmaking still lies in men's hands. Women have to surrender to the decisions of their male family heads; their fathers and husbands particularly for their daily life matters."

On the same note, one interviewee stated that:

"Modern civilization has increased the authority of women as individual and active citizens of the country and social system. So we can assume that even if she has not got hundred per cent authority to take her decisions but yes, it is evident that she has got a substantial role and acquaintance in the decision-making process of her life and family matters."

Another female political leader from JI said:

"The women of our society are independent to take their decision on their own to some extent, and to some extent, they are not. Most women do what they see in their houses. If they know about their rights and they, know about the limits. If they know about their rights according to their religion, culture, or humanity, they make their decision with proper understanding and logic. Or with the involvement of father or brother they do better decisions by their own"

While talking about leadership qualities among Pakistani women, one interviewee said:

"As per my life experiences, most of the women in Pakistan can just dream about having effective leadership skills. Leadership is confined to men in our society. But yes, women who have Islamic insight realize their importance as substantial part of system so they know that both of them have to make the holistic picture of social system complete and beautiful. So men and women both should respect each other but still leadership stays authority of men."

Another participant (aged 34) added:

"Pakistani culture and people cultivate the notion that the ultimate goal and motive of life for woman in this society is to get expert and adapt in household management and domestic responsibilities. She is not nurtured like an individual but a "girl" who knows that no matter how intelligent or skilful she is, her brother will be superior to her no matter what. So just due to the gender superiority of her brother the leadership role will always be the right of her brother. This passive approach never let her take any leadership or decisive role in her life".

Another political leader from PML (N) shared her opinion by saying that:

"I think it is a wrong stereotypical claim that women do not have or aspire to have leadership skills because every woman wants to take a leadership role in her own life as an individual at least. She is just as human as men. Indeed, she has to face immense pressure by family and society in this regard and her struggle is harder than her male counterparts. But at the same time we have seen incredible and outstanding transformation and new patterns in the development and growth in the era of women empowerment. Now women are observed to be active and successful in multidimensional professions and fields but yet she has to face the stereotypical claim that she lag leadership skills"

One interviewee added in the same domain by saying:

"As per my opinion the strength of women as personality and acquaintance of leadership qualities depend on family culture, educational background, upbringing all matter. So this is the reason we keep focus on stressing importance of education for women. If women are nurtured as strong individuals with confidence she eventually grooms as strong decisive person".

Another participant said:

"It is natural that ALLAH has blessed every human with effective cognitive skills so as human women have natural decision making skills as well but as far as leadership qualities are concerned they prefer to follow their men". "They do not consider them capable of leadership role because she is not being treated as the leader of her own life even".

A female politician from PPP said:

"Women are nourished in way that they are being taught by family and society to obey men and their decision-making role in every aspect of life. So, they have to face disgrace, emotional manipulation and pressure which consequently make them a low confident, weak confused personality. A very few women who survive this dramatic situation or get family support even have to go through a tough trial from society because our cultural patterns don't aspire it's women to be independent and strong in their personal or social life and decision making authorities"

Relationship Between Political Efficacy and Hegemonic Masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity embodies extra ordinary authoritarian leadership of men and create and strengthen to work for sustainability of system that excludes females from power, leadership, decisions making (Jewkes et al., 2015). These planned efforts are organized in a way that eventually leads and progress towards the maintenance of the patriarchal order in the social and political sphere of that society. The responses of respondents related to decisive authority in terms of professional and family matters (education and job) are cited in the following.

A female political leader from PPP opined that:

"The term independence in terms of decision making need to be defined appropriately. We must not endorse the idea of extreme independence. Because independence in terms of decisionmaking costs some price to the decision maker. I think this must be done by mutual consensus between men and women as compassionate family members. She must respect her family members during decision making and they must respect and support from her as well."

Another female politician from PML (Q) said:

"The miserable fact about right of decision making of women is that Pakistani women are neither allowed nor being taught to take any skills to take decisions as child or an adult. The ability to take decisions is even not nourished in her. The popular and dominant social pattern of Pakistani society is that male family members are considered to be the head of family members and they hold all the authorities to take all the decisions"

"This varies from one family to the other so as per the advancement and transformation in socio cultural patterns conventional trends are positively changing in some families. Now men understand and encourage women unlike a decade before. Especially the fact that women are acquiring financial independence so they are now getting substantial role in decision making as well. Certainly the point that suppression on women is deep rooted in south Asian culture so it is rampant in Pakistani culture as well"

"Generally women do not take such decisions independently on their own but yes now trends have been observed that these decisions are taken by mutual consensus of both husband and wife so women have been given respect as important member in decision making but still the authority to take final and ultimate decision is still a man's domain" Interviewee shared their views about commitment as decisive individual or dependent on male members for final decision below;

"Women give overwhelming response and they demonstrate very positive behaviour. I have experienced strong voting support within the groups of both men and women. Even if they are not actively physically in political events. They ensure their commitment and support to us".

"Whenever I visit and interact with females during our political campaigns, I try my best to convince them by reminding them the social as well as religious concept of contributing welfare and good to social system and being accountable to Almighty for their power of vote. This is very effective approach to deal with them and gain voting support from them. Some of them make a commitment after this rhetoric. Sometimes they say that they will discuss with their male family members and take their voting decision after consensus with them before making any commitment".

"I experienced that women now take keen interest in political scenarios. Whenever i visit women of my constituency they show interest. Women who are housewives and stay at home with their domestic lifestyle even show some interest".

"Making a commitment depends on the right of decision making so if we are interacting with educated women who belong to high socio-economic background, they sometimes commit that they will support us if we address issues of their areas. Most of all female voters demand a better, healthy environment so they respond that they will support the candidate who will solve the problems of their constituency".

"The trends are multidimensional now conventionally it was obvious that women have to decide their political affiliation and vote as per the orders of their male family members. But now recently we have seen that women now discuss their political opinions". Intervieee shared their views about do women cent percent follow the instructions of their male family members or take different decisions as well;

Socioeconomic Status, Martial Status and Political Participation of Women

Experts have discussed permission issues of Pakistani men which influence voting decisions of females of their family (A. Ahmad et al., 2019; Hassan Shehzad, 2014). It is

reported that canvassing political campaigns need to target men more than the women of Pakistan to gain political support in elections (A. Ahmad et al., 2019; Hassan Shehzad, 2014). Because as per the gender biased patriarchal culture and norms it is the men who take voting decision of their whole family. The responses of participants to this question are cited below:

"Male hegemonic patterns are so prevalent in Pakistan that women do not even dare to take political decision without the consent of their husbands, fathers or other family members. It's a general norm that male members determine who the whole family will vote for".

"As per my observation not more than 2% of women have this authority or courage to take their political decisions particularly their voting decision against their male family members. In fact I think not only male family heads from immediate family but the influential males of extended family or even males of their particular constituency influence their voting decisions".

"Conventionally women used to follow their male family members in their voting decisions instinctively but now there are women who think that they can take their voting decisions independently and sometimes they tell us that they will vote for their own choice".

"As per my experience, its mot only the men who exert pressure on women and their decision making, it may be the dominant figures in their family, the caste, and others so not the men particularly there are different pressures on her decisions so most of the tie we rarely get any strong commitment from female voters of our constituency".

"It is very rare for women to have their own personal view. They mostly rely on their men for formation of political opinion".

"Pakistani women are now more aware and well informed so sometimes they clearly discuss their political opinions with us. If we successfully convince them they even commit to vote for us even without permission of their male family members".

While political participation of women as an independent individual in public events and processions was discussed as under;

"Neither we appreciate nor provoke women to come in public processions and political events without permission of their male family members because we promote idea of mutual harmony between men and women. Family and mutual harmony between men and women as creators of this family system is the most important fundamental and functions unit of system. We do not support the idea of patriarchal or matriarchal society or the male chauvinism or female victimization but we promote the idea of mutual accord and peaceful cohabitation of both. We dream Pakistan to be a society where both men and women act like partners and they take their decisions with mutual consensus"

"Even in today's era of increased political efficacy among women I think most of the times only professional political workers and activists actively attend and participate in political processions. As far as common Pakistani women are concerned as they mostly rely on their male family members for political decisions. So males from their families attend these activities more and women are limited to household and support political parties within their domestic domain" (Malik. F, personal communication, April 2022).

"I invite female voters personally through door to door campaigns so they also come and participate in my events but still it depends on the geographical areas. In some areas women who are literate and belong to modern and educated families they come and join us at the same time in some areas where the voters are from conservative families we have to arrange separate women oriented meetings and gatherings for them"

"As per the social and family trend and culture of Pakistan most of the times female do not get permission to actively participate in political processions and activities but yes in the recent years female have started participating in these political events but still they can only participate in the gatherings and events of the party which is preferred and liked by their male family members only".

"Most of the time they do not make any solid commitment and after taking advise from the men. They say to respond".

"It is obvious women depend on their females for their political decision... Even for going into political processions and events" (Liaquat, K. personal communication, April 2022).

Exposure To News Media Political Efficacy of Women

Most of the respondents replied that certainly technological advancement has made information acquisition so easy for both men and women. But still women have less exposure to political news and current affairs. They are mostly engaged watching entertainment content and even tired of domestic responsibilities and politics. Thus, less exposure to news media and political affairs make is the reason that they rely on men for their political opinion formation.

While responding to the question of role of news media in determining political efficacy among women, the interviewees answered as following:

"Both mainstream as well as social media have become the most potential sources of opinion formation for people. Journalists have become influencers and opinion makers, so they set public agenda and build socio-political images in their minds. Women with more media exposure are more responsive and aware about political scenario and are clearer about their preferences. But still there media exposure does not make them completely independent in their political decisions making. I think Imran khan's popularity as political leader is the evidence of strong effects of media on political efficacy of people".

"There is no point of conflict that media have significant and strong influence on the political decision making of its consumers which include both men and women. But as per my observation men consume political media content more than women so these effects are more prevalent in men as compared with women. So even if they are being cultivated by political rhetoric of media their inclination is more towards the predisposition of their male family members".

"Women have little knowledge about socio political issues. Illiterate women are difficult to deal with But educated females are well aware and they share their political concerns with us".

"Most of the times they express their opinions based on the preferences of their male family members so it is seldom that we find women with opinion strongly affected by media".

"We are living in the age of information and media advancement where no one can completely avoid media. Media has become the most significant source of communication and opinion formation so yes women may not have extra ordinary political information but still they have enough level of political knowledge that they can have an interaction with us. But the role of men as opinion leader is evident even in this case".

"Media has become a global village so now women have become active consumers of political content and are well aware of political issues so they discuss".

Conclusion and Recommendations

In a society where women had to fight for their right of education and equality of equity political participation was a milestone to be achieved. The barriers in the acquisition of their independent rights of freedom of participation and expression had become a part of social norms in some areas. But recent years have marked tremendous change in these norms too. Where Pakistani women are finally getting their right for political participation by society and even by the Election commission of Pakistan. World Bank has reported that about 48.5% population of Pakistan are females (The World Bank, 2021). This demonstrates that they constitute a significant proportion of population. They are fundamental building units of family system in Pakistan and eventually their decision-making phenomenon holds a significant importance for society. Such a significant strata of population comprises on women population but still they must strive hard to get their fundamental rights for political representation as well as for voting. Pakistan has been ranked as second worst country with significant gender related issues(World Economic Forum,
2022).

It is a known fact that news media have very strong impacts on the political awareness, efficacy, information, participation, voting of people. They play pivotal role in creating political efficacy among their audience and eventually motivate them towards active political participation. Since it has been evident that these political talk shows and news bulletins have strong impacts on voting behaviours of voters. The point to be pondered is how they effect on males and female audience particularly. Observation shows that these shows are mostly watched by male members of family because women prefer entertainment content over politics and current affairs. So male members being potential audience of these programs get their information from opinion leaders in media. Women on second step get their political information mostly from these male members. So eventually these male counterparts of women dominate their decision making and direct them in desired manner.

The study has highlighted and discuss significance of women empowerment in democratic societies. For more precision the focus has been on status of women empowerment in Pakistani context in terms of her political efficacy and decision making due to media exposure.
Contemporarily when media has become source of acquisition of information, political opinion maker and trend setter it needs to be observed how media serve as opinion leader to Pakistani women. The findings of this study can be beneficial for academic community of media, communication, and political sciences to understand relationship of media and politics as well as voting behaviors of females. It can also be used by the media

professionals who desire to use media power more effectively to play their role more positively as opinion leaders. The electoral management bodies, government officials, election commission and other stake holders can also get scholarly support from the findings of this study to improve voting conditions for females of
Pakistan.

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