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## Relationship between Consumption of TV Political Programs and Media Malaise in Shaping Political Efficacy among Students

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### Abstract

*This study explores the relationship between consuming Pakistani TV political programs and media malaise to shape external efficacy among University students of Lahore. This study assumed that entrainment and talk shows make students cynical, distrustful and pessimistic; commonly known as media malaise which causes them to affect their external efficacy. Media malaise has been measured with two indicators namely cynicism and political participation. Students of two public sector Universities from Lahore city were taken as population and survey method was applied to get students' responses. Data analysis (N=758) shares an interesting result, that there is a positive relationship between consumption of infotainment shows and media malaise, which shows that political programs are making students cynical, distrustful and pessimistic about the political milieu. This hypothesis was also accepted that media malaise effects reduce the external efficacy of students by making them distrustful about the political environment of the country*

**Key Words:** Cynicism, External Political Efficacy, Media Malaise, Political Participation.

## Introduction

To safeguard a democratic environment, it is indispensable to get the provision of students and to develop their self-confidence about themselves and the country. It is important to equip them with this conviction that they are valuable for the country. Besides, it is equally imperative for them to maintain the trust that the political system is responsive to their demands and they can trust the politicians of the country.

This assurance helps people to enjoy a high level of efficacious feelings and supports them to explore their inner potential. On the contrary, skeptical, unsatisfied, detached, and politically demobilized students cannot comprehend their contribution in the political scenario and they start losing their trust on political structure as a whole and feel that their contribution can not bring any positive change in society, thus their efficacy starts losing its hope.

Political efficacy is an important attribute that signifies the discernment of a person about his/her self-confidence upon the political milieu of the country. Political efficacy was familiarized in the mid-twentieth century, by the "Michigan's Survey Research Centre" Nabatchi (2010).

Political efficacy is further divided into "internal and external levels". Internal side indicates the assessment of people about politics. They feel that they understand the politics; they are able enough to contribute to politics and their participation would always be noteworthy. Whereas, in the second type,

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people develop their trust in political structure as a whole and believe that politicians are reactive and responsive to their needs (Lee, 2005).

Political information is also considered as an essential feature to develop different political attitudes. Efficacy urges people not only to become an active participator in the democratic environment but also to seek information related to the country which leads them to pursue different tools of media for gratifying this need.

Political programs can serve this purpose to a great extent which is evidence of their growing popularity with every passing day. Political programs have become a compulsory part of every news channel and hosts of these programs are treated as celebrities. They are discussed and ranked by the public as well. Political programs help to cultivate and foster the composure of an individual about politics and let him make a mental sketch about his abilities.

Gurevitch, Coleman and Blumler (2009) also share in this regard that television watching and political pictures are mutually exclusive. Television offers a raw material about politics but it is packaged by television, which helps to construct a perception of reality.

Programs of Television and its exposure affect the self-confidence of viewers and they start viewing the political environment accordingly. Television news channels present countless stories in a day. In Pakistan, currently, more than 80 channels are on-air which present different formats of political programs. In Pakistan, infotainments cum satirical shows have received immense popularity in a short period and people seem more grabbed and fascinated by these shows. This acceptance makes it important to evaluate the status of talk shows in a detailed manner but we find rare studies to address this point. By keeping this literature gap in mind, this study undertakes that political programs are producing negativity and pessimism among students which not only causes to reduce their participation tendency but also decreases their political efficacy. By deploying the survey method, the study looks into these programs to create media malaise and its effects to decrease the external efficacy of students.

## Hypotheses

H1: The more people watch political talk shows, the more they develop media malaise effects.

H2: The more people watch political infotainment shows, the more they develop media malaise effects.

H3: Media malaise effects reduce the level of external political efficacy of students.

## Literature Review

Political attitudes are one of the most important determinants of democracy. The notion of political efficacy has got worldwide recognition, presented the first time in the USA by Campbell, Gurin, and Miller during "national elections" (Sohl, 2010). It is considered as an assessment or sentiments of a person regarding politics, in which he believes that he has the potential to influence the political procedure and his activities are important and vigorous to make a visible change in society (Craig and Maggioletto, 1982).

Political efficacy is divided generally in the domains of internal and external". Adnerle (2010) clarifies by sharing that internal level mirrors the sentiments of an individual about his conduct and practices in society and he understands that his actions will be viewed as fair and he can impact politics. External level shares the individuals' conviction that the political format and government is responsive to his requirements and needs. Sharoni (2012) also reinforces that "internal and external political efficacy" are respectively associated with each other with a range of facets of political culture. Internal efficacy is linked with engagement, political knowledge, and interest, whereas external efficacy is likely to affect voting turnout, confidence, and trust in government.

Efficacious person is mostly a keen observer and tries for surveillance of political information. For this purpose, he has a reliance on media. Television is one of the significant communication tools and it contains an assortment of political stories. Ceron and Memoli (2015) take media as a focal point which helps residents to accumulate and pick political information to develop their behaviors accordingly. Therefore, it

is essential to evaluate the TV Programs to know their role to fulfill their social duty or sabotaging the social structures of society.

Talk shows in Pakistan have become very popular among youngsters and its anchor-persons are treated as celebrities. Their programs, content and their affiliations are discussed by people. Besides, talk shows, infotainment shows have gained utmost popularity by people. Due to its comedy, music, satire, and mimicry, people take more interest in it and prefer to watch it as they find it as a less loud and a source of entertainment. That's why infotainment shows have created a hype in a short time and are quite popular among youngsters.

It is also evident from the literature that political talk shows have the potential to develop political efficacy. An informed person always has a better choice in front of him and he can be in a better position to develop his opinion. Iddid, Ahmed, and Souket (2017) also believe political behavior including political efficacy is backed by news and political information consumed by television.

This factor makes it more significant to observe the role of political programs that have received utmost popularity among youngsters and to apprehend the content in shaping political attributes.

## **Debate on Media Malaise**

Discussion on "media effects" has always been a disagreed point in literature as it offers many contradictions and inconsistencies. Media has been a source of information but it is often accused of creating pessimism among people known as media malaise. Media malaise claims that media is discouraging people through its negative coverage of political activities, making youngsters reluctant to participate in politics.

Curran et al. (2014) argue that in literature, there are inexplicable arguments, and media is mostly held responsible to disengage people, while the other group supports the contribution of media and acknowledges it as painting political trust. Peri (2004) shares in this debate and argues that television is accountable for weakening democratic performance of citizens and this tendency leads to democratic crisis

Robinson (1976) was of this view that reporting during the post-Watergate period by American media cultivated negative and feelings of vulnerability and pessimism among voters and their trust was also shattered particularly if they were dependent on media. These pessimistic is particularly created if media reports strategic stories by replacing or overlooking substantive issues.

Entertainment media is equally held responsible in this regard. Most of the time, this segment is ignored as it is taken as a harmless medium. Infotainment shows are creating satire and comic segments and mimicry of politicians is a common and routine segment. This act can also cause to reduce political efficacy and to create pessimism among youngsters as they are likely to believe that politicians are unreal and dishonest so they are not trustworthy. When these youngsters observe the same politicians to be a part of the political set up, they get injected.

This picture shows that efficacious feelings are always more vulnerable to television exposure as its content can reduce or elevate the levels of efficacy especially of young people who actively consume the content and are in surveillance of information. This situation gives prominence to television content as it can affect the political attitudes of youngsters. This study has taken cynicism, political participation as an indicator of media malaise and deploys survey method to find out the relationship between variables.

## **Methodology**

### **Survey Method**

This study selects quantitative methodology to get quantitative data and the survey method was deployed to serve this purpose. A structured questionnaire was adapted from already developed scales with some required changes.

## **The Population of the Study**

Students of public sector Universities of Lahore were chosen as a population of this study.

## **Sample Size**

A sample of (N=758) was taken for this study. All those questionnaires were discarded which were incomplete or had missing values.

## **Sampling Technique**

Two public sector Universities of Lahore were selected, namely "University of the Punjab (PU) and The University of Engineering and Technology, Lahore. By deploying purposive sampling technique, only those students were selected who were enrolled in The Faculty of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Faculty of Natural Sciences, Humanities and Islamic Studies of these Universities. Social sciences departments of selected Universities were purposively chosen because students in this discipline study the social systems, society, and connection among people which helps them to watch and interpret the media differently.

By using purposive method, those students from these faculties were selected, who have exposure to political programs of news channels. Students were asked some basic questions to assess their political interest and inclination to watch political talk shows. The questionnaire was given just to those students who showed political interest and they were also viewers of political programs.

## **Operationalization of Key Variables**

Key variables were operationalized as the following

### **Viewers' Consumption**

Viewers consumption refers to the approximate time of television exposure on daily basis. Viewers consumption was operationalized to the total number of approximate hours; a student is exposed to watch political talk shows in a day or a week.

### **Political Efficacy**

Political efficacy is considered as an assessment or sentiments of a person regarding politics, in which he believes that he has the potential to influence the political procedure and his activities are important and vigorous to make a visible change in society (Craig and Maggiotto, 1982). While sharing about two levels of efficacy, Adnerle (2010) clarifies that the external level shares the individuals' conviction about political format and the government's responsiveness to his requirements and needs.

Internal efficacy for this study includes the confidence and trust of a student over the government institutions and the responsiveness of officials. Items to measure this dependent variable were selected from Niemi, Craig, and Mattei (1991) with few modifications.

### **Political Cynicism**

While defining the concept of cynicism, Cappella (2002) defines cynicism as the "absence of trust". In this study, cynicism refers to the distrustful of students over political media and government officials of Pakistan. Items proposed by Pinkleton, Austin and Fortman (1998) were taken in this study for measuring Political cynicism with few modifications.

### **Political Participation**

This indicator included different items to assess conventional and unconventional modes of participation by asking students about partaking in a strike or boycott, writing letters to politicians or media persons,

approaching any politicians, participating in students' societies, discussing politics with friends, and activeness on social media.

### Data Analysis

**Table 1.** Pearson Product Moment Correlation Between Consumption of Talk Shows and Media Malaise

| Consumption of Talk Shows |      | Media Malaise |
|---------------------------|------|---------------|
| Pearson Correlation       | 1    | .048          |
| Sig. (2-tailed)           |      | .184          |
| N                         | 758s | 758           |

Pearson product moment correlation was applied to explore an association between watching talk shows media malaise representing hypothesis 01. Findings share no relationship between both variables as  $P = .184$ . which showed that these shows are not creating pessimism, cynicism, or frustration among selected University students. Besides, it is also not affecting their inclination to participate.

**Table 2.** Pearson Product Moment Correlation Between Consumption of Infotainment Programs and Media Malaise

| Consumption of Info Programs |     | Media Malaise |
|------------------------------|-----|---------------|
| Pearson Correlation          | 1   | .086          |
| Sig. (2-tailed)              |     | .018          |
| N                            | 758 | 758           |

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

This table showed a positive relationship between both variables against hypothesis 02, (at a significant level as  $P = 0.018$ ) which explains that the more people watch infotainment they more they are likely to get media malaise. This hypothesis is accepted that students of selected universities are more likely to develop media malaise from infotainment programs. They get cynical and pessimistic feelings as a result of watching such programs.

**Table 3.** Pearson Product Moment Correlation Between Consumption of Political Talk Shows and External Political Efficacy

| Consumption of Pol. Programs | External Efficacy |
|------------------------------|-------------------|
| Pearson Correlation          | 1                 |
| Sig. (2-tailed)              | .069              |
| N                            | 758               |

This Table displays no relationship between watching political shows and external efficacy as  $P = .057$ . it shows that talk shows are not affecting the trust of students over politicians and their responsiveness.

**Table 4.** Pearson Product Moment Correlation Between Consumption of Infotainment Programs and External Efficacy

| Consumption of Info Programs | Ext Efficacy |
|------------------------------|--------------|
| Pearson Correlation          | 1            |
| Sig. (2-tailed)              | .077**       |
| N                            | 758          |

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

This table shows a connection between consuming infotainment shows and external efficacy (at a significant level as  $P=000$ ), which shows that infotainment programs play an important role in lessening the external efficacy of students and their trust in political responsiveness of government and politicians' splinters. They get dejected with the politicians and start believing that politicians are not familiar with their problems and can not help them in solving their issues.

**Table 5.** Pearson Product Moment Correlation Between Media Malaise and External Efficacy

|                     | Media Malaise | External Efficacy |
|---------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Pearson Correlation | 1             | .608**            |
| Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000          |                   |
| N                   | 758           | 758               |

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

The third hypothesis was accepted as this table identified a positive relationship between both variables (at a significant level as  $P=000$ ). Relationship's strength is large as its value is .60. This hypothesis was accepted that students with malaise effects experience low external efficacy. It adds an important dimension in literature which makes it more significant to explore the content of political programs vigilantly as these programs can affect the political attitudes of students towards any certain direction.

**Table 6.** Consumption of Current Affairs Talk Shows

|                         | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Multiple times in a day | 70        | 9.2        |
| 6-7 days in a week      | 99        | 13.1       |
| 3-5 days in a week      | 172       | 22.7       |
| 1-2 days in a week      | 167       | 22.0       |
| Sometimes in a week     | 219       | 28.9       |
| Never                   | 31        | 4.1        |
| N=758                   |           |            |

*\*= values in table show percentages.*

This table showed the consumption patterns of students to consume talk shows. Table shows that 9.2% watch political shows multiple times in a day, 13.1% (99) watch 6-7 days in a week, 22.7% (172) watch 3-5 days in a week, 22.0% (167) watch these shows 1-2 days in a week, whereas 28.9% (219) watch sometimes in a week, while 4.1% (31) expressed that they do not watch political shows.

**Table 7.** Consumption of Political Infotainment Shows

|                         | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Multiple times in a day | 137       | 18.1       |
| 6-7 days in a week      | 194       | 25.6       |
| 3-5 days in a week      | 143       | 18.9       |
| 1-2 days in a week      | 152       | 20.1       |
| Sometimes in a week     | 118       | 15.6       |
| Never                   | 14        | 1.8        |

N=758

*\*= values in table show percentages*

This table showed the consumption patters of infotainment shows and shares that 25.6% watch infotainment programs 6-7 days in a week, 20.1% watch 1-2 days in a week. 18.1% watch these shows

multiple times in a day. Whereas 15.6% (118) watch them sometimes in a week while 1.8% do not watch them.

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

This study aimed to explore an evolving concept of media malaise. Despite this fact that television is a powerful source of information, its role is still under attack. This study aimed to examine the political shows to develop media malaise. It was assumed in the study that political programs create pessimism, and make students cynical which leads them to disassociate with political activities. Furthermore, this pessimism lessens their self-confidence and their trust in themselves is weakened. They also become skeptical about politicians and political set-up and start believing that the political environment is not responsive to their needs. This kind of feeling makes them restricted and they become less interested to pay any contribution to the progress of their country.

Three hypotheses were developed for this study to explore the shared assumptions. The first supposition was not confirmed and it showed that there is no connection between watching of political talk shows and media malaise as "Pearson product moment correlation" did not share association ( $P=.184$ ) between both variables. It shows that talk shows do not create any negativity, pessimism, and distrustfulness among students, and no media malaise is created by consuming them (Table 4.1). While the second supposition of the study was confirmed and a positive relationship was found between media malaise and entertainment shows at a significant level (as  $P=0.18$ ) with a strength of the relationship having value is .08 (Table 4.2). This finding is significant and it adds an interesting direction in literature which states that entertainment shows develop pessimistic feelings among its viewers. Entertainment shows are mostly assumed as laughter therapy and people make fun of politicians and this format seems less vulnerable. On the other hand, current affairs talk shows are assumed to be more vulnerable to democracy because of its obvious and loud discussion and portraying political disputes. Therefore, this finding gives an important hint and makes it important to observe the role of entertainment shows along with current affair shows. This finding is in line with Putnam (2000) as he also feels that entertainment shows are a major reason for the decline in political activities. He relates a decline in social capital, less turnout of students, and their disengagement with politics with these shows.

Data showed no connection between watching political talk shows and external efficacy as  $P=.057$ . but it showed a connection between infotainment shows and external efficacy (at a significant level as  $P=.000$ ), which indicated that these shows are reducing the trust of students on politicians and government officials. Their trust is shattered about the responsiveness of officials as they believe that they cannot help them in either way.

The third supposition that less external efficacy would be observed among students with media malaise effects was accepted at a significant level as  $P=.000$  (Table 4.5). It shares that students who develop negativity, distrust, and disparagement from these shows, their external efficacy also reduces. Their trust in the responsiveness and vigilance of government is shattered and they deem this system as a ragged. This result provides a strength to Robinson who also accuses entertainment media for creating negativity among people which causes to decrease social capital and efficacious attitudes.

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