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Political Communication and Public Opinion in Pakistan

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Abstract: *Political communication and public opinion are two interlinked social phenomena. The impacts of political communication on public opinion may vary from region to region and country to country. However, in Pakistan, public opinion is shaped and influenced by political communication. This research enterprise tries to explore the relationship between political communication and public opinion in Pakistan. The study revolves around the view that there is a dearth of comprehension of the relationship between political communication and public opinion in Pakistan. The key objectives of this research include the investigation of the main channels of political communication in Pakistan and their implications on public opinion. The study also investigates features inducing the efficacy of political communication in Pakistan. To provide insight into this issue and fill the gap, this study has employed a descriptive method of research. The primary and secondary sources of data are incorporated. Available surveys are reviewed, and in-depth interviews with political communication experts are conducted to analyze the effectiveness of political communication in Pakistan. The study found that political communication has a mammoth impact on shaping public opinion in Pakistan.*

Introduction

The political environment and public opinion in Pakistan have been structured and shaped by the changes in the socioeconomic, religious, and cultural environment of the country (Akhtar R. & A. G., 2019). Since the last few decades, the country has experienced a different political environment and influence of public opinion in shaping decisions based on internal strife to external policies. In other words, the last decade has witnessed that public opinion and the political arena in Pakistan have been two dynamic factors in terms of shaping the internal and external decision-making of the country (Ali, 2018).

The term political communication is considered as the exchange of ideas and information between the masses and leaders. This view signifies that political communication is comprised of ideas, arguments, and suggestions based on political problems and their implications for the masses in society (Khan, 2018). In a country like Pakistan, these two institutions (public opinion and political communication) have a changing relationship. In Pakistan, politicians mainly shape public opinion through different tools of communication, including social media, speeches, and strikes (Salman Khalid & S., 2019). Among these communication tools, social media has been used to inform the masses about a particular social construction that helps politicians influence their lives and their opinions regarding policy-making and shifting of policies (Salman Khalid & S., 2019).

To sum up, this research enterprise aims to address the relations between public opinion and political communication and their impact in shaping public opinion in Pakistan. To address this phenomenon, the study depends upon in-depth interviews with the most experienced stakeholders. The study also seeks to address the view of the masses on political communication and its impact on public opinion in Pakistan. The discourses produced by politicians through media, election campaigns, and policy-making are discussed, aiming to trace the impact of political communication in shaping public opinion in Pakistan. However, to address this phenomenon, political dynamics in Pakistan are investigated and reviewed

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academically. Moreover, challenges associated with shaping public opinion and communication between politicians and the public are also discussed. This aspect aims to highlight the main challenges hindering the communication channels between the masses and politicians in shaping public opinion in Pakistan. Therefore, socioeconomic, cultural, political, and religious factors are investigated with academic insight to address this issue.

Research Statement

The communication between the masses and politicians in shaping public opinion has been done through a proper channel that includes media, election campaigns, and political agents from top to bottom. The entire process is a complex phenomenon. To understand this process, this research venture aims to examine the relationship between political communication and the public in shaping public opinion and the challenges associated with this process in Pakistan. Therefore, this study tries to fill this void by academically addressing this issue.

Research Question

What is the relationship between political communication and public opinion, and what challenges are associated with shaping public opinion in Pakistan?

Research Objectives

This research enterprise seeks to address the following objectives:
- To understand the terms political communication and public opinion.
- To investigate the relationship between political communication and public opinion.
- To examine the impacts of political communication on public opinion.

Literature Review

Defining the Term Political Communication

The concept of political communication is a complex term. Understanding this requires an academic overview of the literature. However, it is generally considered as the link between the government and the citizens. According to Türker Elitaş, Political communication can be defined as the link between politics and citizens, as well as the engagement modalities that connect these two groups, whether the relationship is developed via the persuasion modalities of Pathos, Ethos, or Logos (Elitaş, 2023). Elif Esiyok believes that Political communication is a significant field that has incorporated various social sciences fields such as political science, psychology, history, and so on. In general, political communication is an area of communication studies that investigates the entire process of political information dissemination among politicians and the public (Esiyok, 2021). For Işıl Tombul, Gülşah Sarı, it is the interaction between the government, political parties, and political players and voters for a variety of political ends (Işıl Tombul, 2021).

To sum up, participating in the political process is a right granted to all citizens in a democratic country. It is critical to the survival of a healthy democratic community. Political communication is essential to political communication. It involves the general people, the news media, the government, and the interest organizations that serve as a bridge between them. It establishes relationships between political institutions and individuals. People can use the internet to interact with their government representatives, organize politically, discuss themes, and educate one another about political matters. In turn, major political actors may successfully communicate with their constituents over modern means of communication, such as the Internet.

Conceptualizing the Term Public Opinion

Public opinion generally refers to an aggregate of individual ideas, attitudes, and beliefs about a specific topic expressed by a large proportion of a community is known as public opinion. Some scholars interpret the aggregate as a synthesis of all or a specific part of society's opinions, while others perceive it as a collection of many competing or opposing perspectives (Davison, 2023). In 1981, Charles Horton Cooley,

an American sociologist, stressed public opinion as a process of contact and mutual influence rather than a condition of broad agreement (Cooley., 1918). In 1961, the American political scientist V.O. Key defined public opinion as 'private persons' opinions that governments consider prudent to heed (Wlezien, 2016). Following breakthroughs in statistical and demographic analysis, by the 1990s, public opinion was understood to be the aggregate view of a defined population, such as a certain demographic or ethnic group (S. A. H. Zaidi, 2018). The power of public opinion extends beyond politics and elections. It has a strong influence in many other areas, including culture, fashion, literature and the arts, consumer spending, marketing, and public relations (Katohar, 2023). To sum up, regardless of how they define public opinion, nearly all scholars agree that at least four conditions must be met for a phenomenon to be considered public opinion: first, there must be an issue; second, there must be a significant number of individuals expressing opinions on the issue, third, at least some of these opinions must reflect some kind of consensus, and final, this consensus must directly or indirectly exert influence.

Relationship between Political Communication and Public Opinion

This study highlights the complex relationship between political communication and public opinion. The mass media, which has come to cover the Habermasian 'public sphere,' generally mediates public opinion in modern society (Savigny, 2012). This area is currently defined by the clash between market and democratic principles, as well as opposing political and media interests. The way information is presented for debate becomes twisted (Savigny, 2012). Public opinion is no longer formed through discussion but rather through communication networks that compete with political actors that attempt to maintain control over information transmission (Savigny, 2012). The growth of the internet as a new mode of communication poses a possible challenge to the traditional media's and political parties' primacy as formators of public opinion. Furthermore, religion, culture, socioeconomic standing, education, and the media all influence public opinion. Political communication shapes public opinion through a variety of communication tactics, and the media plays an important role in determining public opinion (Rojas & S., 2019). However, barriers to successful political communication, such as a lack of information and the presence of fake news and propaganda, obstruct effective communication (Rojas & S., 2019). The findings of this literature evaluation offer insights into the particular dynamics of Pakistan's political scene and point to future study directions.

Theoretical Framework

Media System Theory

The Media System Theory helps to comprehend political communication and public opinion in Pakistan. According to this theory, a country's media system can have a substantial impact on how political communication takes place and how public opinion is formed (McQuail, 2016). The Media System Theory classifies media systems into four categories: First, authoritarian systems illustrate how the government tightly controls the media; second, in liberal systems, the media is independent of the government and is utilized to promote the government's agenda and to stifle opposition, third, pluralist systems allow the media to report on political news and events in a critical manner, and, lastly, the Media–Centric system, which suggests that the media is the most significant source of information for the general population (McQuail, 2016). Therefore, the media has been a key source of creating a link between politicians and the public, thereby shaping public opinion in Pakistan.

Material and Method

Research Method

This research venture has incorporated the qualitative method of research. The study is descriptive in nature, and data provided in the research mostly relies on descriptive analysis based on a thematic approach. Data collected to address this phenomenon includes secondary sources as well as primary sources. The data is analyzed through a thematic approach and coding schemes.

Data Collection

The data for this research venture is collected in two dimensions of data collection. The primary and

secondary sources of data are incorporated to address the core concerns of the research through academic manners.

Primary Data

This research study involves primary sources of data. The primary source includes in-depth interviews with the most experienced stakeholders, such as journalists, media anchors, politicians, think tanks, and researchers. The respondents were interviewed through a set of open-ended questionnaires. The face-to-face and virtual methods were used to conduct interviews.

Secondary Data

The collection of secondary data for this research revolves around the existing academic debates and research works. The work of most renowned academicians has been investigated and reviewed to address the core concerns of this study. However, research journals, research articles, books, and existing interviews, and surveys are incorporated.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is one of the main parts of data analysis in research. It helps to analyze primary and secondary data through a set of themes and coding schemes. Interviews conducted with major stakeholders are reviewed and incorporated through a set of themes and coding schemes. Therefore, this research study has employed thematic analysis to address the relationship between public opinion and political communication and their impact in shaping public opinion in Pakistan.

Sampling

Purposive Sampling

This study employed a purposive sampling method to select samples for the conduct of interviews and then generalized the findings. The respondents for interviews were selected in terms of their experiences with political communication and public opinion.

Sample Size

This research venture has selected thirty samples. These respondents have been selected based on their experience and knowledge of the topic. However, only thirty samples have been selected due to the shortage of time and financial constraints.

Sample Age

For this research enterprise, the age of selected samples ranges from 30 years to 60 years. Additionally, this criterion has been set to address the issue by interviewing the most experienced respondents.

Sample Gender

The sample for this research study is comprised of males and females. Among thirty samples, fifteen are male and fifteen female respondents. The idea of gender has been incorporated to give a fair chance to the most experienced respondents, including males and females.

Ethical Considerations

Informed Consent Letter

This research venture has incorporated an informed consent letter. The aim of adding this letter was to facilitate the respondents and address the issues about research ethics. Before conducting interviews and focus group discussions, respondents were informed about the core concerns of the topic and options for withdrawal from their respective views within 15 days.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

While keeping research ethics, the respondents were also informed about the concepts of anonymity and

confidentiality. The personal information of some respondents, including names, casts, contact numbers, designations, and addresses, were kept secret and wanted to keep privacy.

Results and Discussion

This study has incorporated the qualitative research approach, which gave an in-depth understanding of the relationship between political communication and public opinion in Pakistan. The qualitative data gathered from in-depth interviews provided insights into the perspectives of political actors, media personnel, and experts in the field of political communication and public opinion in Pakistan. The following are the study's findings:

Political Communication and Public Opinion in Pakistan

The in-depth interviews with respondents helped to understand the political communication and public opinion in Pakistan. According to respondents, in Pakistan, political communication and public opinion are complex and varied phenomena impacted by a variety of factors, such as the country's history, culture, and political institutions. The findings of this research also highlight that historically, the process of political communication and public opinion has been the key source of shaping public opinion in Pakistan. In Pakistan, there are many Factors such as media outlets, political campaigns, and political speeches and rallies portrayed by media outlets have always impacted the shaping of public opinion according to the way the media portray it. This political culture is deeply rooted in the veins of the country. Politicians' methods of appealing masses remain in the exploitation of their emotions through emotional slogans, language, and propaganda through media outlets. Therefore, the media's role in spreading political discourses and shaping public opinion has been dynamic in Pakistan.

Factors Influencing Public Opinion in Pakistan

The findings of this research study developed an understanding that helps to understand the impact of various factors influencing public opinion in Pakistan. These factors include socioeconomic, education, religion, culture, and media. The study reviewed the impacts of these factors while making the coding scheme and themes of interviews. The study found that public opinion in Pakistan is influenced and shaped by these factors due to their impact on political dynamics and the public in Pakistan. Since Pakistan is an Islamic country, religion has been influencing the very political issues and decision-making in the country. Religion has been a tool in the political arena for politicians to make political discourses and shape public opinion in the country. Equally, socioeconomic and cultural aspects are no exception. Since Pakistan is a religious country, the impact of culture and socioeconomic features can be traced to political decision-making. For instance, maintaining the reputation and ties with Arab nations and Iran has been an indispensable part of Pakistan's foreign policy. During the USA-Iraq war, various religious pamphlets and protests were recorded in favor of Iraq. The general public and their opinions were influenced by the politicians with the help of media and religion. Therefore, shaping public opinion in Pakistan is influenced by a multitude of factors, including religion, media, culture, and socioeconomic conditions.

Impact of Media on Determining Public Opinion in Pakistan

The findings of this research found that in Pakistan, the media has a substantial role in shaping public opinion. According to the respondents, the media's bias and sensationalism reflect and influence public opinion. It also impedes the effectiveness of political communication in Pakistan. Moreover, the worth of the media in informing the public about political developments, policies, and issues is also indispensable. During interviews with journalists and political leaders, the study found that the role of media in Pakistan has been very crucial in determining public opinion. Therefore, the media in Pakistan has been considered an important means of informing the public about political issues, developments, and policies. The findings addressed that the biases associated with the media have also been impeding the construction of political communication and public opinion in Pakistan. Thus, there is a need for a partial and unbiased media that can play a profound role in disclosing realities and political offshoots for public opinion. This way, impediments to framing public opinion and effective communication between politicians and the public can be ensured through unbiased media in the country.

Obstacles to Active Political Communication in Pakistan

The study found a host of factors impeding the effective path of political communication in Pakistan. These challenges consist of the dearth of timely information, a huge ratio of illiteracy, and the existence of propaganda and fake news. The language used by political leaders to emotionally attract the public has also been one of the key challenges that prevent the path of effective political communication in the country. The autocratic nature of the political system also hindrances the process. For instance, the political history of Pakistan has been influenced by the dictators. Therefore, the relationship between politicians and the masses remained ineffective. The influence of dictators kept public opinion limited and passive. This led to the impediments in framing a cooperative link between political actors and the public. This has also hindered the formation of a dynamic public opinion in the country. Besides, educational institutions and education curricula have also been impeding the process of an active relationship between politicians and the masses in Pakistan. The educational institutions represent religious and traditional approaches to politics. The innovative and democratic features are ignored and avoided. Instead, the history of dynastic and autocratic political systems is being taught in schools, colleges, and universities. Therefore, expecting an active public opinion and association between politicians and the masses can be a mere dream.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between political communication and public opinion in Pakistan. In-depth interviews with political actors, media professionals, and experts in the fields of political communication and public opinion in Pakistan were conducted using a qualitative technique, as was a literature review. The results of this research confirm that religion, culture, socioeconomic level, education, and media influence public opinion in Pakistan. Traditional values and customs influence attitudes and perspectives on social and moral issues, and religion and culture play an important part in shaping public opinion. Socioeconomic policies surely influence public opinion on government policies and social inequality in society, but education correlates with informed political opinions. Like in neighboring countries in Pakistan, the media is dominant over the people in terms of spreading the news that affects public opinion in both ways, positive and negative; the media has a huge impact in shaping public opinion. The media is a very effective means of alerting the public about political developments, policies, and issues. However, media bias and sensationalism have the potential to influence public opinion and obstruct productive political dialogue.

In Pakistan, political communication methods have an impact on public opinion. Political actors utilize a variety of communication tactics to appeal to the emotions of the public, such as speeches, rallies, and social media. In Pakistan, the leaders of the leading political parties used to ignite the people based on emotions and those effects or directly involved in policy-making matters. In addition, the study revealed various barriers to efficient political communication in Pakistan, such as a lack of knowledge, a low literacy rate, adding regionalism for personal benefits, and the presence of fake news and propaganda. These obstacles impede effective communication and limit the public's ability to participate in informed political debate.

To address the prevalence of fake news and propaganda in Pakistan's media environment, the findings of this study imply the need for greater impartial reporting, fact-checking, and information exchange. Furthermore, initiatives to improve information availability and literacy rates can contribute to a more informed population capable of engaging in constructive political dialogue. Overall, this study contributes to our understanding of Pakistan's complex link between political communication and popular opinion. The findings indicate that policymakers, political actors, and journalists must collaborate to improve political communication and encourage informed public conversation.

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