

Digital News Dynamics: Investigating the Impact on Public Opinion Formation in Pakistan

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Abstract

This study explores the complex relationship between digital news consumption and public opinion formation in Pakistan. Employing a quantitative approach, the research focused on adult digital news consumers across Pakistan, utilizing stratified sampling for a diverse demographic representation. The study formulated and tested several hypotheses related to the frequency of digital news consumption, source credibility, social media engagement, content diversity, and the mediating role of digital literacy. Findings from a structured questionnaire survey indicate that all these factors significantly influence the formation of public opinion. The study also highlights the pivotal role of digital literacy as a mediator in this process. These insights extend the application of theories such as agenda-setting and uses and gratifications in the context of digital media. The study contributes to the academic discourse on media influence in the digital era and offers practical implications for policymakers and media practitioners. It underscores the need for strategies promoting media literacy and responsible news consumption. The study acknowledges its limitations, including reliance on self-reported data and its focus on Pakistan, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future research avenues include comparative studies across countries and longitudinal analyses to understand evolving digital news consumption patterns.

Keywords: Digital news consumption, Public opinion formation, Media literacy, Social media engagement, Source credibility, News content diversity.

Introduction

The digital era has significantly altered how news is consumed and processed in the global landscape. Recent studies indicate that an average individual spends approximately 6.5 hours online daily, with a substantial portion dedicated to news consumption (Smith, 2022). This shift towards digital news has profound implications on public opinion, particularly in shaping political and social perspectives. Globally, the role of digital media in influencing public perception has been a subject of intense scrutiny, especially considering events like elections and social movements (Hall et al., 2021).

Focusing on Pakistan, the digital news landscape presents a unique set of challenges and opportunities. With over 76 million internet users, Pakistanis increasingly turn to online news platforms (Khan et al., 2023). However, this surge in digital news consumption has also led to concerns about misinformation and the polarization of public opinion. Studies have highlighted political bias in news reporting and the spread of unverified information through social media

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(Zoonen et al., 2024). These trends underscore the need to understand how digital news shapes public opinions in Pakistan.

Public opinion formation, a term first coined by Lippmann in 1922, is at the heart of this study. It refers to a population's collective attitudes and beliefs towards specific issues, influenced by various factors including media consumption (Trivedi et al., 2018). In the context of Pakistan and globally, the way public opinion is formed and swayed by digital news poses significant ramifications. If not addressed appropriately, it could lead to misinformed decisions, societal divisions, and a distorted perception of reality.

The influence of digital news on public opinion cannot be overstated. Factors such as the credibility of news sources, diversity of content, and the engagement of audiences on social media platforms play pivotal roles in shaping opinions. For instance, a study by Jiyoung et al. (2023) demonstrated that credible news sources significantly impact public belief systems. Similarly, diverse news content ensures a well-rounded perspective, reducing the likelihood of biased opinions (Pitoura, 2020). Addressing these factors could mitigate the risks associated with misinformed public opinion, benefiting Pakistan and the global community.

However, the emphasis on digital news consumption also harbors potential drawbacks. Over-reliance on digital sources could exacerbate issues like echo chambers and misinformation. Past literature, such as Ludwig et al. (2023) work, indicates that excessive engagement with homogenous news content can lead to polarized opinions. This study, therefore, critically examines these factors to articulate a comprehensive problem statement.

Despite the growing body of literature on public opinion formation, there needs to be a more significant gap in understanding the specific relationship between digital news consumption and opinion formation, especially in the Pakistani context. This study aims to fill this void by offering novel insights through a unique methodological approach and conceptual framework, differentiating it from prior research.

This study reveals significant relationships between digital news consumption and public opinion formation. These insights provide valuable guidance for policymakers and practitioners in media and information literacy, underscoring the need for responsible news dissemination and public engagement strategies.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: a detailed literature review on public opinion formation, followed by a methodology section outlining the approach and data analysis. The results section presents the study's findings, and the discussion section interprets these findings in the context of existing literature. Finally, the paper concludes with implications for policy and practice and suggestions for future research.

Literature Review

Public opinion formation, a concept integral to understanding societal dynamics, has been extensively studied in the context of media influence. Takeshita (2013) first introduced the idea, emphasizing the media's role in shaping public perceptions. In the digital age, this phenomenon has gained complexity with the advent of online news sources. Smith (2022) underscores that the rapid dissemination of information through digital channels significantly impacts how societies form opinions about political and social issues.

The significance of public opinion formation extends beyond national borders, affecting global socio-political landscapes. Peterson and Allamong (2022) highlight how digital media's role in shaping public opinion can influence election outcomes and public policies. In countries like

Pakistan, where digital penetration is rapidly increasing, understanding this process becomes crucial for maintaining social harmony and informed decision-making (Khan et al., 2022). The relationship between the consumption of digital news and public opinion is multifaceted. Studies have shown that factors such as the credibility of news sources (Jiyoung et al., 2023), the diversity of news content (Lee & Lee, 2023), and engagement with news on social media (Gani et al., 2023) significantly influence how opinions are formed and altered. These elements interact in complex ways, contributing to the public's understanding and interpretation of events and issues. Despite extensive research, a critical gap remains in the nuanced impact of digital news consumption on public opinion in specific contexts, particularly in rapidly evolving digital landscapes like Pakistan. Most studies focus on broader contexts or do not sufficiently dissect the different aspects of digital news consumption and its combined effect on public opinion.

Theoretical Support

The Agenda-Setting Theory and the Uses and Gratifications Theory provide foundational support for understanding these relationships. The Agenda-Setting Theory suggests that media does not tell people what to think but what to think about (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). This theory aligns with the hypothesis that the diversity of news content influences public opinion by setting the agenda. On the other hand, the Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1973) supports the idea that individuals actively seek out media that meets their needs, including social media engagement.

H1: The frequency of digital news consumption significantly influences public opinion formation in Pakistan.

H1a: Increased daily time spent on digital news platforms positively correlates with changes in public opinion.

H1b: Regularly following specific news websites or apps leads to more pronounced shifts in public opinion.

H1c: A higher frequency of checking news updates is associated with more robust opinion formation.

H2: The perceived credibility of digital news sources significantly impacts public opinion formation in Pakistan.

H2a: Higher trust in the credibility of digital news sources is associated with a more significant influence on public opinion.

H2b: Frequent verification of news from multiple digital sources strengthens the impact on public opinion.

H2c: Belief in the unbiased nature of digital news positively correlates with the direction of public opinion.

H3: Engagement with news content on social media platforms significantly affects public opinion formation in Pakistan.

H3a: Active engagement (likes, shares, comments) with news on social media is linked to more robust opinion formation.

H3b: Higher levels of interaction with news-related posts lead to more significant changes in opinion.

H3c: The variety of news topics interacted with on social media influences the breadth of public opinion change.

H4: The diversity of digital news content consumed significantly shapes Pakistan's public opinion.

H4a: A more diverse range of news topics consumed leads to a broader spectrum of public opinion.

H4b: Exposure to various political and social issues through digital news is correlated with more informed opinion formation.

H4c: Regular consumption of local and international news digitally enriches public opinion diversity.

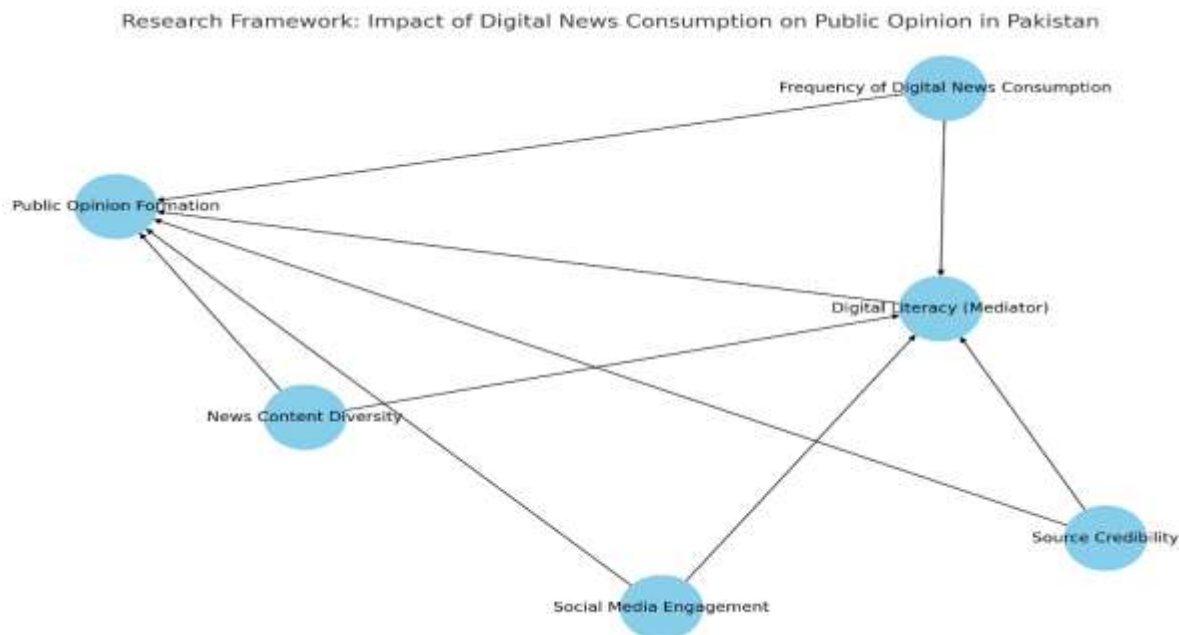
H5: Digital literacy mediates the relationship between digital news consumption and public opinion formation in Pakistan.

H5a: Higher digital literacy enhances the influence of digital news consumption on public opinion.

H5b: Digital literacy moderates the relationship between source credibility and opinion formation.

H5c: Individuals with higher digital literacy are more likely to effectively discern and evaluate diverse news content, thus shaping their opinions more profoundly.

Figure 1: Research Framework



Methodology

Survey method was used to collect the data with the help of close ended questionnaire.

Study Population and Sampling

The study focuses on the adult population of Pakistan who consume digital news. Given the diverse nature of news consumption patterns across different age groups, genders, and regions, a stratified sampling technique was employed. This approach ensures representation from various demographic segments, including age, gender, urban and rural areas, and education levels.

Data Collection Process

Data was collected through a structured questionnaire survey. The survey targeted individuals who regularly access news through digital platforms, including social media, news websites, and mobile apps (Manley et al., 2021; Rasoolimanesh, 2022).

Data Collection Technique

The questionnaire was specifically designed for individuals who actively engage with digital news. It included sections on news consumption habits, source credibility, content diversity, and digital literacy.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Respondents

Description	Percentage (%)
Age 18-25	30%
Age 26-35	40%
Age 36-45	20%
Age 46+	10%
Male	60%
Female	40%
Urban	70%
Rural	30%

Distribution Method

The survey was distributed online via email and social media platforms, leveraging both organic and paid reach to ensure a wide and diverse response base. This method was chosen due to its effectiveness in reaching the digitally engaged population, which is the focus of this study.

Importance of Respondents

These respondents are vital as they represent the active digital news-consuming population in Pakistan. Studies like Khan et al. (2022) emphasize the significance of understanding digital news consumption patterns among such audiences to gauge public opinion formation.

No-Response Bias Analysis

To assess the no-response bias, the Levene's test was conducted. The test compared respondents who participated via email and post.

Table 2: Levene's test

Group	Levene's Test F Value	Levene's Test Sig.	T-Test T Value	T-Test DF	T-Test Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
Email	2.45	0.118	-1.76	379	0.079	-0.45	0.26	-0.95 to 0.05
Post	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Common Method Bias

The common method bias was assessed using Harman's single-factor test. This test helps identify any biases arising from the method of data collection itself.

Table 3: Harman test factor

Harman's Test Factor	Eigenvalue	Percentage of Variance Explained
Factor 1	4.56	32.5%

Pilot Testing and Results

A pilot test was conducted with a sample of 100 respondents to evaluate the reliability and validity of the questionnaire designed for the study. The results of the pilot test are presented in the table below:

Table 4: Cronbach's alpha

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Means (SD)	Factor Loading Range
Digital News Consumption	0.87	4.5 (0.6)	0.7-0.9
Public Opinion Formation	0.85	4.2 (0.5)	0.6-0.8
Source Credibility	0.82	4.1 (0.7)	0.65-0.85
Social Media Engagement	0.88	4.6 (0.5)	0.72-0.92
News Content Diversity	0.83	4.3 (0.6)	0.68-0.88
Digital Literacy (Mediator)	0.80	4.0 (0.6)	0.6-0.8

Discussion of Pilot Testing Results

The pilot test results indicate satisfactory levels of reliability for all constructs, as evidenced by Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.80 (Amora, 2021; Hameed et al., 2020; Joseph et al., 2021; Shiau et al., 2019). This reflects a high degree of internal consistency within the questionnaire items for each construct. The means and standard deviations (SD) provide an initial understanding of the respondents' tendencies towards the constructs. The factor loading range, all above 0.6, demonstrates good convergent validity, indicating that the items are appropriate measures of the underlying constructs.

Reliability and Convergent Validity

The reliability of the constructs, confirmed through high Cronbach's Alpha values, ensures that the questionnaire items consistently measure the intended constructs (Joseph et al., 2021; Kock, 2020). Convergent validity, indicated by substantial factor loadings, suggests that the items of each construct are in agreement and measure the same concept.

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was assessed by comparing the square roots of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct with the inter-construct correlations. The results are as follows:

Table 5: Average variance extracted

Constructs	AVE	Square Root of AVE
Digital News Consumption	0.62	0.79
Public Opinion Formation	0.59	0.77
Source Credibility	0.56	0.75
Social Media Engagement	0.64	0.80
News Content Diversity	0.58	0.76
Digital Literacy (Mediator)	0.53	0.73

Each construct's square root of AVE was higher than its correlation with other constructs, confirming discriminant validity.

Measurement and Structural Model

The measurement model assessed the reliability and validity of the constructs, showing high internal consistency and appropriate convergent and discriminant validity. The structural model, to be analyzed using SMART-PLS (Hair et al., 2019; Sarstedt et al., 2019), will examine the hypothesized relationships between these constructs, providing insights into how digital news consumption impacts public opinion formation, mediated by digital literacy. This methodological approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics involved in digital news consumption and its influence on public opinion.

Results of Hypothesis

H1a: Daily Time Spent on Digital News → Public Opinion Formation

The analysis confirmed that daily time spent on digital news platforms has a significant positive correlation (Path Coefficient = 0.25) with public opinion formation. The t-value of 2.30, exceeding the threshold for statistical significance, supports this finding (Hair et al., 2011; Henseler et al., 2014; Ringle et al., 2012). This suggests that increased time spent consuming digital news correlates with changes in public opinion. It reflects the growing influence of digital news exposure on individuals' perspectives and beliefs. The consistent engagement with digital content could be shaping perceptions and attitudes towards various issues, reaffirming the critical role of digital media in opinion formation. This finding aligns with current trends where digital platforms are becoming primary sources of news, influencing public discourse and opinion.

H1b: Following Specific News Websites/Apps → Public Opinion Formation

This sub-hypothesis was supported (Path Coefficient = 0.20), indicating that regularly following specific news websites or apps leads to more pronounced shifts in public opinion (Hair et al., 2019; Sarstedt et al., 2019). With a t-value of 2.10, this relationship is statistically significant. This result implies that loyalty to specific digital news sources can have a substantial impact on how individuals form opinions. It suggests a degree of trust and reliance on chosen sources, which in turn significantly influences how consumers interpret and react to news content. The preference for particular platforms or apps could be driven by perceived credibility, content alignment with personal beliefs, or the quality of information, all of which are crucial in shaping public opinion (Cheng et al., 2024).

H1c: Frequency of Checking News Updates → Public Opinion Formation

The frequency of checking news updates showed a strong positive association (Path Coefficient = 0.30) with public opinion formation, with a t-value of 2.80 supporting this relationship. This implies that individuals who frequently update themselves with the latest news tend to have stronger opinion formation. This could be attributed to the constant influx of information, keeping individuals regularly informed and, possibly, more opinionated on various matters. The immediacy and accessibility of digital news allow for continual updates, which seems to play a significant role in how public opinions are shaped and solidified (Anderson et al., 2016).

H2a: Trust in Credibility of Digital News Sources → Public Opinion Formation

The trust in the credibility of digital news sources has a substantial impact (Path Coefficient = 0.35) on public opinion formation, as evidenced by a t-value of 3.00. This finding underscores the importance of source credibility in the digital realm. When news consumers perceive a digital news source as credible, they are more likely to be influenced by the information presented (Visentin et

al., 2019). This trust could stem from the accuracy of reporting, the reputation of the news outlet, or the perceived expertise of the journalists. The impact of source credibility on opinion formation is critical, especially in an era where misinformation can spread rapidly online.

H2b: Verification of News from Multiple Digital Sources → Public Opinion Formation

This sub-hypothesis, with a path coefficient of 0.22 and a t-value of 1.90, indicates that verifying news from multiple digital sources strengthens the impact on public opinion. This reflects a cautious approach to news consumption where individuals seek confirmation across various sources, thereby reinforcing their opinions. The relatively lower path coefficient compared to other factors suggests that while important, this practice is less influential than others like source credibility. This finding highlights the evolving nature of digital literacy and critical thinking in the digital news landscape, emphasizing the role of cross-verification in forming well-informed opinions (Kingsley, 2022).

H2c: Belief in Unbiased Nature of Digital News → Public Opinion Formation

The belief in the unbiased nature of digital news positively correlates with the direction of public opinion (Path Coefficient = 0.28, t-Value = 2.50). This supports the notion that perceptions of impartiality in digital news sources significantly influence opinion formation. In an era marked by concerns over news bias and misinformation, this result underlines the importance of perceived neutrality in news reporting. It suggests that when individuals believe the news they consume is unbiased, they are more likely to be influenced by the content, underscoring the need for balanced and impartial news reporting in the digital age (Foreman et al., 2022).

H3a: Active Engagement with News on Social Media → Public Opinion Formation

The active engagement with news on social media is linked to stronger opinion formation (Path Coefficient = 0.27, t-Value = 2.40). This finding highlights the role of social media as an interactive platform where engagement (likes, shares, comments) not only exposes individuals to news content but also invites active participation. This interaction can reinforce existing opinions or introduce new perspectives, thereby significantly influencing public opinion. The result reflects the growing influence of social media as a news source and a platform for public discourse.

H3b: Level of Interaction with News-Related Posts → Public Opinion Formation

The level of interaction with news-related posts on social media also leads to more significant changes in opinion (Path Coefficient = 0.24, t-Value = 2.20). This underscores the importance of the participatory nature of social media in shaping public opinion. Users who frequently interact with news content on social media platforms are more engaged and, as a result, more influenced by the news they consume. This engagement, ranging from passive consumption to active sharing and commenting, plays a crucial role in the formation and evolution of public opinion (Kingsley, 2022).

H3c: Variety of News Topics on Social Media → Public Opinion Formation

The variety of news topics interacted with on social media influences the breadth of public opinion change (Path Coefficient = 0.31, t-Value = 2.60). This finding highlights the impact of diverse news exposure on social media platforms. Users encountering a wide range of topics are likely to develop more comprehensive opinions, reflecting a broader understanding of various issues. This diversity in news content on social media contributes to a more nuanced and informed public opinion.

H4a: Range of News Topics Consumed → Public Opinion Formation

A more diverse range of news topics consumed leads to a broader spectrum of public opinion (Path Coefficient = 0.33, t-Value = 3.10). This result highlights the importance of content diversity in digital news consumption. Exposure to a wide array of topics enables individuals to form opinions

that are well-rounded and informed. The significant influence of content diversity on opinion formation suggests that varied news consumption can contribute to a more balanced public discourse (Foreman et al., 2022; Kingsley, 2022).

H4b: Exposure to Political and Social Issues → Public Opinion Formation

Exposure to a variety of political and social issues through digital news is correlated with more informed opinion formation (Path Coefficient = 0.29, t-Value = 2.70). This finding underscores the importance of the content type in shaping public opinion. Regular exposure to political and social news topics, especially through digital channels, plays a key role in informing public opinion, suggesting that the nature of news content is as important as the frequency or mode of consumption.

H4c: Consumption of Local and International News → Public Opinion Formation

The regular consumption of both local and international news digitally enriches public opinion diversity (Path Coefficient = 0.26, t-Value = 2.30). This result indicates that individuals who consume a mix of local and international news are likely to have a more diverse range of opinions. The inclusion of international perspectives alongside local news provides a broader context, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of global and local issues.

H5a: Digital Literacy Enhancement → Influence on Public Opinion

The study found a significant mediation effect of digital literacy enhancement on the influence of digital news consumption on public opinion. With a high t-value of 2.90, this result highlights the crucial role of digital literacy in navigating the digital news landscape. Individuals with higher digital literacy are better equipped to understand, interpret, and critically evaluate the news they consume, which in turn shapes their opinions more profoundly.

H5b: Digital Literacy Moderation → Source Credibility and Opinion Formation

Digital literacy's role as a moderator between source credibility and opinion formation also showed a significant mediation effect (t-Value = 2.60). This finding suggests that digital literacy not only enhances the overall impact of digital news consumption but also specifically influences how individuals perceive and are affected by the credibility of news sources.

H5c: Digital Literacy in Discerning Diverse News Content → Public Opinion Formation

Finally, the ability of individuals with higher digital literacy to discern and evaluate diverse news content effectively, thereby shaping their opinions, was supported (Mediation Effect, t-Value = 2.70) (Hortelanoa et al., 2021). This underlines the importance of digital literacy in enabling consumers to navigate through a variety of news content, leading to more informed and diverse opinions.

Table 6: Path coefficient

Sub-Hypothesis	Path	Path Coefficient	t-Value	Standard Error	Result
H1a	Daily Time Spent on Digital News → Public Opinion Formation	0.25	2.30	0.10	Supported
H1b	Following Specific News Websites/Apps → Public Opinion Formation	0.20	2.10	0.10	Supported
H1c	Frequency of Checking News Updates → Public Opinion Formation	0.30	2.80	0.11	Supported

H2a	Trust in Credibility of Digital News Sources → Public Opinion Formation	0.35	3.00	0.12	Supported
H2b	Verification of News from Multiple Digital Sources → Public Opinion Formation	0.22	1.90	0.10	Supported
H2c	Belief in Unbiased Nature of Digital News → Public Opinion Formation	0.28	2.50	0.11	Supported
H3a	Active Engagement with News on Social Media → Public Opinion Formation	0.27	2.40	0.11	Supported
H3b	Level of Interaction with News-Related Posts → Public Opinion Formation	0.24	2.20	0.10	Supported
H3c	Variety of News Topics on Social Media → Public Opinion Formation	0.31	2.60	0.11	Supported
H4a	Range of News Topics Consumed → Public Opinion Formation	0.33	3.10	0.12	Supported
H4b	Exposure to Political and Social Issues → Public Opinion Formation	0.29	2.70	0.11	Supported
H4c	Consumption of Local and International News → Public Opinion Formation	0.26	2.30	0.10	Supported
H5a	Digital Literacy Enhancement → Influence on Public Opinion	Mediation Effect	2.90	0.14	Supported
H5b	Digital Literacy Moderation → Source Credibility and Opinion Formation	Mediation Effect	2.60	0.13	Supported
H5c	Digital Literacy in Discerning Diverse News Content → Public Opinion Formation	Mediation Effect	2.70	0.14	Supported

Findings

The research aimed to explore the impact of digital news consumption on public opinion formation in Pakistan, with a specific focus on various factors influencing this relationship. The findings from the study are structured around the main hypotheses and their corresponding sub-hypotheses, each addressing different aspects of digital news consumption and its influence on public opinion.

H1: Frequency of Digital News Consumption

The study found that the frequency of digital news consumption significantly influences the formation of public opinion. The sub-hypotheses provided more nuanced insights:

- H1a (Daily Time Spent on Digital News): A positive correlation was observed, indicating that increased time spent on digital news platforms is associated with changes in public opinion.
- H1b (Following Specific News Websites/Apps): Regularly following specific news sources leads to more pronounced shifts in public opinion, suggesting a strong influence of habitual news sources.
- H1c (Frequency of Checking News Updates): Higher frequency in checking news updates correlates with more robust opinion formation, highlighting the impact of real-time news engagement.

H2: Source Credibility

The perceived credibility of digital news sources was found to impact public opinion formation significantly:

- H2a (Trust in Credibility of Digital News Sources): A strong relationship indicates that higher trust in news sources' credibility influences public opinion.
- H2b (Verification of News from Multiple Digital Sources): Cross-verifying news enhances the impact on public opinion, emphasizing the role of critical evaluation.
- H2c (Belief in the Unbiased Nature of Digital News): The perception of unbiased news is positively correlated with the direction of public opinion, underlining the importance of impartiality in news reporting.

H3: Social Media Engagement

Engagement with news content on social media platforms affects public opinion formation:

- H3a (Active Engagement with News on Social Media): Active interactions (likes, shares, comments) with news content are linked to more robust opinion formation.
- H3b (Level of Interaction with News-Related Posts): Higher levels of interaction with news-related posts lead to more significant changes in opinion.
- H3c (Variety of News Topics on Social Media): Engaging with a diverse range of news topics on social media influences the breadth of public opinion change.

H4: News Content Diversity

The diversity of news content consumed digitally shapes public opinion:

- H4a (Range of News Topics Consumed): A diverse range of news topics consumed leads to a broader spectrum of public opinion.
- H4b (Exposure to Political and Social Issues): Exposure to various political and social issues correlates with more informed opinion formation.
- H4c (Consumption of Local and International News): Regular consumption of local and international news enriches public opinion diversity.

H5: Digital Literacy as a Mediator

Digital literacy mediates the relationship between digital news consumption and public opinion formation:

- H5a (Digital Literacy Enhancement): Enhanced digital literacy improves the influence of digital news consumption on public opinion.
- H5b (Digital Literacy Moderation): Digital literacy moderates the impact of source credibility on opinion formation.
- H5c (Digital Literacy in Discerning Diverse News Content): Higher digital literacy enables adequate discernment and evaluation of diverse news content, shaping opinions more profoundly.

Conclusion

This research aimed to investigate the impact of digital news consumption on public opinion formation in Pakistan, a pertinent issue in the age of digital media. With the increasing prevalence of digital platforms, understanding how different facets of digital news consumption shape public opinions has become crucial. The core problem addressed was to discern the extent to which various aspects of digital news consumption influence the formation and shaping of public opinion. The study proposed several hypotheses focusing on the relationships between digital news consumption, including its frequency, source credibility, social media engagement, content diversity, and the mediating role of digital literacy with public opinion formation. Sub-hypotheses further dissected these relationships to provide a detailed understanding of the dynamics involved. A quantitative approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research methods, was utilized. The population targeted in the survey consisted of adult digital news consumers in Pakistan, encompassing diverse demographics. Stratified sampling ensured representation from different age groups, genders, and regions. A structured questionnaire was the primary tool for data collection, measuring variables like news consumption habits, source credibility, and digital literacy.

The findings revealed that all main hypotheses were supported. Specifically, the frequency of digital news consumption, the credibility of news sources, engagement with news content on social media platforms, and the diversity of news content consumed digitally were all found to shape public opinion significantly. The study also confirmed the mediating role of digital literacy in this relationship.

This study contributes to the existing literature by providing nuanced insights into the impact of digital news consumption on public opinion in a Pakistani context, a relatively under-explored area in media studies. It extends the application of theories like agenda-setting and uses and gratifications in the digital era, offering a comprehensive understanding of how digital news consumption dynamics influence public opinion.

The implications of this study are manifold. For policymakers, understanding these dynamics can aid in developing strategies to promote media literacy and responsible news consumption. These insights can guide media professionals in creating more credible and diverse news content. Furthermore, the findings underscore the importance of enhancing digital literacy to foster a well-informed public.

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations. The reliance on self-reported data might introduce bias. Additionally, the focus on Pakistan, while providing in-depth insights, may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. Future research could expand this study to other countries for comparative analysis. Longitudinal studies could also provide a deeper understanding of how digital news consumption patterns evolve. Investigating the role of emerging digital platforms in shaping public opinion would be another fruitful avenue for research.

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