

Impact of Exposure to Political Campaigns of Major Political Parties (PML-N, PTI & PPP) on Viewers' Participation in Electoral Process

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Abstract

The General Elections 2013 in Pakistan under much tensed circumstance have utmost importance not only for Pakistan but also have vital significance for the major active players of the world. This study was designed to explore and document the exposure to political campaigns launched through television during general elections 2013 and its impact on viewers' political participation. Survey research design was adopted to find out the viewers' use of mass media and explore the factors behind a specific voting decision on them. The population-- the whole university students-- was divided into two strata: natural sciences vs social sciences. From each strata 160 students, male and female students from BS and MA programs were taken as the unit of analysis. Stratified method for the specification of the demographic characteristics was adopted. 320 viewers were interviewed by using purposive sampling method through the questionnaire. The results figured out that most respondents (50.5%) used to watch television very frequently. Findings reveal that 54.5% viewers usually preferred to watch GEO TV. Results demonstrate that a significant number of viewers (60.5%) prefer to watch Discussions programs on TV during political campaigns. Viewers point of view reveal that 41% viewers think PML(N) launched most effective political campaign on television. Findings show that 45% respondents casted vote in favor of PML (N) and followed by PTI (32%), PPP (17%) and others (6%).

Keywords: Politics, Election Campaigns, Television, Electoral Process

1. Introduction

The General Elections May 11, 2013 in Pakistan under much tensed circumstance have utmost importance not only for Pakistan but also have vital significance for the major active players of the world. Pakistan is at the crossroads and in transition, as a huge political change is ongoing to take place through the general Elections of 2013. An election is a decision making process where a population chooses an individual to hold official offices. This is the usual mechanism by which modern democracy fills offices in the legislature, sometimes in the executive and judiciary and for regional and local government (Madni, 2008). According to Graig (2007), study of politics has long been the subject of inquiry: Aristotle wrote on the subject over 2000 years ago, calling Politics the ruling discipline and labeling man a 'political animal' (Madni, 2013). A political campaign is an organized effort to secure the nomination and election of those seeking government offices. In a system of representative democracy, electoral campaigns are the primary means by which parties and candidates communicate and by which voters are informed of a party's or candidate's views (Hillygus & Shields, 2008).

A political party is a political organization that seeks to attain and maintain political power within a government, usually by participating in electoral campaigns. Parties often espouse an expressed ideology or vision bolstered by a written platform with specific goals, the coalition among disparate interests (Dalager, 1996). Media can also produce effects in our behavior through their technological forms. Our daily habits and lives have changed radically through the increase of media communication systems (Madni, Batoool, Abdullah, & Nawaz, 2013; O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2005). A unique combination of commercial, political, academic and cultural programs is the main feature of television. The scope of TV programs can be broadly visualized from three angles; information, education and entertainment. With communication satellites the task of realizing its basic function has become much easier and the purpose more effective (Bansal, 2007). Television viewing is a passive, relaxing and low concentration activity. Viewing is often driven by the wish to escape or to avoid negative affective states. Viewers tend to feel passive and less alert after viewing. Heavier viewers feel worse than light viewers generally, and particularly when alone or during unstructured time (Jamieson & Campbell, 2001).

The importance of television in politics has reached the point at which Theodore H. white said, "Television is the political process- it's the playing field of politics. Today the action is in the studios, not in the back rooms, TV with its presentation, its wide geographic distribution and impact provides a new, direct and sensitive link between government and the people" (Holtz-Bacha, Kaid, & Johnston, 1994). Television

influences society in many ways. People are easily swayed to accept a belief that they may not normally have unless expressed on television, since many people think that everything they hear on television is true. The images presented filter into the heads of millions of viewers and in many cases become a part of that viewer's outlook on life, whether consciously or unconsciously. It can also tell you a lot about the period of time involved. Television advertising is also the primary way that modern political campaigns communicate with potential voters. In a typical presidential, congressional or gubernatorial election, spending on television advertising comprises the greatest proportion of a campaign's budget (Mahsud, Chaudhry, & Madni, 2013; Mahsud, Paracha, & Madni, 2013).

1.1 Political Campaigns

Nadir Hussain states "Traditional campaigning may be a thing of the past, as new media allows political parties to convey its message to a greater number of people" (Madni, Nawaz, Hassan, & Abdullah, 2014). Political campaigns have existed as long as there have been informed citizens to campaign amongst. Often mass campaigns are started by the less privileged or anti-establishment viewpoints (as against more powerful interests whose first resort is lobbying). The phenomenon of political campaigns is tightly tied to special interest groups and political parties. The first 'modern' campaign is thought to be William Gladstone's Midlothian campaign in the 1880s, although there may be earlier recognizably modern examples from the 19th century. Democratic societies have regular election campaigns, but political campaigning can occur on particular issues even in non-democracies so long as freedom of expression is allowed. American created the first mass-base political parties and invented many of the techniques of mass campaigning. In the 1790-1820s, the Federalist Party and the Democratic-Republican Party battled it out in the so-called "First Party System" (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2005). The message of the campaign is what ideas that the candidate wants to share with the voters. The message often consists of several talking points about policy issues. The points summarize the main ideas of the campaign and are repeated frequently in order to create a lasting impression with the voters. In many elections, the opposition party will try to get the candidate "off message" by bringing up policy or personal questions that are not related to the talking points. Most campaigns prefer to keep the message broad in order to attract the most potential voters. A message that is too narrow can alienate voters or slow the candidate down by explaining the details (Bansal, 2007; Qaiser, Madni, Hassan, & Amin, 2014).

2. Literature Review

National trends in media coverage are beginning to be felt in state politics. For example, television has begun to make its presence felt in state politics. Between 1995 and 1998, the number of politicians in surveys who rate the political importance of television as "high" had more than tripled. In fact, more than 85% of our respondents in 1998 rated the political importance of the television as "high" or "medium", placing it just behind the print media in terms of political impact (Bartels, 1993). In a study finding of Roper it is stated that television has changed the way we get information. More than half of all Americans admit to getting most of their news from television rather than from newspapers. In fact, more Americans trust television as a news source (53%) than trust newspapers (23%) (Jamieson & Campbell, 2001).

In 1990 Walker says that whatever its positive or a negative effect, exposure to the news media does influence public awareness of the elections. In a study of the 1988 Southern "Super Tuesday" regional primary, researchers found exposure to all media, especially TV to be positive and significantly related to voter awareness of the campaign, as well as to voter perceptions of increased campaign activity and perceptions of increased Southern political prominence. Exposure to partisan political information was found to be significantly related only to perceptions of increased campaign activity (Marcus, 1982). Differences in voting behavior have been discussed for many decades. Lynda Lee Kaid and Christina Holtz-Bacha study investigated differences in male and female responses to political television broadcasts during recent elections in the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Poland, and Romania. Experimental studies indicated that male and female voters responded differently to the political broadcasts, but that these patterns were not uniform across the countries. Research often finds gender differences in attitudes and behavior, and this is particularly true in the political realm. Usually men have higher knowledge of political issues than women (Madni et al., 2014).

Blood stated (1991) that Research on Australian elections suggests that candidates' use of the media can have a strong impact upon those who make up their minds about candidates during the campaign. Such voters are more likely to be swayed by political appeals than are people who have decided whom to choose before a campaign start. While partisan voters use the media because they are interested in politics, undecided voters refer to media sources for information about parties, candidates, and issues. Nadir Hussain wrote in his article that the General election campaign in Pakistan also marked the first sustained use of advertisements on private TV channels, with the PML-Q producing the most ads. According to research carried out by the Centre for Civic Education Pakistan, a total of Rs.244.75 million was spent by the political parties to buy a total of 169 hours of advertising space on both PTV and the private channels. Most of this airtime was bought by the PML-Q, which

spent Rs.175 million to purchase 105 hours of ad space. By far the least substantive of the television ads came from the PPP, which chose to focus on personality rather than politics. Most of their ads included snippets of Benazir's final rally at Liaquat Bagh, with her intoning, "Bhutto is not dead! Bhutto is alive." Although Benazir may have been talking about her father, the inference was clear. The mantle of martyrdom has now been passed down a generation. Another PPP ad tried to create sympathy by using Benazir's eldest son Bilawal, who talked about his mother's mission and urged the people of Pakistan not to let that mission die with her (Madni, 2008).

Peilin & Sylvia (1999) examines the impact of cable television on Taiwan's election campaign strategies, the implications of political affiliation/ownership of cable television for political campaigns and cable's role in Taiwan's democratization process. The results show that cable has provided an alternative platform for the opposition parties and encouraged the emergence of rational politics in Taiwan. More campaign media budget has been allocated for this emerging political medium, campaign candidates and staffs are taking a proactive role in expending their cable airtime, especially in popular political call-in/debate programs, and the nature of the cable political programming is fostering more issues-based campaigns. The analysis of the 2000 presidential election in the United States by Pippa Noris revealed that those most exposed to the news media consistently proved more knowledgeable, not less, more trusting towards government and the political system, not less, and more likely to participate in election campaigns, not less. This pattern was found across different data sets, different years, and different countries, including in the United States as well as in Western Europe. Moreover, Americans who watched a blend of news and entertainment proved more engaged than those who regularly watched little television of any kind (Hillygus & Shields, 2008).

3. Methodology

This study was planned to identify the impact of exposure to political campaigns launched through television in general elections 2013 on viewers' participation. Survey research design was adopted to find out viewers' use of mass media working in the dissemination of political information and explore the factors behind a specific voting decision on them. The population—the whole university students-- was divided into two strata: natural sciences vs social sciences. From each strata 160 students consists of 80 (40 male and 40 female) students from BS and 80 (40 male and 40 female) students from MA programs were taken as the unit of analysis. This procedure generated population subgroups to meet the requirement of this study. Stratified method for the specification of the demographic characteristics was adopted. This approach adequately organized the population into heterogeneous subsets and selected various elements from each. For the purpose of data collection, the target of 320 viewers were interviewed by using purposive sampling method. A questionnaire is formulated. Face to face procedure was adopted and all the respondents were contacted personally.

Table 1. Total Sample Size 320

Natural Sciences						Social Sciences					
Departments	Male		Female		Total	Departments	Male		Female		Total
	BS	Master	BS	Master			BS	Master	BS	Master	
Physics	10	10	10	10	40	Communication Studies	10	10	10	10	40
Chemistry	10	10	10	10	40	International Relations	10	10	10	10	40
Zoology	10	10	10	10	40	Social Work	10	10	10	10	40
Statistics	10	10	10	10	40	Sociology	10	10	10	10	40
Total	40	40	40	40	160	Total	40	40	40	40	160

Wimmer and Dominick (2008) write that constructing good survey questions involve five basic rules: (1) understand the goals of the study so that only relevant questions are included, (2) questions should be clear, (3) questions must accurately communicate what is required from the respondents, (4) don't assume that respondents understand the questions they are asked and (5) follow Occam's Razor in question development and order. In view of the study's nature and requirements a well-planned questionnaire was developed. In this was empirical efforts were made to find out the answers of the following major research questions: How frequently viewers expose to political campaigns on television channels? Which television channel viewers prefer to watch for political information? Which television content viewers prefer to watch on television? How many viewers participate in the electoral process? Which party they prefer to cast vote for?

Findings of the Study

The result figured out in figure 1 shows the frequency of watching television. It illustrates that most respondents (50.5%) used to watch television very frequently while a 38% viewers watch TV sometimes. In comparison with male and female viewers it is concluded that male viewers (55%) watch TV very frequently than the female viewers (46%).

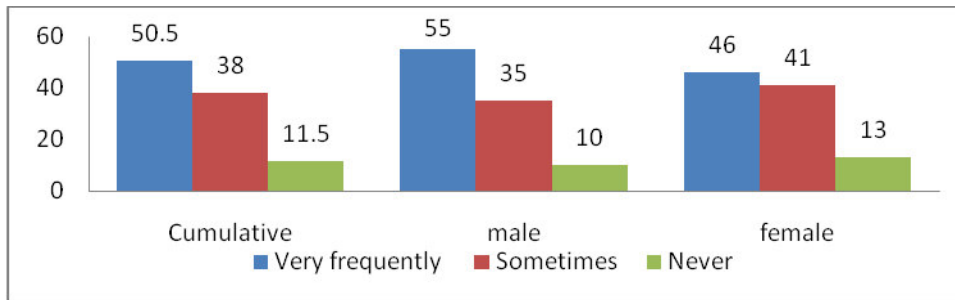


Figure 1 Frequency of watching TV

Findings for the preference for the television channels which viewers used to watch for political information reveal that 54.5% viewers usually preferred to watch GEO TV while a number of viewers (26%) prefer Express TV channel for political information (Figure 2).

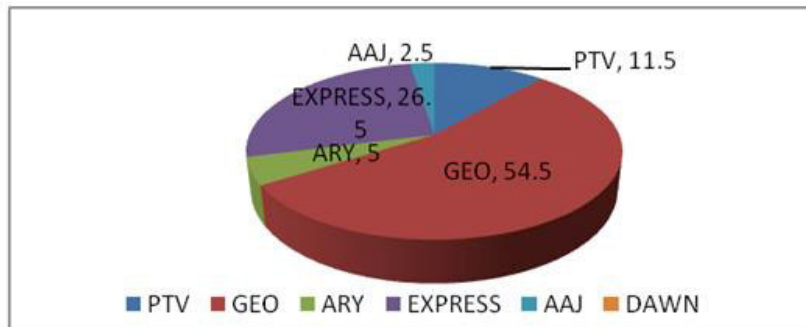


Figure 2 Watching TV Channels For Political Information

Results shown in figure 3 explain preference given to TV contents during political campaigns. Findings demonstrate that a significant number of viewers (60.5%) watch Discussions programs on TV during political campaigns. 37 % viewers watch News contents during political campaigns on television.

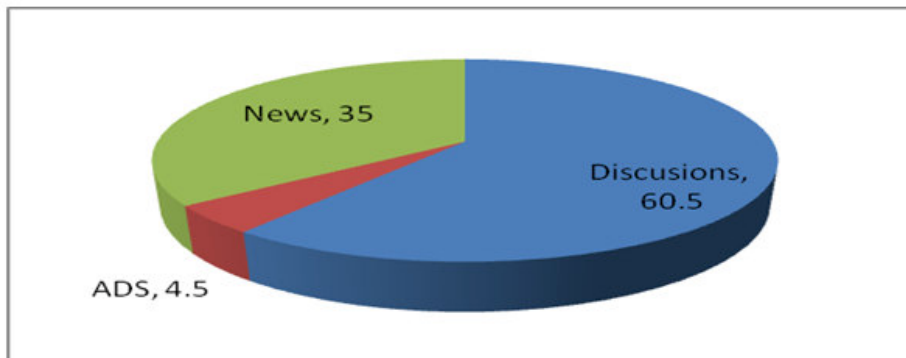


Figure 3 Preferred TV Content during Election Campaign (cumulative)

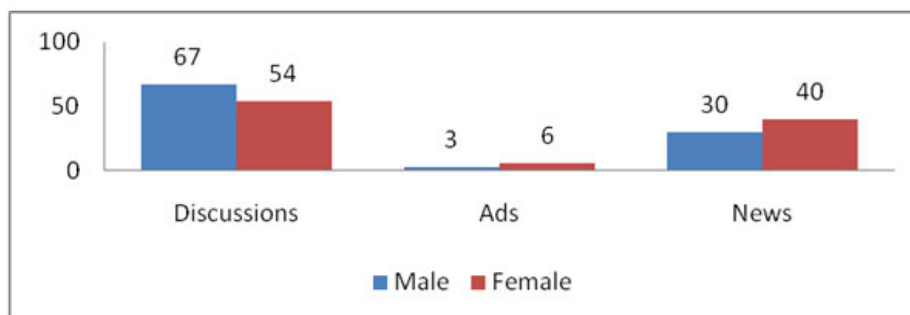


Figure 4 Preference of watching TV Content during Election Campaign

Furthermore, findings reveal in comparison of male and female that male viewers (67%) more watch Discussion programs than female viewers (54%), but female viewers prefer to watch News (40%) and Political Ads. (6%) (Figure 4).

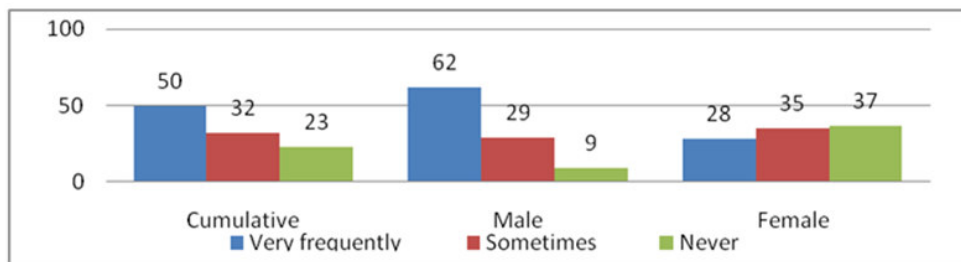


Figure 5 Frequency of Exposure to TV's Political Campaigns

Findings of figure 5 illustrate that a significant number of respondents (50%) have very frequent exposure of political campaigns launched through television. It also reveals the significant difference of very frequent exposure of male viewers (62%) than the female viewers (28%) (Figure 5).

Responses to the question asked about the level of interest in political Campaigns launched through TV depicted in figure 6. The findings reveal that 14.5% viewers take interest a lot in political campaigns launched through TV. While 36.5% viewers watch political campaigns on TV with somewhat interest. Findings of the understanding level of the messages of political campaigns launched through TV reveal that 32.5% viewers understand political campaign completely (Figure 7).

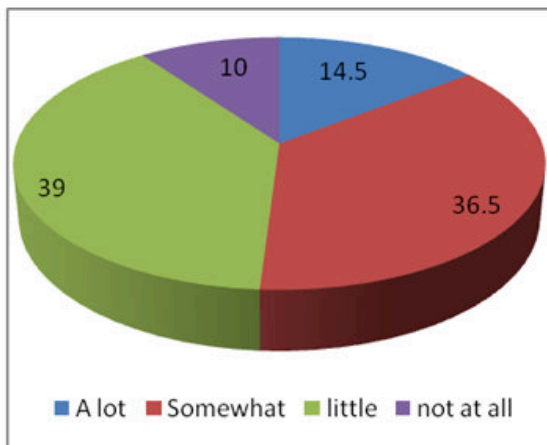


Figure 6 Interest in TV's Political Campaigns

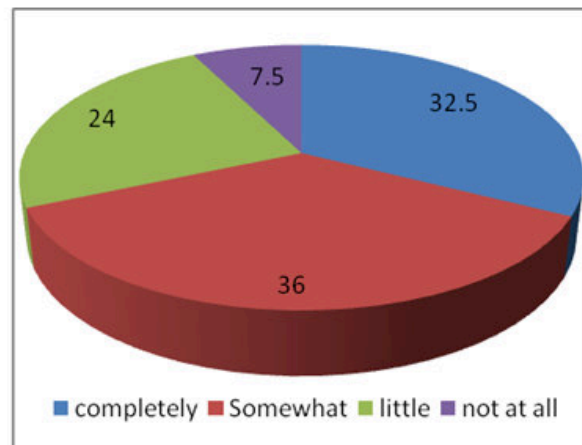


Figure 7 Understanding of messages

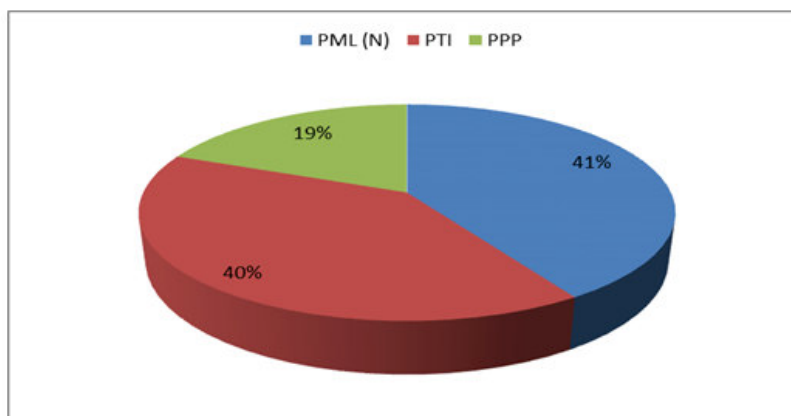


Figure 8 Most Effective Political Campaign

Findings of a very interesting dimension of the research that which political party launched most effective political campaign in viewers point of view reveal that 41% viewers think PML(N) launched more effective political campaign on television than PTI (40%) and PPP (19%) (Figure 8).

Figure 9 shows the extent the political campaigns influence the voting behavior of viewers. It is evident from the figure that a significant number of respondents (45%) consider political campaign less influential, just 7% respondents think political campaign very much influential.

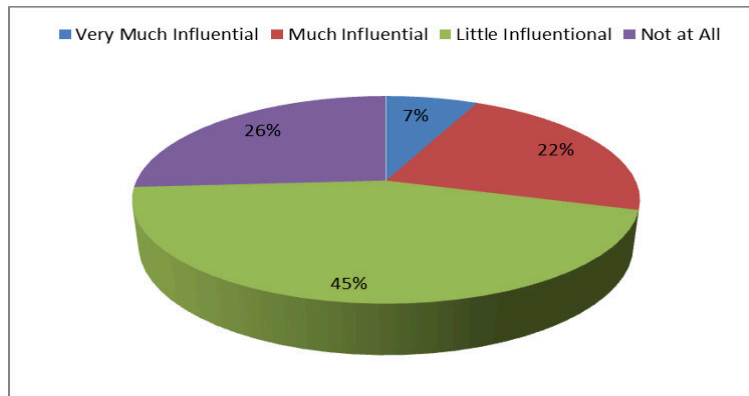


Figure 9 Influence of TV Political Campaigns

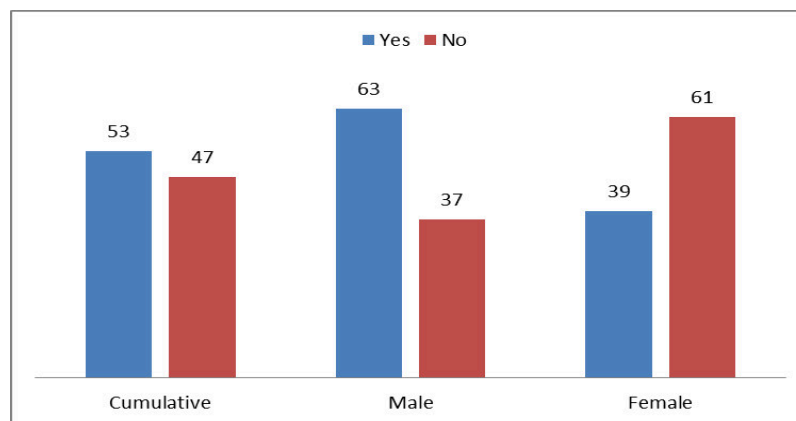


Figure 10 Participation in Political Activities

The Findings show a large number of people (53%) participate in political activities like meetings or processions. As the figures also show that male respondents (63%) are politically more active than female (37%) (Figure 10).

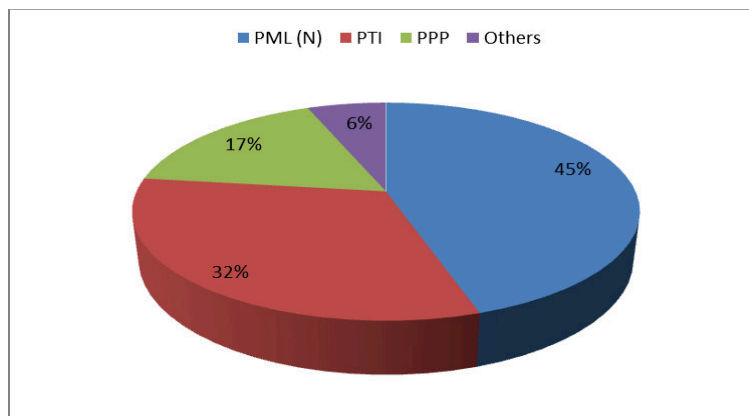


Figure 11 Voted Political Party

Figure 11 shows the voted political parties to whom people casted votes on May 11, 2013. Results show that 45% respondents casted vote in favor of PML (N) and followed by PTI (32%), PPP (17%) and others (6%).

Conclusion

This study was designed to explore and document the exposure to political campaigns launched through television during general elections 2013 and its impact on viewers' political participation. The result figured out that most respondents (50.5%) used to watch television very frequently. In comparison with male and female viewers it is concluded that male viewers (55%) watch TV very frequently than the female viewers (46%). Findings reveal that 54.5% viewers usually preferred to watch GEO TV while a number of viewers (26%) prefer Express TV channel for political information. Results demonstrate that a significant number of viewers (60.5%) prefer to watch Discussions programs on TV during political campaigns. Furthermore, the findings show in comparison of male and female that male viewers (67%) more watch Discussion programs than female viewers

(54%), but female viewers prefer to watch News (40%) and Political Ads (6%). A significant number of respondents (50%) have very frequent exposure of political campaigns launched through television. It also reveals the significant difference of very frequent exposure of male viewers (62%) than the female viewers (28%). Responses depicted that 14.5% viewers take interest a lot in political campaigns launched through TV, while 36.5% viewers watch political campaigns on TV with somewhat interest. Findings also indicate that 32.5% viewers have the ability to understand political campaign completely.

Viewers point of view reveal that 41% viewers think PML(N) launched more effective political campaign on television than PTI (40%) and PPP (19%). It is evident from the results that a significant number of respondents (45%) consider political campaign less influential, just 7% respondents think political campaign very much influential. The Findings show a large number of people (53%) participate in political activities like meetings or processions. As the figures also show that male respondents (63%) are politically more active than female (37%). Figure 11 presents that 45% respondents casted vote in favor of PML (N) and followed by PTI (32%), PPP (17%) and others (6%).

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