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BUILDING TRUST OR DOUBT? MEASURING USES OF INFORMATION SOURCES AFFECTING TRUST IN CONTESTING POLITICAL PARTIES BEFORE ELECTIONS 2024 IN LAHORE

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Abstract
Trust in politics and the political parties is essential for a sustainable democracy in a country, and dependence on information sources may affect trust or doubt in these institutions. This study triangulates and extends media dependency theory, video malaise theory, and virtuous circle theory to propose a theoretical framework. The objectives of the study were to find the uses of information sources, and the effects of information sources on the trust in contesting political parties near the elections of 2024 in Pakistan. The population for the study was youth in Lahore. By using purposive sampling techniques digitally privileged and educated youth were selected from educational institutes in Lahore. A quantitative approach was adopted, with a sample of 269 university students. Data was collected through a survey, and Pearson correlation and multiple regressions were applied using SPSS. Findings support the virtuous circle theory in the context of dependency on traditional mass media, specifically Geo News. Students who rely on Geo News are more likely to trust political parties such as the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan People's Party (PPP). Conversely, findings also align with the video malaise theory, as students who rely on social media for news–particularly for information and entertainment–exhibit lower levels of trust in PML-N and PPP. This study highlights the role of media dependency in shaping political trust, with theoretical implications discussed in detail. These findings contribute to understanding the influence of media and information sources on political perceptions in a critical electoral context.

Introduction

The uses of communication sources create preferences for gratifying the information about political issues in Pakistan (Hussain et al., 2023). The media and communication sources have evolved to great extent and have provided

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diverse environments to pick and choose te preferred sources for attaining information for fulfilling needs for social life and even for health (Hussian & Baig, 2023; Hussain et al., 2023).

Trust is an asset in any sector of life for making our relations better. Trust is vital for sustainable democracy. It is important in political relations of the voters with the contesting political parties near elections. The success of the political parties also depends on the perceptions of the youth who are educated and are digitally privileged in the diverse media eco system. It is of significance to research how different media sources affect trust in political contesting political parties near elections. Youth often seek information that aligns with their existing beliefs, reinforcing their perceptions but they also have the tendency to reject the status quo. Those critical of political institutions tend to consume similar content across new media platforms, which further diminishes or may increase their trust. Media and communication sources through their information provide the avenues in constructing youth perceptions by presenting critical evaluations of the country's governance under contesting political parties in Pakistan or by deselecting the information. The dependency on the information sources presents the different story for the trust in political parties near elections. It has been observed through interpersonal communication that youth's trust in political parties is declining, particularly among those who rely on diverse information sources in today's high-choice media environment. The trust or doubt informed by media varies based on the type of media or communication source utilized. It is therefore important to investigate the effects of the different information sources on the trust in political parties near elections.

Previous research shows conflicting findings regarding the effects of the sources of information on trust in government in Chinese and Jewish contexts. The present study in Pakistan introduces a model to examine the associations between information sources and trust in contesting political parties. This research is significant as it raises awareness about the shifting levels of youth trust in governance shaped by information received through media and communication sources.

The objectives of the study are to:

(1) Analyze the uses of information sources among youth near Elections 2024

(2) Examine how uses of different information sources influence youth's trust in contesting political parties.

Literature Review

There was conflict in literature concerning the effects of the media, communication and news, sources on trust in political institutions. The media usage affected political trust, however different types of media had shaped people's views in different ways (Moy & Scheufele, 1996). Moy and Scheufele (1996) argue that media usage influences social and political trust, suggesting that different types of media shape individuals' perceptions in varied ways. Avery (2009) identifies a negative relationship between news media exposure and public trust in government. According to media system dependency theory, the media's control over information and knowledge fosters interdependent relationships between media and social systems, as well as individual dependency on media (Lyu, 2012). Similarly, Ceron (2015) finds a positive relationship between news consumption on websites and political trust.

Research by Haro-de-Rosario et al. (2018) explores the use of social media platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, by Spanish local government constituents, identifying which platform fosters the highest engagement. In contrast, Bakker et al. (2018) find no significant effect of crisis communication strategies on individuals' willingness to follow local government advice. Zhou et al. (2020) report negative effects of Internet usage on political trust across central and local governments and the judicial system. Khalifa (2020) emphasizes that dependency arises when individuals' ability to achieve their goals relies heavily on information sources and media systems.

Studies have also investigated the correlation between e-governance, social media use, and political trust. Lissitsa (2021) reports a positive correlation between these factors among Jews.

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Hussain et al. (2021) highlights that people increasingly rely on new information sources, including online platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, which are also becoming primary means for accessing traditional news. Similarly, Iftikhar et al. (2021) assess the influence and trustworthiness of political television talk shows on viewers.

Chang (2022) reveals that newspaper political content positively influences political trust, while watching political news and call-in programs negatively affect trust. The Internet similarly erodes political trust, particularly regarding legislative and political parties. Miao et al. (2022) find that traditional media use correlates more strongly with trust in the central government than in local governments. Meng and Zhou (2022) note that exposure to official media positively correlates with political trust, whereas reliance on unofficial or individual media is negatively associated with trust. Liu (2023) discusses the significant relationship between digital media use and political trust, including its role during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The current study differentiates itself from previous research in several ways. First, it reconceptualizes the construct of information sources and levels of political trust in the context of Pakistan's political parties. Second, it contributes to the theoretical discourse on media dependency, media malaise, and virtuous circle theories by examining the relationships between multiple information sources and political trust. Unlike prior studies, this research comprehensively addresses these relationships within the Pakistani context before the 2024 elections. Third, this study is culturally significant as it examines levels of trust in contesting political parties within Pakistan's unique media ecology.

Research Questions

1. Which information sources do youth depend on?
2. Which information sources do youth rely on for trust in contesting political parties of Pakistan?
3. Which information sources do youth rely on to form attitudes of distrust toward contesting political parties of Pakistan?

Theoretical Framework

Rokeach and DeFleur (2013) introduced the media system dependency theory in 1976, highlighting the audience's dependence on media information in urban industrial societies. The theory posits that the degree of audience reliance on media is a critical factor in understanding how information messages influence their beliefs, emotions, and behaviors. In this context, university students are likely to depend more on social media as their primary information source compared to traditional media platforms.

H1: University students are likely to rely more on new media than traditional media.

The virtuous circle theory underscores the accessibility and convenience of political knowledge provided by the media. This exposure fosters a virtuous cycle, enhancing civic engagement and political interest, ultimately increasing trust in political institutions (Lissitsa, 2021). Based on this theory, research questions and hypothesis are formulated.

H2: There is likely to be a positive correlation between information sources and trust in political institutions.

Robinson (2015) introduced video malaise theory in 1976, arguing that television exposure often leads to "video malaise," characterized by negative framing, anti-institutional themes, and political dissatisfaction. Schuck (2017) further elaborates that video malaise theory highlights the media's tendency to focus on scandals, conflicts, and competition between political personalities rather than substantive political issues. Prolonged exposure to such content can result in distrust, civic disengagement, and doubts about governmental legitimacy. Extending these findings, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: There is likely to be a negative correlation between new information sources and trust in contesting political parties.

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Methodology

This study adopts a post-positivist approach and utilizes a cross-sectional descriptive survey design. The target population for the study consists of youth in Pakistan, specifically individuals aged 18 to 35 years. The population is focused on university students due to their higher education levels and access to a wide range of information sources, making them an ideal cohort for exploring media exposure and political trust.

A non-probability sampling technique, specifically purposive sampling, was employed to select participants. University students were sampled from Lahore, Pakistan, chosen due to the city's large student population compared to other cities. The sample size for the study is 269 university students who completed the questionnaires in full. This age group is particularly significant as it represents the youth bulge in Pakistan, a demographic critical for political participation and potential social and political change through voting.

The two main constructs for this study are exposure to information sources and trust in political institutions. Exposure to various information sources is operationalized through a 39-item index, encompassing the following categories: Television use, newspaper use, magazine use, radio use, general internet use, Facebook use (liking, sharing, commenting), WhatsApp use, Twitter use, Instagram use, YouTube use, TikTok use, Interpersonal communication (with friends, peers, family), Use of news channels (Dunya News, Geo News, ARY News, Express News), Exposure to television talk shows, Specific satirical shows shows (Hasb-e-Haal, Mazakraat, Khabarharr), exposure to international news (CNN, BBC Urdu, VOA Urdu, DW Urdu), use of government websites, attendance at public political processions, use of online newspapers, exposure to political memes, social media news use (for information, political motives, entertainment, critical purposes), exposure to sensational news, political scandals, and corruption in news, political Trust (Dependent Variables).

The variables for political trust include, perceived competence of the contesting political parties, perceived honesty of the contesting political parties, perceived concern of the contesting political parties. The corresponding items for these variables can be found in the questionnaire which can be received upon request.

The data collected were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were calculated to summarize participants' responses and provide an overview of the data. A normality test was conducted to assess the distribution of the data, revealing that it was partially normally distributed. Pearson's correlation was used to analyze the associations between the dependencies on various information sources and trust in the contesting political parties.

Data collection took place from April 2023 to August 2023, over a period of five months. This period coincided with a time of significant political instability in Pakistan, largely due to the ongoing economic crisis, which has had a profound impact on public perceptions of political institutions. Rising costs of living, including food, fuel, and oil, have further altered public confidence in the government, making this an important context for understanding media influence on political trust.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 Description of Demographics

Variables	Attributes	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Citizenship	Pakistani	269	100
Provincial Affiliation	Punjab	269	100
	Other	0	0
Gender	Male	77	28.6
	Female	192	71.4

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Education	University diploma, bachelor or equivalent	100	100
	A post-graduate degree like MPhil or Ph.D. or Diploma	0	0
Occupation	Student or studying	269	100
Place of Residence	City	269	100

As shown in Table 1, university students are enrolled n university diploma and bachelor programs are Pakistani citizens from the Punjab province. Female respondents outnumber their male counterparts. Regarding geographical location, all participants reside in urban areas.

Figure 1. Mean Values for the Information Sources



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Based on the graph illustrating mean values, it is observed that exposure to information sources is highest among individuals who use the internet (4.75), WhatsApp (4.71), YouTube (4.33), face-to-face interpersonal communication with family (4.16), Instagram (4.04), face-to-face communication with friends (3.78), use social media for political news seeking (3.54), watch political memes (3.51), follow political scandals in the news (3.16), read online newspapers (3.12), communicate with peers (3.09), watch television (3.09), and use Facebook for liking posts (3.01).

Additionally, university students are engaging with social media for news seeking purposes (2.97), seeking entertainment through social media news (2.95), watching ARY News (2.89), following political conflicts in talk shows (2.83), watching television talk shows (2.7), sharing posts on Facebook (2.64), critically evaluating social media posts (2.67), watching Geo News (2.61), following political satire on Mazakraat (2.59), watching Dunya News (2.46), using Twitter (2.46), watching political satire on Hasb-e-Hal (2.44), reading online and offline magazines (2.42), commenting on Facebook posts (2.41), reading offline newspapers (2.36), using TikTok (2.32), and watching Express News (2.27).

The trend line indicates that new media sources enjoy greater popularity and engagement among university students compared to traditional media sources.

Table 2 Information Sources and Trust in Contesting Political Parties

	PML			PTI			PPP		
	Competence1	Honesty2	Concern3	Competency4	Honesty5	Concern6	Competency7	Honesty8	Concern9
Television	.074	.004	.073	-.028	-.044	-.062	-.040	-.085	-.011
	(.228)	(.946)	(.232)	(.649)	(.468)	(.308)	(.510)	(.163)	(.862)
Print newspaper	.162**	.069	.167**	-.076	-.042	-.036	.082	.025	.149*
	(.008)	(.263)	(.006)	(.216)	(.494)	(.560)	(.182)	(.688)	(.015)
Online magazine	-.019	-.072	-.091	.035	.098	.118	-.016	-.108	-.040
	(.756)	(.238)	(.135)	(.567)	(.108)	(.053)	(.795)	(.078)	(.512)
Radio	.195**	.179**	.115	-.111	-.082	-.109	.127*	.113	.159**
	(.001)	(.003)	(.061)	(.070)	(.177)	(.075)	(.037)	(.063)	(.009)
Internet	-.093	-.093	-.093	.122*	.151*	.130*	-.113	-.135*	-.047
	(.126)	(.128)	(.128)	(.046)	(.013)	(.033)	(.065)	(.027)	(.439)
Facebook (like)	-.127*	-.085	-.091	-.125*	.034	-.033	.024	-.051	.013
	(.037)	(.163)	(.136)	(.041)	(.583)	(.591)	(.698)	(.405)	(.837)
Facebook (share)	-.063	-.049	-.074	-.091	.020	-.019	-.014	-.060	.032
	(.307)	(.421)	(.228)	(.137)	(.742)	(.754)	(.825)	(.323)	(.600)
Facebook (comment)	-.075	.001	-.001	-.114	-.066	-.122*	.054	.025	.100
	(.220)	(.985)	(.989)	(.062)	(.284)	(.046)	(.376)	(.687)	(.103)
WhatsApp	-.144*	-.171**	-.150*	.144*	.119	.123*	-.084	-.185**	-.182**
	(.018)	(.005)	(.014)	(.018)	(.051)	(.043)	(.170)	(.002)	(.003)
Twitter	-.086	-.078	-.055	-.080	-.107	-.056	-.038	-.067	-.041
	(.160)	(.203)	(.367)	(.190)	(.080)	(.358)	(.531)	(.277)	(.507)
Instagram	-.031	-.001	-.053	.082	.047	.048	-.021	-.057	-.034
	(.611)	(.989)	(.390)	(.180)	(.441)	(.436)	(.730)	(.352)	(.576)
YouTube	-.157**	-.182**	-.187**	.011	.016	.042	-.154*	-.267**	-.191**
	(.010)	(.003)	(.002)	(.854)	(.799)	(.493)	(.011)	(.000)	(.002)
TikTok	.109	.085	.053	.068	.151*	.082	.106	.056	-.033
	(.075)	(.167)	(.382)	(.269)	(.013)	(.180)	(.081)	(.358)	(.588)
	.086	.052	-.023	.122*	.037	-.016	-.006	.025	-.035

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Face to face communication with friends	(.160)	(.395)	(.706)	(.045)	(.546)	(.797)	(.920)	(.685)	(.570)
Face-to-face communication with peer	.051 (.408)	.091 (.134)	.012 (.850)	-.003 (.958)	-.005 (.929)	-.033 (.591)	-.010 (.874)	.045 (.461)	.024 (.696)
Face-to-face communication with family	-.013 (.828)	-.063 (.303)	-.063 (.306)	.057 (.353)	.034 (.581)	.061 (.321)	-.113 (.063)	-.034 (.580)	-.051 (.404)
Dunya News	.149* (.014)	.113 (.063)	.169** (.005)	-.136* (.026)	-.170** (.005)	-.150* (.014)	.100 (.103)	.010 (.874)	.142* (.020)
Geo News	.485** (.000)	.373** (.000)	.407** (.000)	-.314** (.000)	-.324** (.000)	-.361** (.000)	.186** (.002)	.211** (.001)	.224** (.000)
Express News	.243** (.000)	.207** (.001)	.152* (.012)	-.165** (.007)	-.173** (.004)	-.178** (.003)	.079 (.197)	.136* (.026)	.163** (.007)
ARY News	-.183** (.003)	-.123* (.043)	-.106 (.083)	.196** (.001)	.216** (.000)	.234** (.000)	.026 (.676)	-.034 (.575)	.077 (.206)
Television Talk shows	.102 (.094)	.078 (.203)	.111 (.069)	-.028 (.650)	-.019 (.762)	-.072 (.240)	.090 (.142)	.103 (.092)	.137* (.024)
Hasb-e-Hal	.003 (.959)	-.017 (.776)	-.020 (.744)	.031 (.609)	-.013 (.835)	-.014 (.821)	-.071 (.243)	-.006 (.927)	.024 (.692)
Mazakraat	-.054 (.377)	-.036 (.553)	-.048 (.432)	.040 (.515)	.037 (.550)	-.006 (.926)	.005 (.939)	-.013 (.829)	.058 (.341)
Khabarharr	.056 (.358)	.055 (.368)	-.002 (.970)	.046 (.455)	.062 (.314)	-.033 (.586)	.007 (.910)	.062 (.312)	.055 (.365)
CNN	-.106 (.083)	-.079 (.195)	-.119 (.051)	-.015 (.805)	-.041 (.505)	-.101 (.098)	-.067 (.272)	-.027 (.654)	-.017 (.784)
BBC Urdu	-.187** (.002)	-.174** (.004)	-.206** (.001)	.086 (.162)	.034 (.584)	.032 (.598)	-.064 (.295)	-.053 (.386)	-.091 (.136)
VOA Urdu	-.030 (.620)	-.028 (.645)	-.085 (.165)	-.013 (.832)	-.055 (.365)	-.066 (.278)	-.057 (.352)	.056 (.358)	-.081 (.186)
DW Urdu	-.038 (.531)	.001 (.989)	-.014 (.819)	-.026 (.676)	.012 (.841)	-.063 (.299)	-.001 (.981)	.133* (.029)	.020 (.746)
Governmental websites	.018 (.766)	.021 (.737)	-.068 (.264)	.118 (.054)	.137* (.024)	.067 (.270)	-.011 (.856)	.045 (.467)	-.069 (.258)
Public political processions (siyasi jalsa)	.020 (.739)	.058 (.342)	-.018 (.772)	.010 (.867)	.032 (.606)	.016 (.798)	-.030 (.627)	.120* (.049)	-.044 (.471)
Online newspaper	.037 (.548)	.050 (.411)	-.025 (.689)	.087 (.155)	.048 (.431)	.105 (.086)	.057 (.353)	.092 (.131)	.019 (.754)
Political memes	-.161** (.008)	-.189** (.002)	-.153* (.012)	.122* (.045)	.099 (.105)	.074 (.225)	-.195** (.001)	-.184** (.002)	-.180** (.003)
Social media for news seeking to get information	-.187** (.002)	-.221** (.000)	-.229** (.000)	.213** (.000)	.171** (.005)	.203** (.001)	-.269** (.000)	-.228** (.000)	-.184** (.002)
	-.139*	-.143*	-.138*	.157**	.161**	.178**	-.167**	-.155*	-.159**

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Social media for news seeking for political motives	.023	.019	.024	.010	.008	.003	.006	.011	.009
Social media for news seeking about entertainment	-.186**	-.219**	-.237**	.138*	.153*	.125*	-.292**	-.290**	-.270**
	(.002)	(.000)	(.000)	(.024)	(.012)	(.041)	(.000)	(.000)	(.000)
Critically evaluate the social media posts	-.051	-.018	-.027	.111	.115	.120*	-.083	-.042	-.067
	(.401)	(.774)	(.662)	(.068)	(.059)	(.050)	(.176)	(.495)	(.275)
Political conflicts in talk shows?	.062	.097	.091	.056	.056	.074	.064	.132*	.064
	(.314)	(.114)	(.136)	(.364)	(.363)	(.225)	(.297)	(.030)	(.293)
Political scandals in news	.060	-.026	-.003	.134*	.173**	.162**	.031	.019	.015
	(.326)	(.672)	(.966)	(.028)	(.005)	(.008)	(.613)	(.756)	(.811)
News related to corruption	-.038	-.134*	-.053	.155*	.189**	.181**	-.046	-.085	-.079
	(.531)	(.028)	(.385)	(.011)	(.002)	(.003)	(.449)	(.163)	(.199)

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

To what degree do you agree that the political party of Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) is competent?[1]
To what degree do you agree that the political party of Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML N) is honest?[2]
To what degree do you agree that Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML N) is concerned about the issues of Pakistan?[3]
To what degree do you agree that the political party of Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) is competent?[4]
To what degree do you agree that the political party of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) is honest?[5]
To what degree do you agree that the political party of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) is concerned about the issues of Pakistan?[6]
To what degree do you agree that the political party of Pakistan People's Party (PPP) is competent?[7]
To what degree do you agree that the political party of Pakistan People's Party (PPP) is honest?[8]
To what degree do you agree that the political party of Pakistan People's Party (PPP) is concerned about the issues of Pakistan?[9]

Positive Correlations of Information Sources with Trust in Political Parties

Exposure to Geo News channel is positively correlated with the belief that PMLN is competent (r = .485, p = .000), honest (r = .373, p = .000), and concerned about Pakistan's issues (r = .407, p = .000). These moderate positive correlations suggest that viewers of Geo News tend to trust PMLN more. Similarly, exposure to Geo News also shows a positive but small correlation with the belief that PPP is competent (r = .186, p = .002), honest (r = .211, p = .001), and concerned about Pakistan's issues (r = .224, p = .000), indicating that viewers may consider PPP trustworthy, though to a lesser extent. Watching Express News is positively correlated

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with perceptions of PMLN's competence (r = .243, p = .000), honesty (r = .207, p = .001), and concern for Pakistan (r = .152, p = .012). These small but positive correlations suggest that Express News viewers are inclined to view PMLN positively. Similarly, watching ARY News is positively correlated with views that PTI is competent (r = .196, p = .001), honest (r = .216, p = .000), and concerned about Pakistan (r = .234, p = .000), again showing that ARY News viewers generally trust PTI. Internet use also correlates positively with perceptions of PTI's competence (r = .122, p = .046), honesty (r = .151, p = .013), and concern for Pakistan's issues (r = .130, p = .033). These small correlations suggest that internet users tend to trust PTI.

Watching Express News correlates positively with views that PPP is honest (r = .136, p = .026) and concerned about Pakistan's issues (r = .163, p = .007), indicating that viewers of this channel may view PPP more favorably in these aspects. There are significant positive correlations, albeit small, between offline print newspaper use and perceptions of PMLN's competence (r = .162, p = .008), its concern for Pakistan (r = .167, p = .006), and PPP's concern for Pakistan (r = .149, p = .015). These correlations suggest that print newspaper readers view PMLN and PPP as more trustworthy in these areas. Radio use correlates positively with views of PMLN's competence (r = .195, p = .001) and honesty (r = .179, p = .003), as well as with PPP's competence (r = .127, p = .037) and concern for Pakistan (r = .159, p = .009). This indicates that radio listeners tend to trust both PMLN and PPP.

Exposure to WhatsApp is positively correlated with perceptions of PTI's competence (r = .144, p = .018) and concern for Pakistan's issues (r = .123, p = .043), indicating that WhatsApp users are more likely to trust PTI. Watching Dunya News correlates positively with the belief that PMLN is competent (r = .149, p = .014) and concerned about Pakistan's issues (r = .169, p = .005). It also correlates with the belief that PPP is concerned about Pakistan's issues (r = .142, p = .020), suggesting that viewers of Dunya News are more likely to trust PMLN over PPP. Social media news use for information seeking correlates positively with perceptions that PTI is competent (r = .213, p = .000), honest (r = .171, p = .005), and concerned about Pakistan's issues (r = .203, p = .001), indicating that social media users trust PTI in these areas. Social media news use for political motives also positively correlates with views that PTI is competent (r = .157, p = .010), honest (r = .161, p = .008), and concerned about Pakistan's issues (r = .178, p = .003), suggesting that such users trust PTI for political reasons.

Exposure to social media news for entertainment correlates positively with views that PTI is competent (r = .138, p = .024), honest (r = .153, p = .012), and concerned about Pakistan's issues (r = .125, p = .041), indicating that users of social media for entertainment also tend to trust PTI. Critically evaluating social media posts correlates positively with the belief that PTI is concerned about Pakistan's issues (r = .120, p = .050), showing that critical evaluators are more likely to view PTI positively. Watching political scandals in the news correlates positively with perceptions that PTI is competent (r = .134, p = .028), honest (r = .173, p = .005), and concerned about Pakistan's issues (r = .162, p = .008), suggesting that those who watch political scandals, view PTI as more trustworthy. Watching political conflicts in talk shows correlate positively with views that PPP is honest (r = .132, p = .030), suggesting that talk show viewers are more likely to view PPP as honest. Exposure to news related to corruption correlates positively with perceptions of PTI's competence (r = .155, p = .011), honesty (r = .189, p = .002), and concern for Pakistan's issues (r = .181, p = .003), indicating that viewers of such news tend to view PTI positively. Face-to-face communication with friends correlates positively with views that PTI is competent (r = .122, p = .045), indicating that people who engage in face-to-face communication with friends are likely to view PTI as competent. Twitter use correlates positively with perceptions that PTI is honest (r = .151, p = .013), suggesting that Twitter users see PTI as honest. Watching television talk shows correlates positively with the view that PPP is concerned about Pakistan's issues (r = .137, p = .024), suggesting that talk show viewers tend to trust PPP's stance on these issues. Browsing government websites correlates positively with the view that PTI is honest (r =

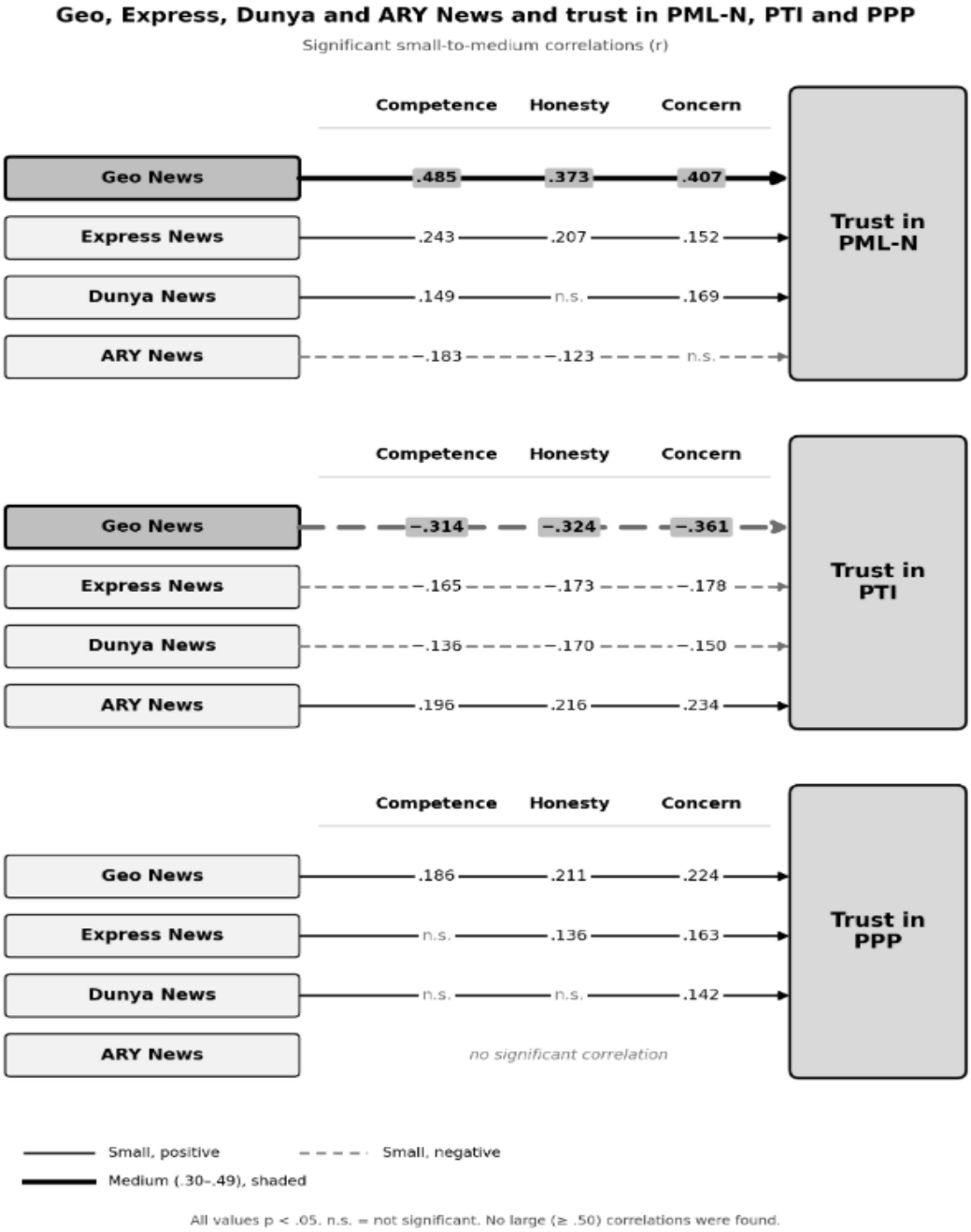
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.137, p = .024), indicating that those who browse government websites are likely to view PTI as honest.

Watching Deutsche Welle Urdu correlates positively with the view that PPP is honest (r = .133, p = .029), indicating that viewers of this channel see PPP as honest. Exposure to political memes correlates positively with perceptions that PTI is competent (r = .122, p = .045), suggesting that users of political memes view PTI as a competent political party. Attending public political rallies correlates positively with the view that PPP is honest (r = .120, p = .049), indicating that rally attendees perceive PPP as honest.

Figure 1. Filtered Findings Related to Correlations of Leading News Channels with Trust (Competence, Honesty, Concern) in Political Parties



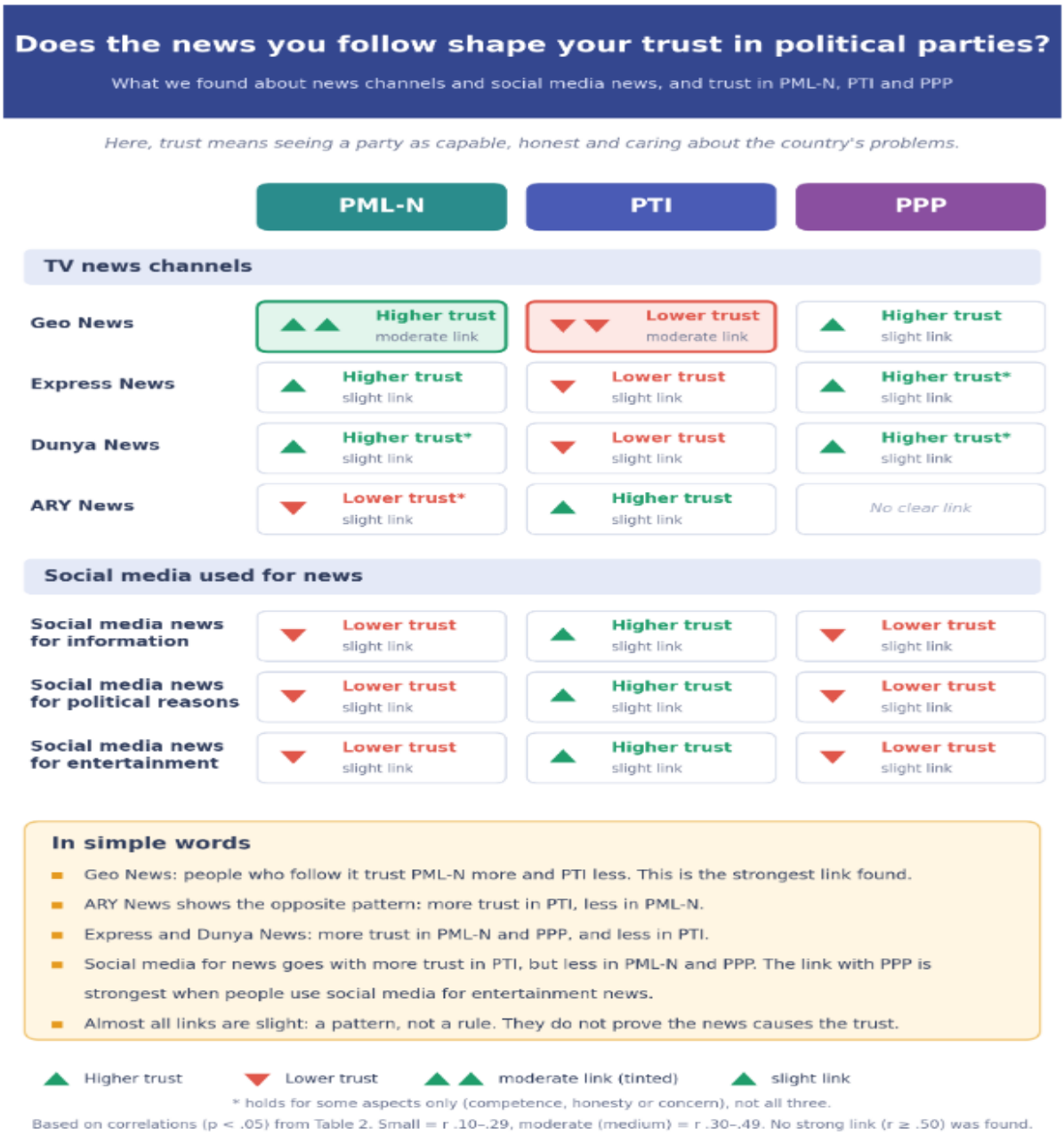
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Negative Correlations of Information Sources with Trust in Political Parties

Exposure to Geo News channel is negatively correlated with the belief that PTI is competent (r = -.314, p = .000), honest (r = -.324, p = .000), and concerned about Pakistan's issues (r = -.361, p = .000). These medium-sized negative correlations suggest that viewers of Geo News are likely to view PTI as untrustworthy. YouTube use negatively correlates with views of PMLN's competence (r = -.157, p = .010), honesty (r = -.182, p = .003), and concern for Pakistan's issues (r = -.187, p = .002), as well as with PPP's competence (r = -.154, p = .011), honesty (r = -.267, p = .000), and concern for Pakistan's issues (r = -.191, p = .002). These small correlations suggest that YouTube users are less likely to trust PMLN and PPP.

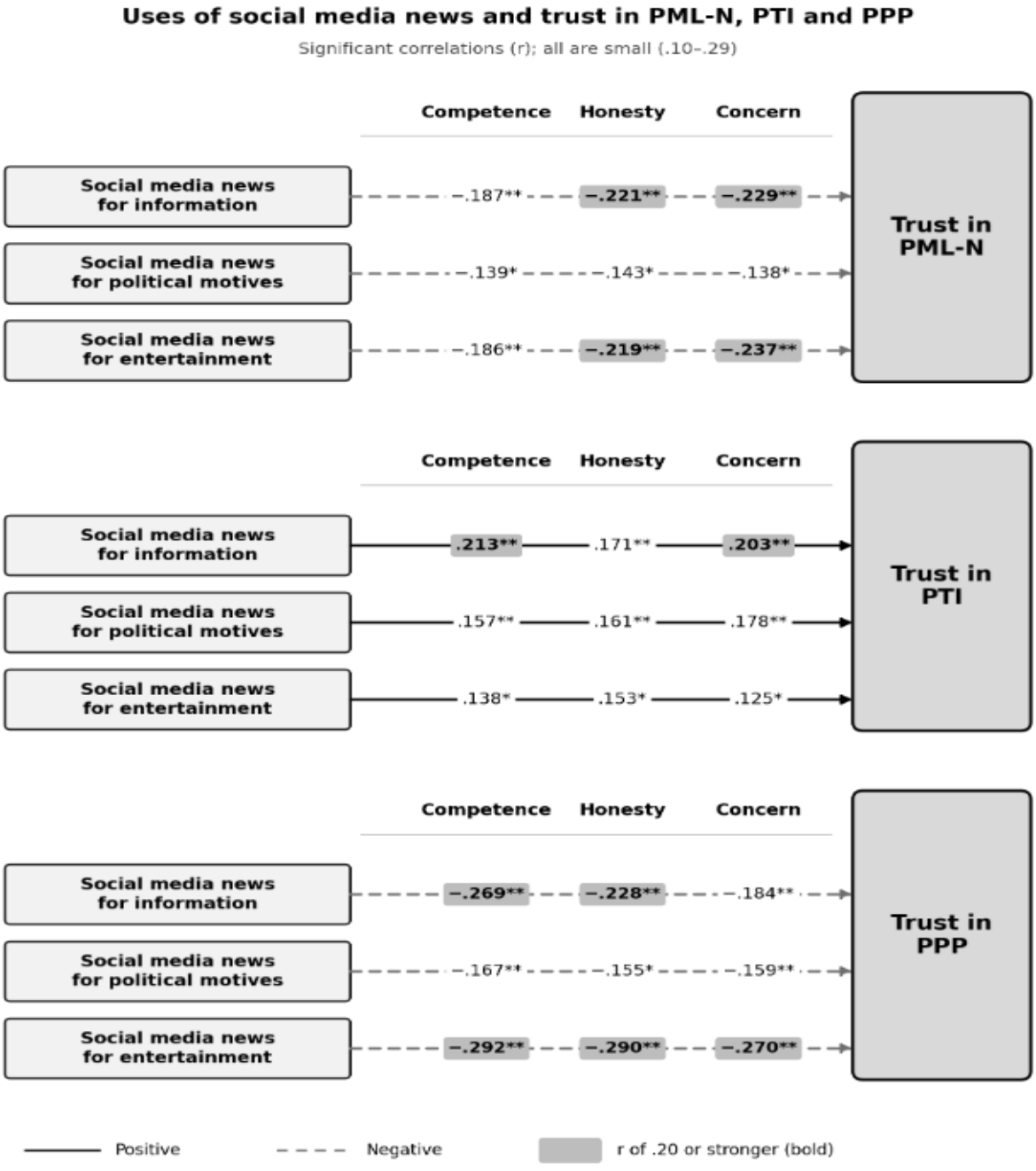
Figure 2. Uses of Social Media News and Trust in Political Parties



Watching BBC Urdu negatively correlates with perceptions of PMLN's competence (r = -.187, p = .002), honesty (r = -.174, p = .004), and concern for Pakistan's issues (r = -.206, p = .001),

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implying that BBC Urdu viewers tend to view PMLN as untrustworthy. Watching ARY News negatively correlates with views of PMLN's competence (r = -.183, p = .003) and honesty (r = -.123, p = .043), suggesting that viewers of this channel generally consider PMLN incompetent and dishonest.



Exposure to Dunya News negatively correlates with perceptions that PTI is competent (r = -.136, p = .026), honest (r = -.170, p = .005), and concerned about Pakistan's issues (r = -.150, p =

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.014), indicating that Dunya News viewers are less likely to trust PTI. WhatsApp use negatively correlates with perceptions of PMLN's competence (r = -.144, p = .018), honesty (r = -.171, p = .005), and concern for Pakistan's issues (r = -.150, p = .014), suggesting that WhatsApp users tend to view PMLN as untrustworthy. Watching Express News negatively correlates with views that PTI is competent (r = -.165, p = .007), honest (r = -.173, p = .004), and concerned about Pakistan's issues (r = -.178, p = .003), implying that Express News viewers are likely to view PTI unfavorably. Watching political memes negatively correlates with perceptions of PMLN's competence (r = -.161, p = .008), honesty (r = -.189, p = .002), and concern for Pakistan's issues (r = -.171, p = .005), suggesting that viewers of political memes tend to distrust PMLN.

Discussion

The descriptive statistics reflect that university students in Pakistan are increasingly relying on new media platforms, such as the Internet, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, and interpersonal communication with family. While they still watch television, it is to a lesser extent. Interestingly, students also engage with content related to political motives, political memes, and political scandals.

Students who rely on Geo News tend to trust the political parties of PML-N and PPP but do not trust PTI. Those who watch Express News show a similar pattern, favoring PML-N but not trusting PTI. In contrast, students who watch ARY News are more likely to trust PTI. Students who depend on YouTube show a lack of trust toward both PML-N and PPP. Additionally, those who watch BBC Urdu exhibit distrust toward PML-N. Students exposed to political memes are also less likely to trust PML-N and PPP. Furthermore, students who turn to social media for news, especially for informational, political, or entertainment purposes, are more likely to trust PTI but tend to distrust PPP and PML-N. Similarly, students who follow news about political scandals or corruption tend to trust PTI.

This research finds support for the Virtuous Circle Theory in the context of Pakistan's media landscape. Dependency on Geo News is significantly correlated with trust in political institutions, including central, local, and provincial governments, the police department, political parties (PML-N, PPP), and the tax authority. On the other hand, the study also provides support for the Media Malaise Theory. Students who rely on social media for news, whether for informational or entertainment motives, tend to be distrustful of political institutions, including the central, local, and provincial governments, the police department, and political parties like PML-N and PPP.

Conclusion

The study concludes that university students in Pakistan are increasingly dependent on social media for news, but television still plays a role in their media consumption. The findings support the Virtuous Circle Theory, as students who rely on Geo News tend to trust political parties like PML-N and PPP. However, the study also aligns with the Media Malaise Theory, as those who use social media for informational and entertainment purposes are more likely to distrust political parties and institutions, particularly PML-N and PPP.

Geo News appears to foster trust in democracy, supporting the established political parties, while social media news consumption tends to strengthen support for PTI, often fostering polarization. The study suggests that Geo News is contributing to political polarization, while social media reinforces a singular political viewpoint, namely PTI's. Furthermore, the study finds that students consuming news via social media platforms, with a focus on information and entertainment, are likely to be distrustful of contemporary politicians and their political parties.

Recommendations

This research informs the urgency for effective political communication campaigns aimed at improving the public image of the current government. These campaigns should address the concerns of university students and the broader public. Additionally, Geo News should consider revising its editorial policy to include diverse viewpoints and foster a more balanced

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perspective, which could reduce political polarization and enhance democratic engagement.

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