

Media Preference, Political Awareness & Participation: A Study Among University Students During 2017 U.P. Elections

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Abstract

The research was undertaken to find out the media preference of the university students of western UP during the elections. The various media theories claim greater media dependence during times of greater importance. The researchers wanted to find out if the same applied to the elections as well. The researchers surveyed 150 university students using structured questionnaire. The findings suggest greater dependence on media during election times with different media preference for different type of information. The greater media consumption bears no significant association with the level of awareness regarding the politicians however the political engagement in other forms increases.

Keywords: Media engagement, Media preference, Elections, Political engagement, Political knowledge

Introduction

Plato¹ once said “One of the penalties for refusing to participate in politics is that you end up being governed by your inferiors.” This one statement of Plato embodies what all is comprised in the political participation, political awareness and political knowledge. Political knowledge and awareness are believed to have direct influence on the political participation which forms the spine of any democratic system and the existence of that democratic system rests on that. If the spine collapse, the system too would collapse. The proponents of agenda setting theory in media Shaw and McCombs² argue that media does not make you think in a particular direction rather it tells you what to think about. The message is clear. Media stimulates the thinking and allows you to engage in discussions and debates to give shape to an indigenous opinion. There are other factors which may play a pivotal role in what opinion you may form, but none of those undermine the role media plays.

Media plays a significant role in raising the levels of awareness to calling somebody for action. This is relevant under any circumstances. Even during the times of the election, the role of media remains the same. In fact some studies suggest that this dependency on the media for various reasons increases. Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin Defleur³ in 1976 stated that the dependency on media increases during the time of emergency which includes time of political importance and calamities etc. Elections are one such things when the media consumption goes up, T.V. viewing hours soar high, the sales of the newspapers go up and the downloads of the news applications in the mobile phones increase. The study here has attempted to find out the media preferences or pattern of media consumption of the university going students of western U.P.

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Review Of Literature

Otto Hannelie & Fourie Lynnette⁴ in their research work titled *Media-usage patterns and political knowledge of NWU students: The 2009 election* state that a sustainable democracy thrives on informed and independent votes who take part in the democratic process reasonably. The researchers claim that the heavy media usage is directly proportional to the political knowledge. As part of the study, the researchers have conducted study on the university students. It was a quantitative survey conducted with the help of questionnaires. The findings suggest that the levels of political knowledge in all the colleges, which were part of the study, were poor. The students in the three chosen colleges for the study had students who can be categorized as the light media users. The students rarely engaged in politics related discussions with the peers. Among the students, T.V. emerged as the preferred medium over others while radio topped the rest becoming the second most preferred medium for political knowledge enhancement.

Meti V, Khandoba PK & Guru MC⁵ conducted research work titled *Social Media for Political Mobilization in India: A Study* with the aim to understand the social media use for political activities and to what extent the former affects the political activities. The political activities here being talked about by the researchers include political efficacy, political knowledge and political participation among people. The results of the study indicate that use of social media for the political activities enhances the political knowledge and political participation amongst the users. The researchers further claim that the greater the frequency of social media use, higher is the level of political awareness and more is the political participation. The researchers further state that those who use twitter and facebook for discussing election related issues tend to be more influenced by the web media in comparison to the other forms of media. The researchers also tell that the engagement with politics through the use of web based mediums allow greater face-to-face interaction. Researchers make a claim with the help of the findings of their research that as the number of web based discussions and involvement will increase, the offline mode of discussion will start to vanish. Researchers use a phrase, 'What happens online, does not stay online'. Through this, the researchers mean to say that it influences the interpersonal face-to-face interaction that may occur later.

Hyunwoo Lee & Jungae Yang⁶ in the research work titled *Political Knowledge Gaps Among News Consumers with Different News Media Repertoires Across Multiple Platforms* indicate a sharp divide in terms of the news consumption. Researchers claim that while a set of people avoid it deliberately, others get their share of news diet from multiple sources. The researchers also state that the people who have same access to media tend to have

different political knowledge due to the difference in their levels of education the exception being those small percentage of people who are very keen news seekers. The researchers have made an interesting call that since the emerging news seekers did not differ in terms of political knowledge acquisition from the news avoiders, it indicates that the rise of the new media cannot significantly influence how the news will help in information acquisition. According to them, it can however be not generalized or should be generalized without a follow up empirical study. Researchers believe that the results may vary if the same study is conducted in different country.

Lee Shaker⁷ in his research work titled *Citizens' Local Political Knowledge and the Role of Media Access* reaffirm that local and national political knowledge are distributed throughout population in varied patterns. According to the researchers the proliferation of new media has unique and possibly negative consequences for local politics. There is a possibility that the expansion of local political offerings online may be beneficial, but this outcome is far from assured. In simple words, the researchers believe that as the scope of online media increases, there is a downward spiral seen in terms of the interest in the local affairs. So when the increase in the media and information access, our knowledge and awareness should go up, in terms of the local news it is bound to fall down as the new media may increase our appetite for the national level and international level news.

Alina Muntean⁸ in her Masters level research work titled *The Impact of Social Media Use of Political Participation* claim that since the social media's nature is highly interactive, the activity levels related to political issues are even more influential. Researcher claims that the social media is a relatively new and unexplored field hence there is a need for further detailed and elaborated research on its implications especially for the political arena. The researcher further states that the findings show that social media use had a significant impact on Romanian young citizens' political participation, during the presidential elections of 2014 highlighting the importance of social media usage especially during the time of elections.

Objectives & Methodology

- To find out the average time spent on different mediums by the students during the time of elections for the political awareness and participation
- To find out the factors leading to one medium being preferred over the other
- To find the relationship between language and news credibility amongst the audience

Population-College going students of Western Uttar Pradesh
Sample Size- 150

Sampling Technique- Multi-stage sampling

Tool for data collection- Questionnaire

Tool for data analysis-MS Excel

Data Tabulation & Analysis

On being asked about the total time spent with the different mediums, the total time spent by the respondents was classified and the result was as follows:

Table 1.1

	0-1 Hours	1-2 Hours	2-5 Hours	More than 5 Hours
Print	2	7	3	0
TV	4	11	17	23
Internet	3	14	28	33
Radio	0	0	0	0
Other	1	3	1	0
Total	10	35	49	56
Total Percentage	7	23	33	37

37% respondents spent more than 5 hours in a day while 33% respondents spent around 2-5 hours in a day. 23% respondents used media for around 1-2 hours in a day and the number of respondents using media for only 0-1 hours were 7%. It was seen that the respondents spend most

time on internet and television and amongst the heavy users, mostly are the internet and T.V. users.

When asked about the media for political knowledge enhancement, the response of the respondents was as given below:

International News

Table 2.1

Medium	Radio	Print	TV	Internet	Other	Total
No. Respondents	0	24	54	72	0	150
% of Respondents	0	16	36	48	0	100

48% of the total respondents are dependent on the internet medium for gathering international events based information and news. TV is second on the preference list with 36% respondents choosing it. While print media

stands third with 16% of the respondents opting it. While no other medium is used by the respondents for enhancing their international political knowledge which makes radio being used by none.

National News

Table 2.2

Medium	Radio	Print	TV	Internet	Other	Total
No. Respondents	3	27	72	48	0	150
% of Respondents	2	18	48	32	0	100

The data differs for the national news section where T.V. becomes the preferred choice with 48% respondents choosing T.V while internet bags the second position in terms of preference with 32% respondents choosing it. Print

media is seen as a reliable medium for national level political knowledge enhancement medium by 18% respondents and Radio is chosen by merely 2% respondents making it the least preferred medium over others.

Local News

Table 2.3

Medium	Radio	Print	TV	Internet	Other	Total
No. Respondents	8	69	56	18	0	150
% of Respondents	5	46	37	12	0	100

For local news, the preference of the respondents take a different turn with print becoming the dominant preferred medium over other mediums with 46% respondents calling it their first choice of medium. T.V. comes second with 37% respondents while internet comes at the third position with 12% respondents choosing it as the preferred

medium. Radio was the least preferred medium with only 5% choosing it over others.

When asked if the respondents put deliberate efforts to know more about a political party, political figure or political event, the response were as mentioned below:

Table 3.1

Medium	Yes	No	Sometimes	Total
No. Respondents	36	84	30	150
% of Respondents	24	56	20	100

Majority of the respondents 56% replied in negative stating that they do not put in deliberate efforts to know more about a political party, political figure or a political event. While only 24% said that they did always did it when there was some update regarding the political party, figure or event. 20% believed that they did it sometimes based on the issue, political person or event concerned. Their

behavior was restricted and relied on how connected they feel to that issue, event or the person being talked about.

The respondents when asked about which medium is their choice for digging deep to get more information, the response was as below:

Table 3.2

Medium/ Level	International	National	Local
Print	4 (3%)	8 (5%)	36 (24%)
TV	48 (32%)	66 (44%)	38 (25%)
Radio	0 (0%)	3 (2%)	0 (0%)
Internet	78 (52%)	57 (38%)	29 (19%)
Other	20 (13%)	16 (11%)	47 (31%)
Total	150	150	150
Total Percentage	100	100	100

The choice is the medium becomes different for the international, national and locally concerned news. Since, it is difficult to get more on an issue concerning smaller locally oriented population, the primary choice was T.V.(25%) and newspapers (24%). Here the print and T.V. is specific to the local small newspapers and local news channels like citicable etc. The other option is chosen by majority and here it is specific to the interpersonal and group communication with the peers including family members, classmates and friends. 31% like to engage in such discussions and debates to dig deeper into an issue or event to get more information. Whereas in case of issues and events or people

of National level, T.V. and Internet were the most preferred choices at 44% and 38% respectively. There is a significant degree of fall in print and other being the preferred choice for gathering additional information. For issues, political people and events of international importance, Internet is the first choice with 52% respondents choosing it and T.V. coming second with 32% . There is a significant drop in the number of people choosing print as the preferred choice.

On being asked about the negative stories related to political issues, political figures and political events, the respondents' interest in such were as follows:

Table 4.1

Medium	Yes	No	Sometimes	Total
No. of Respondents	90	48	12	150
% of Respondents	60	32	8	100

90% respondents found negative stories related to political parties, figures and events interesting and it compelled them to gain additional information regarding the same. In fact, the respondents believe that it helps them to keep a regular track of what is happening in the political arena. 32% respondents never found such stories interesting

while 8% respondents found them interesting sometimes.

The respondents further talked about their response to such stories and information which interests them. Their response are as follows:

Table 4.2

	Express on SNS	Interpersonal Discussion	Cross-check the information	Other	Total
No. Respondents	47	56	36	12	150
% of Respondents	31	37	24	8	100

37% respondents are enticed by the idea of interpersonal discussions on the issues which interests them. 31% share their opinion on the same issues on social media networks. All these respondents do the same without cross-checking the information while only 24% put in the deliberate effort to verify the information being disseminated.

Since the study was conducted during the time when the Assembly elections had been declared in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, the researcher tried to evaluate the level of awareness of the respondents regarding the politicians contesting the elections. The response of the respondents were as such:

Table 5.1

	Few	All	None	Total
No. Respondents	80	30	41	150
% of Respondents	53	20	27	100

Out of the 150 respondents 53% respondents replied that they know about a few contestants but not all. Only 20% respondents were aware of all the politicians contesting elections while 27% respondents did not know even a single person contesting elections.

aware of the politicians contesting elections from their constituencies, they also kept in regular touch with the updated information regarding their political moves and updates. When asked about which medium do they use to get access to additional information regarding the politicians contesting elections from their constituency, the response of the respondents were as such:

In addition to this, some respondents were not only

Table 5.2

Medium	Radio	Print	TV	Internet	Other	Total
No. Respondents	2	27	65	57	0	150
% of Respondents	1	18	43	38	0	100

43% respondents relied on television for gathering more information regarding contestants. At 38% internet was the second highest choice of the respondents for gathering more information. Only 18% relied on print medium, that too the local newspapers while only 1% had any faith on the radio.

Since the political parties and politicians work around the political ideology they imbibe, it is important even for the voters to be fully aware of what is in store for them in the future. When asked about the level of awareness of the respondents regarding the ideologies of the political parties, the response was as follows:

Table 6.1

	Yes	No	Can't Say	Total
No. Respondents	62	78	11	150
% of Respondents	41	52	7	100

41% respondents were aware of the various political parties or of their favorite election contender. 52% were not at all aware of the political ideologies and were not aware of the various political views prevailing worldwide. 7% could not

exactly decide if they are fully aware or not.

It is however important to know what all helps the respondents in understanding the political ideologies. The response were as such:

Table 6.2

	Mainstream Media	Publicity Collaterals	Interpersonal Discussions	Others	Total
No. Respondents	51	18	66	15	150
% of Respondents	34	12	44	10	100

44% respondents came to know about the ideologies of the political parties through the means of interpersonal communication based discussions and debates while 34% gave the credit to the mainstream media for shaping their opinions. 12% believed that critical analysis of the various publicity material distributed by the political parties helped them in shaping opinion regarding the ideologies. While 10% gave the credit to the instincts, their educational background etc.

There are plenty of studies which talk about the crystallization or bandwagon effect when it comes to voting. There are many reasons for the same. This results in voters

standing in the queues to cast their votes without being aware of the election manifestoes of the political parties. Here as part of this study, the table below suggests that 71% voters are not aware of the election manifestoes while only 28% are fully equipped with information while casting the vote.

Since the researcher conducted study on the university students and they had the access to the news medium of different languages, the researcher wanted to find if there was any relation between the perceived credibility and the language used by the medium to disseminated news. The response were as follows:

Table 7.1

	Yes	No	Can't Say	Total
No. Respondents	42	107	2	150
% of Respondents	28	71	1	100

Table 8.1

	English	Hindi	Urdu	Total
No. Respondents	68	47	36	150
% of Respondents	45	31	24	100

45% respondents found English content to be more reliable while 31% found the Hindi content to be more credible. Since the study was conducted in U.P. where there are number of Urdu newspapers and magazines in circulation and there are significant number of Urdu language readers and speakers, 24% found Urdu language content to be more credible.

Findings & Conclusion

The findings of the study reveal that the majority tend to have a higher media consumption during the times of election with the majority depending on internet and television. The people engage with media for their information specific needs and social needs as well. The personal discussions and debates offer the people, especially the university students like in case of this study, opportunity to gel together and fulfill the social needs and other related desires. The choice of media for the political knowledge depends heavily on the nature of the political knowledge in question. For international political news, the choice is generally T.V. and Internet, for National its T.V. followed by Internet while in case of political issues concerning the local area, print media is the preferred choice. The findings also suggest that the negative stories or the incidents like scams, scandals and political agitations tend to attract the people which further results in the interpersonal discussions with the peers or on the social networking sites. However a very low percentage of people verify the correctness of the facts emerging out of the negative news stories.

The findings of the study further elaborate that the majority of the people are partially aware of the politicians contesting elections while a significantly high number of people are unaware of the party manifesto for the elections. Majority are also unaware of the political ideologies of the various parties contesting elections. However those who know about the political ideologies, they gave credit to the interpersonal discussions and majorly mainstream media projections for shaping their understanding.

One key finding to emerge from the study was that even though English was the language which was believed to be most credible with respect to the election related media content, Hindi was not far behind. Also the third language i.e. Urdu was also considered credible by a significantly high number of people.

Since this study took place in western U.P. and the respondents were the students belonging to the various streams. The results cannot be generalized. A similar study with different set of respondents and in a different place with different demographic setup may display a different result but this study does give a clear indication of what can be expected.

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