

## **Exploring Public Perception about the Framing of Politicians in the Mirror of Comedy TV shows of Pakistan**

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### **Abstract**

*Private TV channels in Pakistan have established a new tradition of comedy shows in which they portrayed our politicians in hilarious manners as corrupt, greedy, fighting for power, self and personal interest etc. This article explored a comprehensive perception of the people regarding the framing of Politicians through caricatures in the leading comedy shows. A survey of 774 respondents was administered in the Islamabad city by utilizing the probability sampling method. The Findings of the study revealed that the majority of people were convinced that comedy TV shows are presenting a true picture of our politicians and they are responsible for bad governance and political instability in Pakistan. Most of the viewers were sure that female politicians and religious politicians were not being depicted in a more humiliating way as compared to other politicians. They expressed their concern regarding the integrity of the leadership of the mainstream political parties and they also believed that our politicians are liars and they are involved in embezzlement of money.*

**Keywords:** framing of politicians, public perception, political satire, comedy TV shows

### **Introduction**

This research article aims to deeply watch systematically how private Pakistani TV comedy shows are framing our politicians and how a common man perceives the image of them from these comedy shows. Arrival and emergence of private electronic media in the first decade of this century has changed the trends and values. Comedy TV shows, especially portraying our politicians as a source of entertainment. Almost every comedy television show has its dummies of mainstream politicians. Dialogues, style, parodies and mimicries of politicians is an important part of almost every comedy show. For this purpose, there are so many different segments of different comedy shows with the main emphasis on politicians.

Viewers are facing a fluid of media messages from different television channels in Pakistan and the authenticity and reliability of these messages is a big question mark. Viewers are now greatly exposed to unconfirmed media content as it is a package of infotainment. Viewers of Comedy shows perceive the image of political figures in a way that is presented by private television

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channels. This perception is very important as they are voters and an important part of this political system. This type of unproven information helps the audience to categorize and organize the information provided by media; daily and conveniently. And stereotyping is the process which helps in this organization and categorization of general beliefs at the cognitive level (McGarty et al., 2002)

### *Political Satire*

There are a large number of mass media scholars who studied the impacts and effects of comedy TV shows in-depth to examine its association with political awareness, political socialization, voting behaviour and perception especially (Baum & Angela, 2006). Political satire must be entertaining or humorous, but it should be primarily a stroke or attack on any prominent personality or prominent organization. There are so many forms of satire, as we are watching daily on comedy TV shows. Primarily satire is applied as a tool to pretend the usual and regular weakening. Political satire is currently presented (in comedy TV shows) as a tool of funniness, comedy, mockery and joking to present events and personalities for fun and entertainment (Gray et al., 2009).

Kaid, Mckinney, and Tedesco (2007) explored that information about politics and politicians is positively associated with the exposure to comedy and satire shows and it has also potential to enhance their awareness, political socialization effectiveness, especially in the case of youth. LaMarre et al. (2009) investigated media content practicing of satire regarding politics and politicians in “*The Colbert Report* and the effect or impacts of political philosophy on perceptions of Stephen Colbert”. Cao and Brewer (2006) explained this particular perception more and they pursued to recognize how satirical comedy shows can stimulus actively participate in politics. They established their hypothesis as exposure to comedy and satirical television shows escalate political awareness and active participation in the political process. Comedy shows have a two-dimensional impact on viewers. First, these comedy shows are a significant source of political information and second, these shows are an important source of entertainment. Baum and Angela (2006) explored the effects of comedy TV shows and he found a substantial relationship between the consumption of political comedy TV shows and constant voting trends and voting behaviors.

Lee and Kwak (2014) examined how political satire can provoke adverse sentiment and that might be an inspiring and stimulating foundation to active participation in the political process. They established their hypothesis that political satire shows decrease positive emotions towards the government overall.

Many investigations have confirmed a large number of effects of political satire on individual level socio-political attitudes and behaviours connected to a diversity of current political issues Holbert et al. (2003). Studies point out that there is a strong relationship between prime time comedy shows and individual-level political behaviours and attitudes. These satirical researches have explained considerable effects on gaining of political sense and understanding. Such studies are consistent with entertainment study regarding politics, which elaborate the impacts and effects of prime time comedy shows on individual-level political understanding, opinions, perceptions, behaviours and attitudes (Landreville et al., 2010). Hokenson (1993) provides a very brief explanation of satire's goals: he says satire should not concern with real social responsibilities or issues in any open way.

The literature review can analyze and assess the foundations and tells the researcher or individual who reads on the best suitable. Wimmer and Dominick (2014) stated that the phenomenon of literature review suggests the material and evidence about "what was done, how it was done and what outcomes were produced." The literature review is the most important to provide solid foundations for every type of research project. It helps the researcher to examine and read the printed material as well as electronic versions of the studies regarding a particular area of research. Caricature, political satire, mockery and mimicry are used to find out irrationalities and insincerities, the variance between the portrayal of personalities, events or situations and their "actual" position (Gray et al., 2009). According to Hoon Lee (2012), the efficiency of satirical programmes is almost equivalent to daily news and current affairs segments related to politics. He conducted survey research with a sample of 700 respondents. He examined that most of the people tend to share the contents of comedy TV shows on social media for interaction and exchange of ideas also.

#### *Objectives of The Study*

The major objectives of this research are:

1. To explore the framing of politicians in comedy TV shows.
2. To examine the public perception of the politicians.

#### **Cultivation Theory**

Cultivation Theory focuses that perception of heavy television viewers is cultivated frequently by what they watch on TV screens. Gerbner declares this as a televised world and uses a term "not a window on or reflection of the world, but a world in itself" (Curran, 2012). Experts of Cultivation theory argument that television has long term influence. The present research has determined to apply the

Cultivation Theory of Dr. Gerbner as a handbook to explore public perception about the framing of politicians.

#### *Research Questions*

RQ1: What is the perception of the viewers the way politicians are being framed in the comedy TV shows of Pakistan?

RQ2: Are our politicians responsible for political instability and bad governance as played up in the presentation of comedy TV shows?

RQ3: What is the perception of the viewers regarding the framing of the female leading politicians as being depicted in the comedy TV shows in comparison of the male politicians of Pakistan?

RQ4: What is the perception of the viewers the way the politicians of religious political parties are being framed in the selected comedy TV shows in comparison of politicians of mainstream political parties of the country?

#### **Methodology**

Survey technique was applied to gather the responses from respondents for analysis and discussions.

#### *Study Area*

To explore the public perception the current research project is conducted in Islamabad, the capital of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. As there is a large number of people working in this city, from all areas of Pakistan, that's why this city is considered as mini Pakistan. Islamabad was distributed in three constituencies and 14 'Charges' by the Election Commission of Pakistan in 2018 general election. The researcher selected the Charge Number 1, Charge Number 3, Charge Number 5, Charge Number 7, Charge Number 9, Charge Number 11 and Charge Number 13 with the help of even and odd technique at the first stage. The details are as under:

***Table: 1 Constituency and their extent***

<b>Constituency</b>	<b>The extent of the constituency</b>
NA 52, ICT-I	Charge No.2, Charge No. 1 (Some areas)
NA 53, ICT-II	Charge No. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and some areas of Charge No. 1
NA 54, ICT-III	Charge No. 3, 4, 5, 13 and Charge No. 14

#### *Population for the Study*

The population of this research consists of all registered voters of Islamabad. Details are as under:

Table: 2 Registered Voters of Islamabad

Male Voters of Islamabad	Female Voters of Islamabad	Total Voters of Islamabad
407463	357885	765348

### *Sample of The Study*

According to Morgan table, and for the better strength of sample, the sample details are as under:

1. Male respondents sample = 387
2. Female respondents sample = 387
3. Total sample = 774

### *Reliability*

Cronbach's Alpha should be more than 0.7, in this research; the value of Cronbach's Alpha was measured as 0.76. This value indicates the high ratio of reliability of a questionnaire for the survey.

### *Measurement*

The collected data was investigated by using IBM's SPSS 21.

## **Results and Findings**

RQ1: What is the perception of the viewers the way politicians are being framed in the comedy TV shows of Pakistan?

***Table: 3 Politicians Can Do Anything***

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	221	28.6	28.6	28.6
Agree	421	54.4	54.4	82.9
Neutral	65	8.4	8.4	91.3
Disagree	50	6.5	6.5	97.8
Strongly Disagree	17	2.2	2.2	100.0
Total	774	100.0	100.0	

(421) 54.4 percent respondents agreed, followed by (221) 28.6 percent respondents, who strongly agreed that our politicians can do anything for their interest. (65) 8.4 percent respondents were neutral, (50) 6.5 percent respondents disagreed and (17) 2.2 percent respondents strongly disagreed.

***Table: 4 Politicians Tell Lies***

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	246	31.8	31.8	31.8
Agree	439	56.7	56.7	88.5
Neutral	60	7.8	7.8	96.3
Disagree	25	3.2	3.2	99.5

Strongly Disagree	4	.5	.5	100.0
Total	774	100.0	100.0	

(439) 56.7 percent respondents agreed followed by (246) 31.8 percent respondents, who strongly agreed that comedy TV shows are portraying that our politicians tell lies for their interest. (60) 7.8 percent respondents were neutral, (25) 3.2 percent respondents disagreed and (4) 0.5 percent respondents strongly disagreed.

**Table: 5 Politicians do not fulfill their Promises**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	257	33.2	33.2	33.2
Agree	456	58.9	58.9	92.1
Neutral	33	4.3	4.3	96.4
Disagree	26	3.4	3.4	99.7
Strongly Disagree	2	.3	.3	100.0
Total	774	100.0	100.0	

(456) 58.9 percent respondents agreed followed by (257) 33.2 percent respondents, who strongly agreed that comedy TV shows are portraying that our politicians do not fulfil their promises after getting power. (33) 4.3 percent respondents were neutral, (26) 3.4 percent respondents disagreed and (2) 0.3 percent respondents strongly disagreed.

**Table: 6 Embezzlement of Money**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	149	19.3	19.3	19.3
Agree	445	57.5	57.5	76.7
Neutral	134	17.3	17.3	94.1
Disagree	42	5.4	5.4	99.5
Strongly Disagree	4	.5	.5	100.0
Total	774	100.0	100.0	

(445) 57.5 percent respondents agreed followed by (149) 19.3 percent respondents, who strongly agreed that comedy TV shows are portraying that majority of our politicians are involved in embezzlement of money. (134) 17.3 percent respondents were neutral, (42) 5.4 percent respondents disagreed and (4) 0.5 percent respondents strongly disagreed.

RQ2: Are our politicians responsible for political instability and bad governance as played up in the presentation of comedy TV shows?

**Table: 7 Politicians are Responsible for Political Instability**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	164	21.2	21.2	21.2
Agree	380	49.1	49.1	70.3
Neutral	113	14.6	14.6	84.9
Disagree	88	11.4	11.4	96.3
Strongly Disagree	29	3.7	3.7	100.0
Total	774	100.0	100.0	

(380) 49.1 percent respondents agreed that politicians are responsible for political instability in Pakistan, followed by (164) 21.2 percent respondents, who strongly agreed. (113) 14.6 percent respondents were neutral, (88) 11.4 percent respondents disagreed and (29) 3.7 percent respondents strongly disagreed that politicians are responsible for political instability.

**Table: 8 Politicians are Responsible for Bad Governance**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	190	24.5	24.5	24.5
Agree	426	55.0	55.0	79.6
Neutral	78	10.1	10.1	89.7
Disagree	69	8.9	8.9	98.6
Strongly Disagree	11	1.4	1.4	100.0
Total	774	100.0	100.0	

(426) 55.5 percent respondents agreed that politicians are responsible for bad governance in Pakistan, followed by (190) 24.5 percent respondents, who strongly agreed. (78) 10.1 percent respondents were neutral, (69) 8.9 percent respondents disagreed and (11) 1.4 percent respondents strongly disagreed that politicians are responsible for bad governance.

RQ3: What is the perception of the viewers regarding the framing of the female leading politicians as being depicted in the comedy TV shows in comparison of the male politicians of Pakistan?

**Table: 9 Framing of Female Politicians**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	52	6.7	6.7	6.7
Agree	233	30.1	30.1	36.8
Neutral	136	17.6	17.6	54.4
Disagree	275	35.5	35.5	89.9

Strongly Disagree	78	10.1	10.1	100.0
Total	774	100.0	100.0	

(275) 35.5 percent respondents disagreed followed by (233) 30.1 percent respondents, who agreed that comedy TV shows are presenting our female politicians in a more humiliating way as compared to male politicians. (136) 17.6 percent respondents were neutral, (78) 10.1 percent respondents strongly disagreed and (52) 6.7 percent respondents strongly agreed that comedy TV shows are presenting our female politicians in a more humiliating way as compared to male politicians.

RQ4: What is the perception of the viewers the way the politicians of religious political parties were being framed in the selected comedy TV shows in comparison of politicians of mainstream political parties of the country?

**Table: 10**      **Framing of Religious Politicians**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	65	8.4	8.4	8.4
Agree	244	31.5	31.5	39.9
Neutral	114	14.7	14.7	54.7
Disagree	280	36.2	36.2	90.8
Strongly Disagree	71	9.2	9.2	100.0
Total	774	100.0	100.0	

(280) 36.2 percent respondents disagreed followed by (244) 31.5 percent respondents, who agreed that comedy TV shows are presenting our religious politicians in a more humiliating way as compared to other politicians. (114) 14.7 percent respondents were neutral, (71) 9.2 percent respondents strongly disagreed and (65) 8.4 percent respondents strongly agreed that comedy TV shows are presenting our religious politicians in a more humiliating way as compared to other politicians.

### Discussion and Conclusion

Television has become a central medium of news and entertainment or infotainment since last two decades in Pakistan. The emergence of private TV channels has changed the taboos and conventional norms of the television industry. Television dramas were most popular when there was only one channel PTV. But private TV channels like, *Geo*, *ARY*, *Dunya*, *Aaj*, *Express*, *Sama* and other channels has changed the scenario. As we know that political talk shows are the most popular shows nowadays. After the political talk shows, private TV channels introduced a new concept and that is comedy shows. Comedy shows like '*Ham Sab Ummeed say hain*', '*4*

*Man News*, *Khabarnaak* and *Hasb e Haal* etc. has glued the public instead of dramas.

Parodies, dummies, mockeries and jokes are the essentials of these comedy shows. Besides the entertainment, these comedy shows have enough potential to influence and affect the opinion formation. Nowadays politics and politicians are the main subjects of these comedy shows. Scriptwriters, actors and anchors considered that politics and politicians play a key role in the success of any comedy show. Contents of these comedy TV shows are often discussed among the people in offices, organization and public places. This indicates the influence and popularity of comedy TV shows.

As mentioned earlier that survey method has been applied as the most suitable study design for this study. The researcher conducted a test study before data collection to check the validity and reliability of the. A very comprehensive questionnaire was prepared to obtain the data and information of the respondents about TV Watching frequency and schedule, favourite comedy show, receiving information from a comedy TV show and content sharing of comedy TV shows. The key emphasized area of this study was the framing of the politicians. For this purpose, a total number of 774 respondents as a sample of the general public were gathered throughout the Islamabad by utilizing the probability sampling method. Systematic random sampling method was adopted to draw the sample from the population.

The researcher examined that comedy TV shows had substantial potential and effects that could mold and shape the opinions of the viewers. Findings of the study also cleared that a large number of people were convinced that comedy TV shows are presenting a true picture of our politicians. They believed that politicians were responsible for bad governance and political instability of Pakistan. Most of the viewers were sure that female politicians and religious politicians were not portrayed in a more humiliating way as compared to other politicians. Maximum registered voters answered that our politicians are liar and they were involved in embezzlement of money. Majority of the respondents used negative frames for our politicians

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