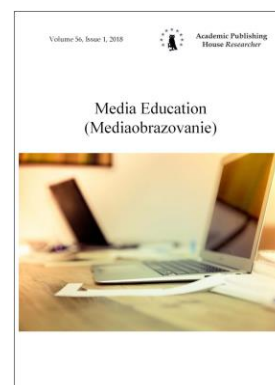




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## News Media Use and Civic Engagement: The Mediating Role of Social Capital and Civic Accountability

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### Abstract

This study aims to explore the relationship between news media use and civic engagement. This study also investigates the mediating role of social capital and civic accountability in the relationship between news media use and civic engagement. The theoretical framework of this study is based on social learning theory. By employing a cross-sectional survey design, this study has collected online data from 350 respondents from four universities located in Lahore. To empirically test hypotheses, Partial Least Square based Structural Equation Modeling technique has been used. The results of this study reveal that news media use is positively associated with civic engagement. News media use has a significant relationship with social capital and civic accountability. This study has also found a positive relationship between social capital and civic engagement. Similarly, the relationship between civic accountability and civic engagement also remains significant. The results of the indirect effects indicate that social capital and civic accountability are significant mediators in the relationship between news media use and civic engagement.

**Keywords:** news media, civic engagement, social capital, civic accountability.

### 1. Introduction

Media is considered the eyes and ears of a society that plays a positive role by providing information concerning important events happening in society (Florini, 2012; Shah et al., 2005). People rely on different mediums to get the latest information regarding newsworthy events. This information strengthens the social fabric and has deep effects on the masses. In short, media is an important social agent of socialization that plays a vital role in increasing civic engagement (Entman, 2005; Hooghe, 2002; Neuman et al., 2011; Prior, 2003; Xenos et al., 2014). Social media also play a significant role in this regard. It can be used to promote civic engagement (Kenna, Hensley, 2019).

It is natural for a human being to take a keen interest in social events as man is a social animal who wants to bring a positive change in society improving the existing situation. An individual keeps himself abreast of the latest happenings and contributes to civic activities. Civic engagement is a broader term. It is not limited to political participation but also includes involvement in community affairs such as volunteer community activities (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012). The relationship between media and civic engagement is evident from previous studies (Livingstone, Markham, 2008; Warren et al., 2014). It is usually understood that news media disseminate information that leads the public towards community involvement (Verba et al., 1995). It is also a fact that an individual's attitude sometimes decreases the level of civic engagement (Uslaner, 1998).

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Media promote social capital that leads towards civic participation. Social capital is further divided into two categories i.e. sense of mutuality and social trust. Media usage is the main source to create formal and informal relations within society and creates a sense of mutuality and promote values of social trust. Mutuality means sharing feelings and actions among social circles and social trust helps in establishing and strengthening relations. Social capital formulates a strong civil society by facilitating associative behavior and empowering individuals (Verba et al., 1995). The way of interacting with companies is modified, with the advent of new media. The gatekeeping mechanism and dissemination of the information have changed due to the advancement of new media (Fieseler, Fleck, 2013). Social capital is one of the most important elements that mediate the relationship between media use and civic engagement. Social capital facilitates associative behavior and enhances the level of civic engagement (Kim, 2007). Social trust converts 'They' into 'We', create an atmosphere of brotherhood, unite people, and establish a prosperous society (Uslaner, 2018).

Several studies have explored the relationship between news media use and civic engagement (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Livingstone, Markham, 2008; Thorson, Edgerly, 2017). Previous scholarly studies have also investigated the mediating role of social capital in the effects of news media use on civic engagement (Cattell, 2001; Collins, Guidry, 2018; Kim, 2007). The mediating role of civic accountability has not been explored yet. This study bridges this gap exploring the mediating role of civic accountability in the relationship between news media and engagement. This study identifies the effects of news media on civic engagement focusing on societal issues that is the requirement of the time.

This study aims to explore the relationship between news media use and civic engagement by investigating the mediating role of social capital and civic accountability. It will make a distinct contribution to the existing literature by exploring the effects of news media on civic engagement in the context of Pakistan. Above all, this study will explore the mediating role of a new construct civic accountability between news media use and engagement.

*News Media Use and Civic Engagement.* Q.K. Mahmood and M. Saud (Mahmood, Saud, 2019) explored the relationship between Facebook use and civic engagement among a sample of 1245 respondents. The results indicated a significant relationship between Facebook use and civic activities of youth. Moreover, age and qualification were found to be the significant predictors of civic participation. This study indicated a positive connection between new media and engagement.

S. Zubair and S.A. Halim (Zubair, Halim, 2017) examined the effects of social networking sites among 195 youngsters of Pakistan and Egypt. This study found no relationship between the new media use and civic contribution of youth. This study contradicts the findings of previous research indicating no significant association between new media and engagement. D.H. Choi and D.H. Shin (Choi, Shin, 2016) explored the relationship between social media use and engagement through investigating the moderating role of social capital. The results showed that new media and social capital enhance civic engagement. Moreover, an individual's level of social capital was found a major reason with reference to the effects of social media on civic engagement.

A critical review of previous studies identified a strong connection between news media use and civic engagement (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Hoffman, Thomson, 2009; Kim, 2007; Livingstone, Markham, 2008; Neill, 2009; Pasek et al., 2006; Thorson, Edgerly, 2017; Xenos, Moy, 2007).

*News Media and Social Capital.* A.M. Warren, A. Sulaiman, and N.I. Jaafar (Warren et al., 2014) studied the effects of new media in fostering online civic engagement as well as establishing mutual and institutional trust. The empirical analysis of the data showed that new media use was positively related to the mutual trust which in result enhanced trust in state institutions. Moreover, mutual incentives motivated and encouraged citizens to participate in online civic activities through developing their interest. M.D. Bonner (Bonner, 2009) in his study found that media play a vital role in promoting social accountability while providing platforms for public discussion and mutual action for the betterment of society. This study explored the influence of media in creating social accountability concerning police violence through newspaper coverage.

J. Son and N. Lin (Son, Lin, 2008) studied the relationship between social capital and civic action using secondary data of a national survey. The results revealed that social capital was a significant predictor of civic action. This study proved that organizational networks played a central role in enhancing contribution to civic affairs.

Empirical literature found that media use for entertainment has a negative association with social capital. D.V. Shah, Nojin Kwak, and R.L. Holbert (Shah et al., 2001) in his study found a negative relationship between the entertainment use of the internet and social capital. Likewise,

J. Cho, H. Rojas, and D.V. Shah (Cho et al., 2003) also found the same results in their study and found the internet one of the major factors for having adverse civic consequences. The result of these two studies mentioned above indicated a negative relationship between entertainment use of media and engagement.

*Relationship between Social Capital and Civic Engagement.* R.A. Jalalani and N. Shah (Jalalani, Shah, 2019) examined the relationship between social capital and civic engagement by collecting data from university students. The results illustrated that bonding social capital and trust had a positive and direct influence on civic engagement. This study revealed a positive relationship between social capital and engagement in the context of Pakistan.

Another study identified the relationship between social capital and civic behavior among a sample of 420 respondents. The results indicated a positive and direct relationship between a high level of social capital and civic behavior. Besides, this study also observed partial mediating effects of social capital. The overall results of this study proved that news media was significantly related to engagement through social capital (Liu et al., 2014). On the other hand, a study found no relationship between media use and civic engagement. This study examined the effects of news media and social capital on engagement by collecting data through a telephonic survey. The results indicated that social capital enhances engagement. News media does not lead to participation. This study found a positive relationship between social capital and civic contribution, but this relationship was nonsignificant when it came to news media (Zhang, Chia, 2006).

R.D. Putnam (Putnam, 2000) argued that those individuals who have a large social network are more likely to contribute to civic activities. Social trust removes barriers and opens new avenues for civic engagement. J. Son and N. Lin (Son, Lin, 2008) also agreed with this point of view arguing that social capital increases engagement in civic activities. Social trust, mutuality and the feeling of brotherhood removes distances and bring different people on same page. As a result, people work for the welfare of community going beyond their personal interests.

*Mediating Role of Social Capital.* Z.J. Zhong (Zhong, 2014) analyzed the role of social networking sites in bridging social capital and enhancing involvement in civic affairs. This study collected data from 654 respondents. It was inferred from the results that social networking sites bridge and bond social capital that in turn have a positive influence on civic involvement. This study found the significant mediating effects of social capital between new media and engagement. Similarly, another study found the mediating effects of social capital on civic engagement and collective efficacy (Collins et al., 2014). Social capital is a potential mediating variable between the relationship of news media and engagement.

A critical review of previous literature indicated that news media has positive effects on civic engagement. Besides, social capital is also a significant mediator between news media and engagement. However, no study investigated the mediating role of civic accountability which has been measured in this study. This study fills this research gap exploring the mediating effects of civic accountability between news media and civic engagement.

*Social Learning Theory.* Social learning theory was proposed by Albert Bandura in the 1960s in the result of the bobo doll experiment. Bandura experimented on a doll in the presence of children. The doll was physically harmed, and its effects were observed on children. Bandura observed that children imitated acts of their elders and kicked and punched the bobo doll (Bandura, Walters, 1977). Through this experiment, he concluded that our behaviors are formulated because of observation (Mihalic, Elliott, 1997). Before the formation of this theory, it was assumed that human behaviors take place in the result of reinforcement or conditioning, but this assumption was changed with this experiment (Maisto et al., 1999). Bandura proved that the process of learning take place through imitation, retention, reproduction, and motivation. In this regard, the process of reenactment or modeling play a crucial role.

This theory is related to this study as individuals learn a lot of things through imitation. The process of observation and imitation lead towards civic engagement. People contribute to community affairs by getting inspiration and observing behavior of other people through news media. Besides, the process of learning through mass media carries the ability to build social capital by formulating the sense of mutuality and social trust as well as promoting civic accountability in society. Besides, R.D. Putnam (Putnam, 1995) argued that television is one of the major factors for declining social capital and civic contribution in the USA because it portrays mediated reality contrary to social facts.

A lot of previous studies have used social learning theory to elucidate the concept and process of social work, socialization, and engagement (Akers, 1995; Campbell, 1979; Jacklin, Reynolds, 1993; Pratt et al., 2010). Besides, sociologists have extensively used this theory to explain deviant behavior and human reinforcement (Brauer, Tittle, 2012; Durkin et al., 2005; Ford, 2008).



**Fig. 1.** Proposed Conceptual Model

Following are the main objectives and hypotheses of this study:

- To explore the relationship between news media use and civic engagement.
- To check the relationship between news media use and social capital.
- To examine the relationship between news media use and civic accountability.
- To identify the relationship between social capital and civic engagement.
- To discover the relationship between civic accountability and civic engagement.
- To investigate the mediating role of social capital in the relationship between news media use and civic engagement.
- To explore the mediating role of civic accountability in the relationship between news media use and civic engagement.

H1: News media use has significant relationship with civic engagement.

H2: News media use has significant relationship with social capital.

H3: News media use has significant relationship with civic accountability.

H4: Social capital is positively associated with civic engagement.

H5: Civic accountability is positively associated with civic engagement.

H6: The relationship between news media use and civic engagement is mediated by social capital.

H7: The relationship between news media use and civic engagement is mediated by civic accountability.

## 2. Material and methods

*Participants and Sampling.* This study is based on quantitative methodology. A cross-sectional survey design was employed to complete this research. Data was collected through an online questionnaire due to pandemic situations around the globe and the closing of educational institutions. The questionnaire carried 39 close-ended items. All items were directly related to the research topic.

University students, both males, and females, aged 18 to 33, were participants of this study. Through employing a purposive sampling technique, data was collected from 350 students from three universities of Lahore. The purposive sampling technique allows a researcher to collect data from those respondents who have certain characteristics that have interest for researcher (Neuman, 2007).

*Demographic Variable.* This study asked participants about their gender, locale, age, sect, qualification, and household income.

*News Media Use.* News media use scale was adopted from a previous study (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012). Participants were asked how much they had read, seen, or listened to different news mediums to get information about events, public issues, and politics. Seven news mediums were mentioned in response: newspaper, magazine, radio, television, social networking sites, online newspaper, and internet. Their response was evaluated on a five-point scale from never (1) to very

often (5). Cronbach's Alpha for the measure was ( $\alpha = .65$ ,  $M = 22.71$ ,  $SD = 4.20$ , Minimum = 7, Maximum = 35).

*Social Capital.* The social capital scale was adopted from the study of S.H. Kim (Kim, 2007). This scale consists of two sub-scales: informal socializing and interpersonal trust. Informal socializing subscale consists of six items such as "I participate in alumni activities" (Cronbach's Alpha  $\alpha = .70$ ,  $M = 18.62$ ,  $SD = 3.78$ ). Interpersonal trust sub-scale contains two items such as "Most people can be trusted" (Cronbach's Alpha  $\alpha = .72$ ,  $M = 26.58$ ,  $SD = 4.66$ , Minimum = 12, Maximum = 40).

*Civic Accountability.* Civic accountability was assessed on a five-point Likert scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) by adapting a scale from an existing study (Flanagan et al., 2007). It included four items such as "If I love Pakistan, I should notice its problems and work to correct them" (Cronbach's Alpha  $\alpha = .70$ ,  $M = 16.65$ ,  $SD = 2.62$ , Minimum = 4, Maximum = 20).

*Civic Engagement.* This study measured civic engagement by adopting the civic engagement scale developed by A. Doolittle and A.C. Faul (Doolittle, Faul, 2013). This scale consists of two subscales: civic attitude and civic behavior.

*Civic Attitude Subscale.* Civic engagement attitude subscale was evaluated on a five-point Likert scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). It carries eight items such as "I feel responsible for my community" (Cronbach's Alpha  $\alpha = .88$ ,  $M = 32.68$ ,  $SD = 4.77$ , Minimum = 14, Maximum = 70).

*Civic Behavior Subscale.* Civic behavior subscale was assessed on a five-point Likert scale from never (1) to very often (5). It included six items such as "I am involved in a structured volunteer position in the community" (Cronbach's Alpha  $\alpha = .84$ ,  $M = 20.61$ ,  $SD = 4.68$ , Minimum = 14, Maximum = 70). It is pertinent to mention here that the reliability value reported above all constructs was checked on a sample of 50 respondents. Besides, the researcher has also assessed composite reliability and AVE after data collection. Their results have been presented in the result section.

*Data Collection.* Data was collected from university students in April 2020. An online questionnaire was prepared using Google form. The researcher shared the survey URL via email and social networking sites. In the end, the researcher received 350 responses. Data was collected in November and December 2020.

*Data Analysis.* The researchers used the Smart PLS 3.2.9 to analyze data. PLS-SEM is a popular approach used to test measurement and structural models. Through this approach, we can analyze data and produce consistent results even with smaller sample size. It has the highest statistical power to generate accurate results. First, the researcher converted the SPSS file into a CSV file. A new project was created in Smart PLS and CSV data file was imported. A consistent PLS Algorithm was run through which construct reliability, validity, AVE, discriminant validity was reported. To empirically test hypotheses, the researcher performed bootstrapping on the 2000 bootstrap sample. Through this approach, the researcher evaluated both measurement and structural models. The results have been presented in the next chapter.

### 3. Discussion

This study examines the association between news media use and civic engagement. Moreover, this study also investigates the mediating role of social capital and civic accountability. The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in cultivation and social learning theory. A cross-sectional survey design was applied to obtain data from 350 respondents through an online questionnaire created through Google form. PLS-SEM approach is used to empirically test hypotheses. In this chapter, the researcher explains the results considering previous literature. The analysis revealed the following results.

The relationship between news media and engagement is significant. The results have supported the abovementioned hypothesis indicating a positive association between news media use and engagement. These results are consistent with previous studies (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Hoffman, Thomson, 2009; Livingstone, Markham, 2008; Mahmood, Saud, 2019; Martens, Hobbs 2015; Mushtaq, Baig 2015; Pasek et al., 2006; Rafique et al., 2016; Thorson, Edgerly, 2017; Thorson et al., 2020; Xenos, Moy, 2007; Zubair, Halim 2017). These studies also proved that news media has positive effects on civic engagement.

The findings of the study have shown a positive relationship between news media and social capital. This shows that news media has direct impacts on social capital. These findings have not only supported the hypothesis 2 but also in line with the previous studies findings (Ohme, 2020;

Ida, Saud, 2020; Lu, Lee, 2021; Uslaner, 1998), who in their study also found news media as a significant predictor of social capital. In this regard, the present study testifies the results of previous literature.

The results of this study support the relationship between news media use and civic accountability. Thus hypothesis 3 is supported. It reveals that news media use lead an individual towards civic accountability. This result is consistent with the researcher's expectations. News media create a sense of responsibility and encourage individuals to work for the betterment of society.

Hypothesis 4 is supported as the relationship between social capital and civic engagement is significant. Consistent with previous studies (Jalalani, Shah 2019; Son, Lin, 2008; Zhang, Chia, 2006) social capital has direct and positive effects on civic engagement. The association between civic accountability and civic engagement is significant. Hypothesis 5 is supported that shows civic accountability has positive impacts on civic engagement. These results support the findings of M.D. Bonner (Bonner, 2009) that also indicates a positive association between civic accountability and engagement.

It was predicted that social capital mediates the relationship between news media use and civic engagement. The findings support the proposed relationship. Hypothesis 6 is supported. It indicates that social capital is a significant mediator in the relationship between news media use and civic engagement. These results are similar to previous studies findings (Collinsm, Guidry, 2018; Kim, 2007; Tucker et al., 2021; Zhong, 2014). The findings of these previous studies also showed that social capital is a significant mediator. This study testifies the results of previous studies.

Civic accountability is hypothesized to mediate the relationship between news media use and engagement. The results support hypothesis 7. As is evident from the results, the relationship between news media use and engagement is mediated by civic accountability. For the very first time, this study investigates the mediating role of civic accountability. The empirical literature has not found the mediating role of civic accountability. This study verifies the mediating effects of civic accountability between news media use and civic engagement. Like civic accountability, future investigations should find new variables that mediate the relationship between media and engagement.

*Theoretical Implications.* Social learning theory has provided a theoretical framework for this study. The overall results of present study support the propositions of social learning theory. This study found that media play a key role in encouraging engagement among masses. People learn from media and work for the betterment of society. This theory is also of the view that people learn through the procedure of modeling and imitation. Social learning theory seems compatible with the results of this study.

*Limitations of the Study.* This study limits generalization due to employing the convenience sampling technique. Its results cannot be generalized to all youngsters in Pakistan. Besides, a cross-sectional survey design limits the ability of causality.

*Delimitations of the Study.* This study measured news media use as an independent variable, civic engagement as a dependent variable, social capital, and civic accountability as mediating mechanism. Data was collected from university students aged 18 to 33 by using a cross-sectional research design.

*Implications of the Study.* The present study makes a distinct contribution to the existing literature by exploring the mediating role of civic accountability between news media and civic engagement. Besides, its results can be helpful for social workers who intend to bring constructive change in society. They can design their strategy considering the results of this study.

*Future Research.* Future investigations must include people other than students in their sample so that the extent of this study could be broadened. In addition, future studies should collect offline data through a self-administered questionnaire or in-depth interviews. Future studies need to further investigate the proposed relationships within the framework of the O-S-R-O-R model. Future researchers can explore the role of other mediating mechanisms such as interpersonal communication, civic knowledge, civic efficacy, and so on. In future studies, researchers should try to generalize results having a true representative sample.

#### 4. Results

This part of the study deals with the results of this study. The researchers have analysed the data by using Smart PLS 3.2.9. In this study, construct reliability, discriminant validity, direct and indirect effects of different variables have been described in detail. Above all, this part throws light

on the results of the hypotheses. Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage of demographic characteristics. The sample of this study included 187 (53.4 %) male and 163 (46.6 %) females. 94 (26.9 %) respondents were living in rural areas while 256 (73.1 %) in urban areas. When it came to age categories, 100 (28.6 %) respondents' age was between 18-22, 166 (47.4%) were 23-28, 52 (14.9 %) were 29-33, 32 (9.1 %) respondents were more than 33 years old. The majority of the respondents 243 (69.4 %) belonged to Ahle-Sunat sect, 25 (7.1 %) Ahle-Hadith, 19 (5.4 %) Ahle-Tasih, and 63 (18 %) having their association with other sects. 32 (9.1 %) respondents had 12 years of education, 107 (30.6%) had 14 years of education, 122 (34.9 %) had 16 years of education, 71 (20.3 %) had 18 years of education and only 18 (5.1 %) were PhDs. Moreover, 119 (34 %) respondents' household income was less than 40000, 110 (31.4 %) between 40000-80000, 72 (20.6 %) in between 80000-120000, and 49 (14 %) more than 120000.

**Table 1.** Demographic Information

Demographics	Frequency (N= 350)	Percentage (%)
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	187	53.4
Female	163	46.6
<i>Locality</i>		
Rural	94	26.9
Urban	256	73.1
<i>Age</i>		
18-22	100	28.6
23-28	166	47.4
29-33	52	14.9
More than 33	32	9.1
<i>Sect</i>		
Ahle-Sunat	243	69.4
Ahle-Hadith	25	7.1
Ahle-Tasih	19	5.4
Any other	63	18
<i>Qualification</i>		
Intermediate	32	9.1
Bachelor	107	30.6
Master	122	34.9
M.Phil	71	20.3
PhD	18	5.1
<i>Household Income</i>		
Less than 40000	119	34
40000-80000	110	31.4
80000-120000	72	20.6
More than 120000	49	14

Internal consistency reliability was in the range between 0.72 to 0.90. All constructs had reliability more than .70. In the reflective measurement model, it is recommended to have at least .70 reliability. However, the composite reliability of all constructs was up to the required standard ranges from 0.78 to 0.91. So far as AVE is concerned, it should be at least 0.50. All the constructs fulfill this standard. In addition, the overall result of the discriminant validity given in Table 3 assessment was satisfactory. The R<sup>2</sup> value of social capital (0.191) and civic accountability (0.135) was weak. Whereas the R<sup>2</sup> value of civic engagement was 0.539 which was moderate.

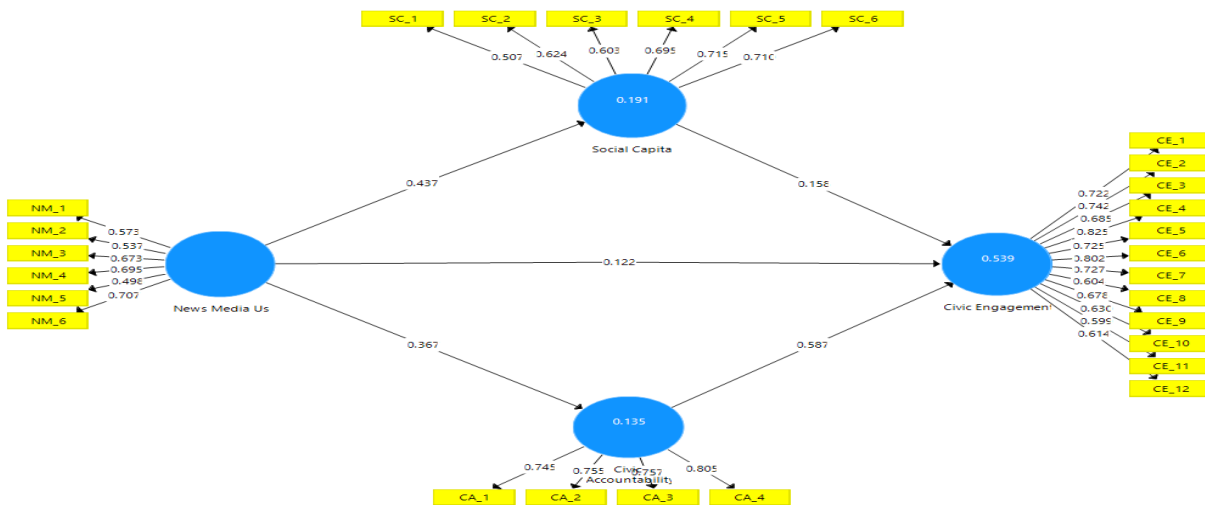
**Table 2.** Construct Reliability and Validity

Constructs	α	Composite Reliability	AVE
News Media Use	0.79	0.78	0.53
Social Capital	0.72	0.81	0.51
Civic Accountability	0.76	0.85	0.58
Civic Engagement	0.90	0.91	0.50

**Table 3.** Discriminant Validity

	1	2	3	4
1. Civic Accountability	<b>.766</b>	-		
2. Civic Engagement	.704	<b>.700</b>	-	
3. News Media Use	.367	.406	<b>.619</b>	-
4. Social Capital	.459	.481	.437	<b>.647</b>

Note. Bold figures are the square roots of the AVE. The rest of the values represent correlation among latent variables.



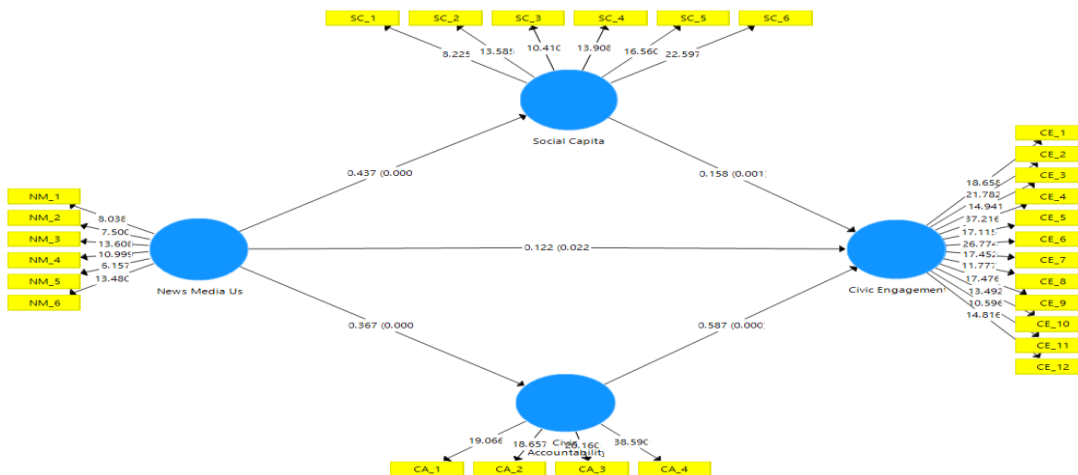
**Fig. 2.** Measurement Model

Table 4 indicated the results of direct and indirect effects. The relationship between news media use and civic engagement (CE) was significant ( $\beta = 0.122, t = 2.28, p = .02$ ). News media use was positively related to social capital ( $\beta = 0.437, t = 9.93, p = .000$ ). The results demonstrated that the association between news media use and civic accountability was significant ( $\beta = 0.367, t = 6.05, p = .000$ ). Moreover, the relationship between social capital and CE was statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.158, t = 3.37, p = .001$ ). The results further illustrated that the relationship between civic accountability and civic engagement was significant ( $\beta = 0.587, t = 13.41, p = .000$ ). Social capital significantly mediated between the relationship of news media use and CE ( $\beta = 0.069, t = 3.22, p = .001$ ). Civic accountability also mediated the relationship between news media use and CE ( $\beta = 0.216, t = 5.47, p = .000$ ).



**Table 4.** Results of the Direct and Indirect Effects

Hypothesis Path	$\beta$	SD	t-value	p-value
News Media Use -> Civic Engagement	0.122	0.053	2.28	.022
News Media Use -> Social Capital	0.437	0.044	9.93	.000
News Media Use -> Civic Accountability	0.367	0.061	6.05	.000
Social Capital -> Civic Engagement	0.158	0.047	3.37	.001
Civic Accountability -> Civic Engagement	0.587	0.044	13.41	.000
News Media Use -> Social Capital -> Civic Engagement	0.069	0.021	3.22	.001
News Media Use -> Civic Accountability -> Civic Engagement	0.216	0.039	5.47	.000



**Fig. 3.** Structural Model

In the above structural model, beta and *p*-values can be observed in the inner model and *t*-values in the outer model.

### 5. Conclusion

Summarizing the whole discussion, this study has examined the association between news media use and civic engagement through the mediating role of social capital and civic accountability within the framework of social learning theory. Civic engagement is a positive sign of a civilized society that brings prosperity and play a critical role in making a state welfare. Social capital especially interpersonal trust and the feelings of mutuality enhance engagement inside society. Besides, civic accountability realizes individuals about their civic duties and motivate them to work unconditionally for the sake of their community. A lot of studies have been conducted across the world to identify the role of news media in leading masses towards civic activities. This study has tried to investigate the role of news media in engagement with special reference to Pakistan. In addition to identify the direct relationship between news media and engagement, this study also investigates the mediating effects of social capital and civic accountability. Previous studies have not investigated the mediating role of civic accountability between news media and civic engagement. This study has bridged this gap identifying the mediating effects of civic engagement. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted to carry out this study. PLS-SEM approach was applied to empirically test hypotheses.

The results revealed that news media use has positive and direct effects on civic engagement. This study has found the significant effects of news media on social capital and civic accountability. Moreover, social capital has direct effects on engagement. Civic accountability has also positive effects on civic engagement. Apart from direct effects, this study also identifies indirect effects. Social capital mediates the relationship between news media use and engagement. The results of this study support civic accountability as a positive mediator which significantly mediates between news media use and civic engagement.

The overall results of this study support the propositions of social learning theory proving that people get inspiration from media coverage related to civic activities. Public perception is built through

attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation as Bandura described the phases of learning. The procedure of modelling also plays a crucial role in this regard. More specifically, news consumers follow the footsteps of philanthropists portrayed by media and support them going beyond everything.

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