

Digital Media Literacy and Political Participation: The Mediating Role of Information- Seeking Behavior of Youth in Lahore, Pakistan

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Abstract - In the modern digitized world, individuals are not only enabled to access, acquire or create information, but also evaluate and effectively disseminate it for political discourse through digital platforms. The present study aims to investigate the role of digital media literacy in shaping political participation through mediating effects of information-seeking behavior among literate youth of Lahore. Employing the theoretical lens of digital media literacy (DML), the study adopts a quantitative approach and collects data from a sample of 401 respondents aged 18 to 29 years from different universities of Lahore through a structured questionnaire. Using the purposive sampling technique, the study targets the university students belonging to two disciplines i.e., media studies and political science examining how digital media literacy directly and indirectly shapes political participation through information-seeking behavior. The findings suggest significant associations among digital media literacy, information-seeking behavior and political participation. The study offers valuable insights for educationists and media practitioners in Pakistan to promote digital media literacy and political participation through critical and informed use of digital platforms. Future research is recommended to explore the relationship in rural context including other mediating variables.

Keywords - Digital Media Literacy, Political Participation, Information-Seeking Behavior, Youth



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1. Introduction

The media landscape in Pakistan is continuously evolving and reaching high levels of advancement. Digitization has immersed into the pluralistic and diverse society of the country. It has gone through a drastic transformation in terms of information sharing and consuming digital technologies. People are now more informed of the happenings and occurrences around them than ever before. It has led the individuals to become a part of the participatory culture.¹

¹ Syeda Ammarah Bano, Sofia Mubbsher, and Lubna Zaheer, "Exploring the Relationship between Media Literacy

The term ‘digital literacy’ is defined as the ability to access, understand, consume, critique, create and distribute information through digital media technology.² It is considered as an important skill nowadays where digital technologies have impact on almost every aspect of the lives of people. As a part of the informational social setup, it is crucial for people to know the effective use of their knowledge and information. In this age of digitalization, there is a huge information flow of social and political issues online. Hence, digital media literacy (DML) is necessary to critically evaluate information, understand the correct use of media platforms, initiate active participation and make informed and wise decisions. It has become an inevitable and indispensable skill for individuals to ensure social inclusion and equality.³

In the present information based society, it has been considered a requisite for individuals to make a responsible and efficacious use of information. Student in higher education are required to have proficiency in information literacy in order to shape their self-regulated learning skills.⁴ The media serve to be the significant providers of information for individuals as they collect, utilize, create and distribute information. The nature of information and the way it is being presented affects the ways how different individuals, groups, societies, and institutions perceive and respond to it.⁵

Participation of youth in socio-economic and political life is key feature of the contemporary democracies. Indeed, the omnipresence of the latest digital communication technologies for political activities and participation have extended and internet has surfaced the new kinds of political participation in the digital media environments. Youth is a generation that has been immersed in the new digital tools and technologies, and are often understood as technologically adept, and seem to be less interested in conventional forms of political participation as compared to individuals belonging to other age groups.⁶

The endangered ambivalence and attitudinal uncertainty due to competing political views can be addressed with an effective search of information and gaining deeper understanding of different political issues adopting an active, thorough, persistent and focused information-seeking behavior (ISB). Informational utility of digital media, especially for news, is intimately connected to political participation among different individuals as news can stimulate relevant cognitive resources including knowledge and efficacy, that primarily drives participation.⁷ In the developed countries like the United States, information-seeking behavior among youth has

and Political Engagement,” *Annals of Human and Social Sciences* 5, no. 2 (2024): 285–99.

² Ester Van Laar et al., “Determinants of 21st-Century Skills and 21st-Century Digital Skills for Workers: A Systematic Literature Review,” *Sage Open* 10, no. 1 (2020): 2158244019900176.

³ Ece Avinç and Fatih Doğan, “Digital Literacy Scale: Validity and Reliability Study with the Rasch Model,” *Education and Information Technologies* 29, no. 17 (2024): 22895–941.

⁴ Thanita Lerdpornkulrat, Chanut Poondej, and Ravinder Koul, “Construct Reliability and Validity of the Shortened Version of the Information-Seeking Behavior Scale,” *International Journal of Information and Communication Technology Education (IJICTE)* 13, no. 2 (2017): 27–37.

⁵ Teresa Mastin, “Media Use and Civic Participation in the African-American Population: Exploring Participation among Professionals and Nonprofessionals,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 77, no. 1 (2000): 115–27.

⁶ Eva Fernández Guzmán Grassi, Martijn Portos, and Andrea Felicetti, “Young People’s Attitudes towards Democracy and Political Participation: Evidence from a Cross-European Study,” *Government and Opposition* 59, no. 2 (2024): 582–604.

⁷ Michael Chan, Hsuan-Ting Chen, and Francis L F Lee, “Cross-Cutting Discussion on Social Media and Online Political Participation: A Cross-National Examination of Information Seeking and Social Accountability Explanations,” *Social Media+ Society* 7, no. 3 (2021): 205630512111035696.

been profoundly affected by the extensive adoption and use of the digital media and technologies. In the developing countries like Pakistan, information seeking and sharing behavior of youth is undergoing a radical change. Numerous digital media platforms are being used for sharing news content, serving entertainment and educational purposes. This has increased the knowledge sharing initiatives and opportunities of political participation for them.⁸ Political participation (PP) is a concept with multiple dimensions. It includes both institutional (e.g., voting, political party membership, joining petitions) and non-institutional (e.g., rejecting or proscribing; or favoring an idea of a party or candidate) forms of participation. However, with the emergence of the new digital technologies, new approaches have been developed to conceptualize political participation. Few studies have addressed digital political participation as an independent approach rather being a forbearer of traditional (offline) participation. These studies described digital political participation as a way of participation comprising of political actions or happenings being processed or held through the use of digital tools.⁹ A considerable number of educated young people are participating in political life, through the usage of digital media technology, as a part of participatory political culture which is collaborative, peer based, and do not follow any conventional institutions or individual authorities.¹⁰ Online environments for youth are becoming central to their political life. They participate in political discussions, share political ideologies, opinions and perspectives through digital media. In the current online realm, digital literacy offers an ethical media usage guideline and focuses upon the veracity of online political participation in youth.¹¹ Young people possessing media and digital literacy are able to make credible choices of sources and platforms for information seeking. It turns them into critical thinkers generating fresh knowledge perceptions out of them.¹² The research has repeatedly demonstrated that digital literacy is closely linked to political participation specifically among the literate youth.¹³ It suggests that increased levels of digital literacy are closely associated with political participation and community activities such as participation in volunteer work, digital advocacy programs and community resourcefulness. The youth are able to identify and access information, share opinions, team up in digital sphere, and contribute to community as they acquire and utilize digital skills. Therefore, it is obligatory to promote digital literacy and provide opportunities for youth to engage digitally making them informed, active citizens so that they can contribute towards social change and make meaningful contributions to the society.¹⁴

The theoretical framework presented by Fiona Suwana identifies four critical elements to enhance digital media namely content, changers, community and collaboration. The DML

⁸ Duncan Mbeeria, "Influence of Social Media on Information Seeking and Sharing Behavior among Young Adults in Kenya," *African Journal of Information and Knowledge Management* 3, no. 1 (2024): 53–63.

⁹ Zafer Kuş et al., "Developing a Digital and Traditional Political Participation (DTPP) Scale for Youth: A Validity and Reliability Study," *Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations* 25, no. 1 (2023): 7–21.

¹⁰ Joseph Kahne and Ellen Middaugh, "Digital Media Shapes Youth Participation in Politics," *Phi Delta Kappan* 94, no. 3 (2012): 52–56.

¹¹ Mohd Sufiean Hassan et al., "Analysis and Evaluation Dimension: Strengthening The Integrity of Political Participation Practice in Social Media from Media Literacy Perspective," *Sciences* 10, no. 11 (2020): 123–40.

¹² Bano, Mubbsher, and Zaheer, "Exploring the Relationship between Media Literacy and Political Engagement."

¹³ Athina Karatzogianni, Katrin Tiidenberg, and Dimitris Parsanoglou, "Multimodal Research: Youth Becoming Digital Citizens," 2022.

¹⁴ David De Coninck, Natalia Waechter, and Leen d'Haenens, "Unraveling the Engagement Paradox: High Civic Engagement among Vulnerable European Youth in the Digital Age," *Journal of Applied Youth Studies* 8, no. 2 (2025): 249–67.

framework focuses on developing educational materials tailored to the cultural context of learners; empowering individuals, educators, activists and community leaders; building supportive networks encouraging shared learning and participation; collaborating partnerships among different stakeholders, administration bodies, community organizations, educational institutes and even private sector to effectively implement DML strategies. The framework aligns with the comprehensive approach to media literacy perspectives and works to equip individuals with essential digital skills to traverse, analytically involve and participate in community actions (Suwana 2021).¹⁵ In this study, DML is conceptualized as an individual-level cognitive and evaluative competence.

Educators should embrace digital media use for both academic and political engagement. Presently, it poses challenge for the researchers, academicians and educators to stay even with the swift use of digital media for political activities by youth finding ultimate ways to become civic minded (Kahne and Middaugh 2012).¹⁶

1.1 Objectives

The study aims to

Examine the role of digital media literacy in shaping political participation among youth in Lahore, Pakistan.

Study the mediating effects of information-seeking behavior on digital media literacy and political participation among youth in Lahore, Pakistan.

Suggest recommendations for enhanced digital media literacy and increased political participation.

1.2 Research Questions

1. Does media literacy play a role in shaping political participation among youth in Lahore, Pakistan?

2. Does information-seeking behavior play a mediating role on the relationship between digital media literacy and political participation among youth in Lahore, Pakistan?

2. Hypotheses Development

There is ample literature on youth political participation, with several studies investigating youth engagement in politics and its impact on democracy. Some studies highlight youth's growing interest in democratic activities concluding high levels of youth participation in political discourse, few emphasize on the active role of youth in Pakistan's politics being critical to Pakistan's political structure. Some studies focus on the social media effects on political engagement and efficacy. Youth nowadays, has not only become a driving force but an obvious and meaningful actor in the political landscape of Pakistan. It is fundamental to understand the increasing involvement and use of new media or digital media technology for participating in democracy and promoting political activism.¹⁷

2.1 Digital Media Literacy and Political Participation

Research on the relationship between use of media and political participation commenced in the late 1990s. It trailed several lines of inquiry. It studied alternative forms of participation and e-

¹⁵ Fiona Suwana, "Content, Changers, Community and Collaboration: Expanding Digital Media Literacy Initiatives," *Media Practice and Education* 22, no. 2 (2021): 153–70.

¹⁶ Kahne and Middaugh, "Digital Media Shapes Youth Participation in Politics."

¹⁷ Syeda Muzna Ali, Munaza Sarwar, and Muhammad Usman Ghani, "Assessing the Progress of Youth Political Participation and Its Impact on Democracy: A Case Study of 2024 Elections of Pakistan," *Pakistan Social Sciences Review* 8, no. 2 (2024): 498–507.

participation including online political activities using digital media such as online petitions, blogging, political discussion forums and citizen journalism.¹⁸ Scholars have reportedly marked an affirmative and constructive relationship between media use, social inclusion, political knowledge and political activism or participation. Some of them believe that community engagement occurs due to digital media utilization, other advocate that media literacy education is crucial to cognitive and social framework that ultimately supports public participation in political activities.¹⁹

According to Suwana (2021), digital media and learning (DML) suggest that the foundation of involvement in participatory politics is laid with the advancement of digital social capital. The digital and media literacy enables the citizens to make rational choices, access information through information-seeking strategies, understanding information and viewpoints, critically evaluate media content and assessing the quality and reliability of the content. Digital literacy has empowered them to even create and distribute media messages in various forms, using language, sounds and new digital media technology, even self-reflection and communication behavior by following ethics and principles of social responsibility.²⁰ They are now able to be a part of the social change by working individually and collectively by sharing knowledge and participating as members of democratic setup.²¹ Therefore, literature supports the positive association between digital media literacy and political participation.

H1: There is a statistically significant relationship between digital media literacy and political participation.

2.2 Digital Media Literacy and Information-Seeking Behavior

Studies reveal that individuals belonging to diverse backgrounds spend more time and intellectual efforts in political information-seeking. Discussing one of the rational perspectives as information utility theory, it become evident that information-seeking through digital media is essential to be informed and make sensible decisions. It states that when people lack required information, they will be motivated to seek it out to be better informed and knowledgeable. Perspectives based on emotions as effective intelligence theory and spiral of silence theory suggest that uncertainty can cause distress and apprehension, which in turn, kindles information seeking in individuals so that they may search to adapt to and cope with certain situations. They concentrate and look for information about the general public opinion more often through digital media.²² Hence, it can be considered that digital media literacy is positively correlated with information-seeking behavior.

H2: There is a statistically significant relationship between digital media literacy and information-seeking behavior.

2.3 Information-Seeking Behavior and Political Participation

As reported by Chan, Chen, and Lee (2021), uncertainty leads people towards information seeking. They search for not only that information which aligns with their own perceptions but

¹⁸ Bruce Bimber et al., "Digital Media and Political Participation: The Moderating Role of Political Interest across Acts and over Time," *Social Science Computer Review* 33, no. 1 (2015): 21–42.

¹⁹ Mastin, "Media Use and Civic Participation in the African-American Population: Exploring Participation among Professionals and Nonprofessionals."

²⁰ Suwana, "Content, Changers, Community and Collaboration: Expanding Digital Media Literacy Initiatives."

²¹ Hans Martens and Renee Hobbs, "How Media Literacy Supports Civic Engagement in a Digital Age," *Atlantic Journal of Communication* 23, no. 2 (2015): 120–37.

²² Chan, Chen, and Lee, "Cross-Cutting Discussion on Social Media and Online Political Participation: A Cross-National Examination of Information Seeking and Social Accountability Explanations."

also the one that opposes them.²³ It inevitably reinforces political participation. Experiments reveal that indecisive people would exhibit both affirming and opposing attitudes towards political content. It aligns with the notion that when one goes through information that holds politically different stance and exhibits disagreement, one would simultaneously seek out information and know about opposite views and perspectives in order to act proactively by being better informed for intersecting instances ahead. Therefore, being subjected to abundant information is favorable to attaining political understanding and awareness. It serves to move parallel to the ideal conception of democratic citizen, who is well-informed about the political scenario, committed with democratic norms and shows active participation in politics. Overall, these explanations suggest a positive correlation between information-seeking behavior and political participation.

H3: There is a statistically significant relationship between information-seeking behavior and political participation.

2.4 Mediating Role of Information-Seeking Behavior

The existing body of literature has commended the significance of informed choices in democratic life and political discussion, shaping attitudes and patterns of participation in political activities. It is about the social and digital media which serves as a digital sphere providing quick and easy access to information and news, express and share opinions, exchange views, and engage in various political and civic actions. Digital media have broadened the horizons for political discussion and action. Political participation constitutes the activities by citizens that directly or indirectly influence the selection of government representatives and the actions and decisions they make. In order to conceptualize political participation through digital networks, Theocharis introduced the concept of digitally networked participation (DNP) defining it as an action based on networked media carried out by citizens to demonstrate their intent to raise awareness about their social networks and activate them exerting pressure to reach towards a solution to a specific socio-political problem.²⁴

It is outlined by many new media scholars that young people are more interested in digital platforms for searching political news and frequently engage themselves in political participation which in turn, stimulates them to be a part of the political action and decision-making. They advocate the positive association between the use of digital media and political discourse for those who have low political interest.²⁵ The diffusion of digitally networked media has significantly altered the ways people communicate, seek and share information for participating in political affairs. Research has identified political participation as a way to increase political interest and knowledge, strengthening the collective capacity of people to react and act on complex problems. Political participation has been considered central to assess the quality of democracy. Digital participation activities range from information seeking to discussing politics and volunteering. Digitally networked technologies have made political participation more deliberative and inclusive initiating ‘citizen coproduction’ where governments treat participants as partners for service design, monitoring and service delivery.²⁶ As noted by Kim and Yang,

²³ Chan, Chen, and Lee.

²⁴ Yannis Theocharis, “The Conceptualization of Digitally Networked Participation,” *Social Media+ Society* 1, no. 2 (2015): 2056305115610140.

²⁵ Mohd Sufiean Hassan et al., “Social Media and Political Participation among Young People,” *Jurnal Sains Sosial* 1, no. 1 (2016): 95–114.

²⁶ Grassi, Portos, and Felicetti, “Young People’s Attitudes towards Democracy and Political Participation: Evidence from a Cross-European Study.”

proactive and prudent information seeking among digital natives may serve as significant contributor to civic engagement and political participation.²⁷ They suggest that higher level of web or internet information literacy is associated with higher levels of political participation even if the cultural context tends to discourage it among youth.

H4: Information-seeking behavior mediates the relationship between digital media literacy and political participation.

While previous studies have reconnoitered the relationship between digital literacy and political participation, there is limited focus on how digital media literacy influences the effectiveness and quality of political information that youth seek and how this, in turn, affects their political participation. There is a scarcity of research specifically examining how digital media literacy affects the quality of political information-seeking behaviors among youth and how this quality impacts their level of political participation. Addressing this gap could provide a profound understanding of the effectiveness of digital media literacy programs and their role in increasing informed political participation among youth in Lahore, Pakistan.

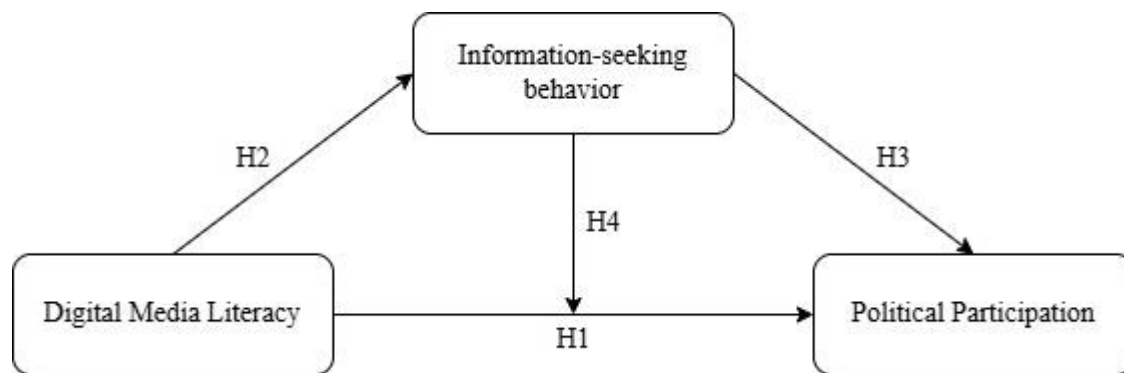


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the study

3. Method

This quantitative study employs a survey method for data collection from university students in Lahore across two disciplines i.e., Media Studies and Political Science. The study aims to investigate the relationship between digital media literacy and political participation along with the mediating role of information-seeking behavior among these students.

3.1 Population and Sample Size

Purposive sampling technique is employed and the data has been collected from the students of Media Studies and Political Science Departments as these students are more familiar with the attributes of media literacy and political participation in democracy. Due to the unavailability of exact enrollment numbers for students in political science and media studies, a systematic approach has been employed to determine an appropriate sample size. To ensure the reliability and reflective representation, the number of 401 respondents was selected in accordance with Krejcie and Morgan's table,²⁸ aligning with Cochran's formula.²⁹

²⁷ Eun-mee Kim and Soeun Yang, "Internet Literacy and Digital Natives' Civic Engagement: Internet Skill Literacy or Internet Information Literacy?," *Journal of Youth Studies* 19, no. 4 (2016): 438–56.

²⁸ Robert V Krejcie and Daryle W Morgan, "Determining Sample Size for Research Activities," *Educational and Psychological Measurement* 30, no. 3 (1970): 607–10.

²⁹ William G Cochran, "Matching in Analytical Studies," *American Journal of Public Health and the Nations Health* 43, no. 6_Pt_1 (1953): 684–91; William G Cochran, "The χ^2 Test of Goodness of Fit," *The Annals of*

The study achieved a response rate of 18.6%, with 2,151 questionnaires distributed via online social media platforms (e.g., WhatsApp) and university administration channels.

3.2 Measurement Scale

The study uses the existing validated tool for measuring digital literacy developed by authors.³⁰ It is a Likert-type measurement questionnaire.

The dependent measures include three dimensions: “Digital political support” comprising of 16 items; “Traditional political support” factor consisting of 12 items, and “The digital political following” factor, of 11 items.³¹

The mediating measure had 4-dimensions: search strategies, evaluation of information, referring and regulation activities.³² After careful evaluation of the measurement tool, the following scales were adopted collectively to measure the mediating variable: a 10-item scale for search strategies, 14-items for information evaluation, 6-items for referring to information and a 12-item scale for regulation activities.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

The study ensured the privacy and confidentiality of the participants in the research. Survey questions did not include personal information such as names or ethnicity, thus protecting the privacy of participants. It followed departmental ethical guidelines for social science research. Additionally, informed consent of the participants had been taken providing them choice to participate and share information voluntarily.

4. Results

The participants included 401 individuals with an almost equal gender distribution: 46.9% (n=188) were male, 51.1% (n=205) were female, and 2.0% (n=8) preferred not to disclose their gender. In terms of age, the majority (47.1%, n=189) were between 22 to 25 years old, followed by 27.9% (n=112) aged 18 to 21 years, 22.9% (n=92) aged 26 to 29 years, and only 2.0% (n=8) were aged over 29 years. Regarding their educational qualifications, 52.9% (n=212) were pursuing a Bachelor's degree, 45.1% (n=181) were enrolled at the Master's level, and 2.0% (n=8) were pursuing other qualifications. In terms of discipline, the majority (64%, n=257) were enrolled in Media Studies, followed by 36% (n=144) in Political Science. Concerning institutional affiliation, 60.1% (n=241) of the participants were studying at private universities, whereas 39.9% (n=160) were from public universities. Most participants (79.1%, n=317) were single, and 20.9% (n=84) were married. Regarding occupation, the majority (74.1%, n=297) were full-time students, while 18.0% (n=72) were employed, and 8.0% (n=32) were engaged in other occupations. In terms of residence, 82.0% (n=329) belonged to urban areas, and 18.0% (n=72) were from rural areas. Finally, 61.8% (n=248) of the participants came from nuclear family systems, while 38.2% (n=153) belonged to joint or extended family systems.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics for Key Constructs

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
Digital Media Literacy	19	0.724
Information Seeking-Behavior	39	0.724

Mathematical Statistics, 1952, 315–45.

³⁰ Avinç and Doğan, “Digital Literacy Scale: Validity and Reliability Study with the Rasch Model.”

³¹ Kuş et al., “Developing a Digital and Traditional Political Participation (DTPP) Scale for Youth: A Validity and Reliability Study.”

³² Caroline F Timmers and Cees A W Glas, “Developing Scales for Information-Seeking Behaviour,” *Journal of Documentation* 66, no. 1 (2010): 46–69.

Political Participation	38	0.747
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Cronbach's alpha was calculated to determine the internal consistency of all the three constructs. The results demonstrated acceptable reliability having alpha scores above the accepted threshold of 0.70. The digital media literacy (DML) scale exhibited acceptable internal consistency having value 0.724. Information-seeking behavior (ISB) showed the reliability with alpha coefficient of 0.724 while political participation (PP) produced a Cronbach's alpha of 0.747 demonstrating a good reliability score.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix

Variables	DML	PP	ISB
DML	1	.489**	.677**
PP	.489**	1.000	.696**
ISB	.677**	.696**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
N	401	401	401

The above table elucidates the interrelationship among digital media literacy (DML), information-seeking behavior (ISB), and political participation (PP). The findings reflected a significant positive correlation between DML and PP ($r = .489$, $p < .001$), indicating a higher level of association between digital media literacy and political participation. Respectively, there was a strong and positive correlation between DML and ISB ($r = .677$, $p < .001$), signifying that increased level of digital media literacy is positively correlated with more frequent information-seeking behavior. Moreover, the results established a strong positive correlation between ISB and PP ($r = .696$, $p < .001$), showing that more the individuals engage themselves in information-seeking, the more they participate in political activities. These finding collectively demonstrated the significant relationship between digital media literacy, information-seeking behavior and political participation within the sample.

Table 3: Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path	Coefficient	p-value	R ²	Significance
H1	DML → PP	0.489	$p < .001$	0.239	Supported
H2	DML → ISB	0.677	$p < .001$	0.458	Supported
H3	ISB → PP	0.696	$p < .001$	0.484	Supported
H4	DML → ISB → PP (Indirect Effect)	0.4090	$p < .001$	0.458	Supported

As table 3 demonstrates, H1, hypothesizing a significant relationship between digital media literacy (DML) and political participation (PP) was supported, showing a statistically significant coefficient of 0.489 ($p\text{-value} < 0.001$), with an R^2 of 0.239. The result displays a robust relationship between these variables. H2, predicting a positive relationship between digital media literacy and information-seeking behavior, was also supported showing a significant coefficient of 0.677 ($p\text{-value} < 0.001$), with an R^2 of 0.458, showing a strong relationship between DML and ISB. Similarly, H3, hypothesizing a significant relationship between information-seeking behavior and political participation, was supported. The coefficient of 0.696 was significant ($p\text{-value} < 0.001$), with an R^2 of 0.484, suggesting a strong relationship between the two variables. Lastly, H4, suggesting a significant mediating role of information-seeking behavior (ISB)

between DML and PP, was supported. It showed an indirect effect of 0.4090 as significant (p -value < 0.001), and the R^2 of 0.458.

Consequently, all four hypotheses (H1, H2, H3, H4) were supported indicating the significant role of digital media literacy (DML) and information-seeking behavior (ISB) in shaping political participation (PP) among youth in Lahore, Pakistan. It was found that digital media literacy not only influences the political participation directly but indirectly as well through information-seeking behavior (ISB). It confounds that the digitally literate individuals are likely to seek political information or content, leading towards and increased political association or involvement.

4.1 Mediation Analysis

Model Specification-Hayes Model 4

The mediation model tests whether information-seeking behavior (ISB) mediates the effect of digital media literacy (DML) on political participation (PP).

DML= X (Predictor)

ISB= M (Mediator)

PP= Y (Outcome)

Bootstrap Samples= 5000

Confidence Level= 95%

Table 4: Mediation Analysis Results (PROCESS Model 4)

Path	Effect (B)	SE / BootSE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI
DML → ISB (a)	0.61	0.03	18.37	$< .001$	[0.54, 0.67]
ISB → PP (b)	0.67	0.05	13.78	$< .001$	[0.58, 0.77]
DML → PP (total, c)	0.44	0.04	11.20	$< .001$	[0.36, 0.52]
DML → PP (direct, c')	0.03	0.04	0.68	.499	[-0.06, 0.12]
Indirect (a × b)	0.41	0.16	—	—	[0.06, 0.57]

The mediation analysis examined whether ISB mediates the relationship between DML and PP.

The results provide strong evidence for a full mediation model. First, DML significantly and positively predicted ISB (path *a*; $B = 0.61$, $p < .001$) indicating that higher levels of DML are associated with higher levels of ISB. This establishes the first condition for mediation. Second, ISB significantly predicted PP while controlling for DML (path *b*; $B = 0.67$, $p < .001$), demonstrating that ISB is a strong positive predictor of PP. Third, the total effect of DML on PP was significant (path *c*; $B = 0.44$, $p < .001$), suggesting that DML is positively associated with PP when ISB is not included in the model. However, when ISB was entered as a mediator, the direct effect of DML on PP (path *c'*) became non-significant ($B = 0.03$, $p = .499$), indicating that DML no longer predicts PP independently of ISB. Primarily, the indirect effect of DML on PP through ISB was statistically significant ($B = 0.41$), as shown by a bootstrapped 95% confidence interval that did not include zero [0.06, 0.57]. Hence, the mediation effect is confirmed.

Table 5: Model Fit Statistics

Outcome Variable	R^2	F	df	<i>p</i>
ISB	.46	337.36	(1, 399)	$< .001$
PP (with DML and ISB)	.49	187.38	(2, 398)	$< .001$
PP (total effect)	.24	125.38	(1, 399)	$< .001$

The model fit statistics illustrates that there is a substantial variance in the outcome variables demonstrated through the regression model used in mediation analysis. As the first path demonstrates, DML showed 46% of variance in ISB ($R^2 = .46$), and the model displayed high significance, $F(1, 399) = 337.36, p < .001$. It proves DML to be a strong predictor of ISB. The second path, where PP was regressed concurrently on DML and ISB, the model displayed 49% of the variance in PP ($R^2 = .49$), exhibiting statistically significant model fit, $F(2, 398) = 187.38, p < .001$. It indicates a collective contributory role of DML and ISB for strengthening PP. As the total effect model depicts, where PP was regressed on DML, it showed 24% of the variance in PP ($R^2 = .24$), $F(1, 399) = 125.38, p < .001$, proving DML alone as a meaningful predictor of PP. Though the results explain that DML has a significant total effect on PP, the relationship gains more strength through ISB. The prominent increase in explained variance from $R^2 = .24$ (total effect model) to $R^2 = .49$ (mediated model) highlights the pivotal role of ISB associating DML to PP. These findings are consistent with full mediation.

5. Discussion

The results indicated that digital media literacy (DML) was related to youth political participation (PP), in which DML is directly connected to youth PP and indirectly related to youth PP via ISB. The result supported all the four hypotheses. The results supported that DML, ISB, and youth PP are correlated, which suggests that digital literacy is not just a modest technological skill, but an essential civic resource that young people need for finding sorting evaluating, interpreting, and using political information; more interestingly, the significant mediating role of ISB supported that the relationship between DML and youth PP can be partly explained by the occurrence that how young people actively and critically seek political information. The results of H1 shows a significant effect of DML on PP are consistent with previous studies on the association between media literacy and digital skills and civic and political participation. Martens and Hobbs suggest that media literacy is an important factor in civic engagement as it equips persons for accessing analyzing evaluating and producing media messages.³³ The use of digital media has opened new avenues for civic and political participation among young people compared to traditional forms of political activities. Kahne and Middaugh show evidence that the use of digital media was instrumental for young people's participation in ways that go far beyond traditional engagement practices.³⁴ And Kahne Lee and Feezell find a positive correlation between digital media literacy and online civic and political participation³⁵ while Mohamed indicates a positive association between media literacy and political participation.³⁶ That findings are confirmed by Theocharis who draws on the concept of digitally networked participation to explain current political engagement.³⁷ The present research contributes to this growing literature on digital youth participation by providing evidence from Pakistani youth that digital literacy increases youth participation. Also, digital literacy enables youth to participate in diverse forms of political activity that have not only traditionally included voting and other conventional actions but have also used new mediums of online political discussions, information sharing, digital campaigns and petitions, advocacy, and political views

³³ Martens and Hobbs, "How Media Literacy Supports Civic Engagement in a Digital Age."

³⁴ Kahne and Middaugh, "Digital Media Shapes Youth Participation in Politics."

³⁵ Joseph Kahne, Nam-Jin Lee, and Jessica Timpany Feezell, "Digital Media Literacy Education and Online Civic and Political Participation," *International Journal of Communication* 6 (2012): 24.

³⁶ A A Mohamed, "An Exploratory Study for the Impact of Media Literacy on Political Participation: Case Study on Somali National University," *International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR)* 12, no. 5 (2023): 1123–28.

³⁷ Theocharis, "The Conceptualization of Digitally Networked Participation."

dissemination.

Because of this, the findings lend support to the argument that the advent of online informational and communicational media has expanded youth's participation repertoire and political opportunities. Given that youth are a significant political constituency in Pakistan's democratic life, this research lends support to the contribution of Ali, Sarwar, and Ghanic account of Pakistani youth participation during the 2024 general elections which underscores the importance of youth participation.³⁸ The present research further explains the mechanisms through which such participation may be promoted.

The stated result of H2, predicting the positive link between DML and ISB offers a useful insight as to how digital skills further interact in the political information environment. Digital literacy equips people with the ability to ultimately discover search topics, select relevant sources, compare and evaluate information, but distinguish between quality information and misinformation and biases. Avin and Doan highlight the multidimensional aspects of digital literacy³⁹; Laar et al. illustrate that besides of the technical skill set, new digital literacies should include information processing skills, communication skills, problem-solving skills, critical skills and others.⁴⁰ Kim and Yang separate internet skill literacies from information literacies but evidence the importance of information-related skills for civic participation.⁴¹

And, Lerdpornkulrat et al. underline the necessity of systematic information seeking skills.⁴² As a result, the digitally literate youth can effectively search for information, strategic information providers, evaluate information, and ignore the overload information. The result for H3, which found a positive effect of ISB on PP, also shows that the opportunity to acquire political information are extremely needed for civic engagement. Chan, Chen, and Lee suggested information seeking as one of the important elements for digitally mediated political participation⁴³, which figure out that young people who actively seek political information are more likely to participate in political participation.

Bimber et al. also find that digital media can directly promote political participation but the strength of this association depends on political interest and individual participatory activity type.⁴⁴ Information seeking cannot share the same meaning with political participation as an action by itself. Instead, it supplies the informational context in which political participation tends to happen. Young people who ask candidates elections policies, parties, and social issues questions, due to seeking information can more easily have more political knowledge and concept formation about these questions. An insightful aspect of this study is the H4 mediation finding. Seeking for information plays a crucial mediating role between DML and PP, implying that digital literacy may not operate solely via a direct pathway to uptake of political

³⁸ Ali, Sarwar, and Ghani, "Assessing the Progress of Youth Political Participation and Its Impact on Democracy: A Case Study of 2024 Elections of Pakistan."

³⁹ Avinç and Doğan, "Digital Literacy Scale: Validity and Reliability Study with the Rasch Model."

⁴⁰ Van Laar et al., "Determinants of 21st-Century Skills and 21st-Century Digital Skills for Workers: A Systematic Literature Review."

⁴¹ Kim and Yang, "Internet Literacy and Digital Natives' Civic Engagement: Internet Skill Literacy or Internet Information Literacy?"

⁴² Lerdpornkulrat, Poondej, and Koul, "Construct Reliability and Validity of the Shortened Version of the Information-Seeking Behavior Scale."

⁴³ Chan, Chen, and Lee, "Cross-Cutting Discussion on Social Media and Online Political Participation: A Cross-National Examination of Information Seeking and Social Accountability Explanations."

⁴⁴ Bimber et al., "Digital Media and Political Participation: The Moderating Role of Political Interest across Acts and over Time."

participation. DML endows people with the digital media skills, while seeking for information act as the behavioral mechanism through which users' skills could be transformed into political literacies and perform active participation so. This view is in line with Kim and Yang, Chan et al., and Martens and Hobbs who foreground knowledge and competencies derived from active information seeking as an influential factor in participating in civic life.

The mediation outcome also suggests that digital media literacy does not have to directly induce political action. To translate digital media literacy to political action young people also need the ability to identify pertinent political information, conduct a systematic search, evaluate the information, and incorporate this new information into their overall understanding of the political environment. The implication is then that digital media literacy might lead to political action via the sequential pathway: digital media literacy effective information seeking political understanding political participation. It also points toward the importance of critical digital literacy, as Hassan et al. pointed out, over basic functional digital literacy, as a tool to secure political participation in social media setting where misinformation, partisan messaging, and political contents consumed and circulated swiftly, are commonplace. Another interesting aspect to the findings is the support to the redefinition of the concept of youth as digital citizens. Kahn et al. and Karatzogianni et al.⁴⁵

Lahore, where the research was taking place, has provided an important environment to analyze the impact of the digital neighborhood as it has a large population of youth, educational facilities and a society experiencing various kinds of political as well as digital communication. Yet, due to the particular nature of the social educational technological, and political system of Lahore, caution must be observed for instance against to the overgeneralization of the results to the Pakistani youth. In sum, this study adds to literature by combining the DML, ISB, and PP variables in a single empirical model with particular attention to the mediation effect of information seeking. While DML does affect adult political engagement in prior research, other variables unique to this study need further examination; these include contextual variables such as proximity to the city center, radio/television usage, and psychological variables such as political efficacy, political interest, socio-political awareness, trust in digital information, partisan ideologies, and political content exposure. Overall, the research seems to suggest that improving young Pakistani citizens' information searching skills and critical analysis of digital political information might cause increased political knowledge and more meaningful participations in democracy.

6. Conclusion

Digital media literacy serves to be the most needed form of literacies as the world has gone beyond the global village nomenclature. This study substantiates the significant relationships among digital media literacy (DML), political participation (PP) and the mediating role of information-seeking behavior (ISB). The findings underscore the interdependencies among the three variables. The study highlights the importance of digital media literacy in political context where it initiates the literate youth to participate actively in the political activities through their information-seeking behaviors. Hence, individuals who are digitally literate and possess a keen and rational information-seeking behavior tend to participate in the political activities more reasonably and may lead towards the development of a progressive socio-political model by informed decision-making.

7. Limitations

⁴⁵ Karatzogianni, Tiidenberg, and Parsanoglou, "Multimodal Research: Youth Becoming Digital Citizens."

The study focuses particularly on Lahore as its primary geographic context. The sampling strategy applied using the Krejcie and Morgan table, aligning with Cochran's formula, rely on few rigid, fixed assumptions about data. The cross-sectional design limits the data to be collected at a single point in time not being able to establish a cause-and-effect relationship. Moreover, the self-reported data may reflect social desirability bias.

8. Recommendations

- Universities and colleges should incorporate political digital literacy into existing digital/media literacy programs, particularly training in source evaluation, misinformation detection, fact-checking, and responsible political communication.
- Government and civil society organizations must develop digital and civic literacy initiatives for youth at national level.
- Future studies should compare urban and rural youth and investigate additional variables such as political efficacy, political knowledge, media trust, misinformation exposure, and online political trends.

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