



Digital Echo Chambers: The Role of Social Media in Political Polarization and Misinformation

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Abstract

This study explores the role of social media in fostering digital echo chambers, political polarization, and the spread of misinformation among young users. Using a quantitative survey-based approach, data were collected from 150 undergraduate students at the University of Management and Technology (UMT), Sialkot. The study examines how exposure to misinformation and biased political content on social media influences political opinions, reinforces partisan attitudes, and intensifies political polarization. Regression analysis was employed to test the proposed hypotheses. The findings reveal that exposure to misinformation on social media significantly predicts political polarization, while biased political content strengthens skepticism toward opposing viewpoints. Additionally, socioeconomic, cultural, and emotional factors moderate individuals' susceptibility to political misinformation. The study highlights the powerful media effects of social media platforms in shaping political perceptions and emphasizes the need for media literacy to counter polarization and misinformation in digital environments.

Keywords: Digital Echo Chambers, Social Media, Political Polarization, Misinformation, Media Effects, Youth, Pakistan



Introduction

Polarization shapes different and tells separate stories about what misinformation really means. In extremely divided context, the meaning of false news has no objective. All partisan groups understand the same narrative perspectives in different ways, usually identifying alternative viewpoint as inaccurate or false. The polarization in meaning makes it hard to build mutual agreement of reality. (Ribeiro, Calais, Almeida, & Jr., 2017). Online social media change audience perceptive of getting news rather than older or traditional media. News is shared immediately and usually designed for personal preferences. Audience engages, share, and give opinions, which shapes the viewpoint of events. This creates news engagement faster more engaging and reader focused. Therefore, immediate spreading amplifies the possibility of wide propagation and shape the public view and discourse in immediate time frame. (Marchi, 2012) Political fact checking developed another form of journalism for checking false news and misinformation. It analyzes statements by politicians and media to verify authenticity. Through giving statement bases analysis, it helps the audience recognize between correct and incorrect information. This encourages transparency and promote analytical thinking, making it important in addressing the spread of fake news. (Fridkin, et al., 2015) False news has becoming the big issue and communication experts are paying attention to it. It examines the false information contents goes viral rapidly on social media and how it is shaping public perception. The scholars are concentrating of creating methods and which can help to recognize, reduce and address false information more effectively. Communication researchers analyzing political polarization and emphasize how media digital platforms strengthen views. (Waisbord & S., 2015) Online political discussions are totally different from having face to face interaction, because online platforms usually less social gestures, promotes immediate responses, and enables individuals to hide beneath the hidden identity. Therefore, online political discussion become more intense, divided and ineffective compared to political discussion. (Ho, S, McLeod, & M, 2008)

The distinct is significant because it is impact what is correct or incorrect. When individual from political views based on misinformation, and a majority of population believes the same misconceptions, these common misperceptions can twist the general societal views. When large number of individual shared and reinforce the same misperception public affirmation occurs which amplifies the perceived truth of misinformation. (JH, PJ, J, D, & RF, 2000) . There is also proof that efforts to address misinformation are more successful when false information is seen as a one, specific instance even within ideologically divided contexts. When individual recognize misinformation as a self-contained event, they are unlikely to question its authenticity, making it more impactful and more complex to clarify. This increases the probability that the incorrect statement will expand widely truthful information can resist. The impactful approaches can diminish the effect of misleading information, cultivate critical thinking, and decrease the polarization between political parties. (UK & AngLC, 2019)

This demonstrates that, apart from early concerns, the policy mentions among various social groups are likely to reflect comparable trends. Groups recognize the strategy based on their principles, opinions and backgrounds. When several groups analyze the policy, it shared general public perception and general political discussion. Favorable and unfavorable reactions very across the groups examine the strategy, it shapes shared public perception and wider political debate. (Page, I, Y, & Shapiro, 1992) Political polarization



occurs in two primary types. The first, opinion-based polarization, which indicates increasing gap of political views ideologies, viewpoint, and policies among political opponents. When a person specifically acknowledges information that reflects their current belief system then it becomes firmer and more intense. The increasing individual divides reduce mutual recognition and make valuable political communication. (Dalton, R, & J, 1987) .The latest study offers comprehensive assessment of how media effect political polarization and highlights various deficiencies examined previous research. Media performs a crucial role in forming political polarization by impacting how individual see and perceive political matters. When individual view news that reflects only with their current beliefs, their perspective becomes stronger and biased. The swift dissemination of misinformation and highly emotional content also amplify frustration and mistrust between political parties. (Tucker, et al., 2018)

Problem Statement

The rapid growth of social media has significantly transformed the dissemination of political information, enabling the widespread propagation of misinformation. Audiences frequently engage with emotionally charged and politically biased content rather than accurate information, shaping opinions, beliefs, and perceptions about political parties and authorities. Such exposure reinforces pre-existing partisan views, deepens societal divisions, and fosters polarization. Despite growing awareness of misinformation, there remains a gap in understanding how misleading political content specifically contributes to political polarization, especially among young social media users. This study aims to analyze the processes through which misinformation spreads, influences public opinion, and intensifies political polarization in the social media context.

Research Objectives

1. To examine how false and biased information affects public political views, judgments, and opinions.
2. To analyze the extent to which inaccurate and biased information intensifies societal separation and political gaps.
3. To evaluate cultural, emotional, and socioeconomic factors that make individuals more vulnerable to adopting biased political narratives.

Research Questions

1. How does exposure to misinformation and biased political content on social media affect public political perceptions and opinions?
2. To what extent does social media contribute to the intensification of political polarization within society?
3. Which individual or societal factors (e.g., cultural, emotional, socioeconomic) increase susceptibility to political misinformation?

Limitation of Research

The research includes specific constraints. Due to the rapid evolution of digital platforms, the research work may not illustrate current distorted political trends. The outcome is based on individuals feedbacks which can shape individual belief and common media content. The research is also specific sample, reducing the applicability extend result to general population.

Literature Review

Political polarization is defined as a phenomenon through which member of society and groups progressively accept polarized political positions, bringing to firm polarization in



society. During this phenomenon, individual not only possess opposing political views, but also develop aggression, lack of confidence, and unfavorable opinions towards those with conflicting ideas or political party associations. This increasing divide can decrease possibilities for mutual agreement and exchange of views can reduce opportunities, amplify social conflict and contribute scattered political environment where collaboration and mutual understanding become challenging. Eventually, the increasing polarization weakens democratic processes and restrict the capacity of social groups to work collectively toward mutual priorities. (Adnan & M, 2022, August 11)

As we discuss earlier, misinformation shared on online platforms can deeply shape audience interpretation of government-related concerns, indirectly shaping individual voting behavior and governance priorities. By providing filtered and manipulated information, the misleading storyline reinforces existing opinions, create isolated communication spaces and increase political fragmentation. Gradually, this process amplifies political polarization between polarized parties makes more difficult increasing social and political divisions. The polarization does not exhibit remain restricted to individual views, it also influence voting choices, electoral behavior and political decision-making framework. Over time, in highly polarized communities, collaboration, communication, and developing mutual understanding become progressively difficult, diminishing social unity and well-functioning political system. (Talabi, et al., 2022)

Social media platforms transformed into significantly powerful environment that directly influence how users perceive, analyze and react to information across political, spiritual and commercial spheres. Through algorithm-driven personalized and continue subjected to targeted content, users offer experience that strengthens their pre-existing views. The focused validation not only enhances individual perspective but also minimize engagement to different viewpoints. Hence, digital media platforms contribute to increasing political polarization by amplifying belief-based differences, reinforcing group-oriented conflicts and creating self-reinforcing communities where alternative opinions infrequently encountered. Therefore, social media does not clearly inform audience, it strongly shapes public mindset, social dialogue and overall political environment. (Muzaffar, et al., 2019)

In Pakistan, multiple ideological and political parties, including PTI, PML-N, PPP and some others activity utilize on social media to spread their message. These parties manage their personal online network and authorized accounts on social media sites like Twitter, Facebook and even skypes to engage with people, spread their political message, and coordinate followers for electoral engagement in politics. On these digital platforms, spread current news, political messages, and rallying messages. Among all major political parties, PML-N and PTI stay most leading and well-observed on social media like Twitter, Facebook, and several political online journals, where their followers are strongly engaged. (Kugelman & Michael, 2014) .A recent study, investigated behaviors within online posting across multiple subject areas indicated that, when conversation focus on politically important polarizing issues, online communication tends to consolidate into closely connected groups of similar thinking. These groups act as closed information loops, where people mostly engage and strengthen their views and agree with their own, leading to clarify amplified levels of political polarization. (Barberá, Pablo, & Rivero, 2015)

In modern societies, the spread of misinformation and partial narratives has become the major factor leading to political polarization. Different extremist and militant groups,



without mentioning specific names, often manipulate cultural and ideological weak points by propagating false and inaccurate information through various mediums. The influence of information not only reinforce current opinions and belief system among individuals, but also reduce interaction with different viewpoints. Thus, societal bonds erode, institutional trust weakens in public, and divide among conflicting ideological groups increases. As a result, common understanding, productive discussion, joint decision making become progressively difficult, creating a situation where societal polarization escalated and firmly established. (Yaseen, Z, Muzaffar, & M, 2018) .The misinformation varies among sources. Commonly, it describes the information that is inaccurate and manipulative. Some descriptions involve component of purpose to mislead, while others use the basic for identifying fake news, which is often seen as a particular subdivision of misinformation. In current political contexts, misinformation also amplifies the political polarization, as false and misrepresented information moves towards people in their political factions and magnifies existing polarization. (Treen, et al., 2020) .In modern political environment enables circumstances in which disinformation spread rapidly, especially as rival political groups accelerate their use of polarizing, exaggerated and aggressive tactics to shape public perception. These methods not only reinforce existing ideological tensions but also legitimize the rude behavior public political discourse. Eventually, some process undermines the standards political interaction, reduce the depth of societal debate, and restrict chances for individuals to engage in rational, research supported debates. Thus, political landscape become progressively divided, polarized, exposed the ongoing spread of inaccurate data and emotionally exploitative information. (Taber, C, S, Lodge, & M., 2006) .Although, the younger generation are more engage in political debate platforms through social media and other forums, the awareness of political issues remains limited and divided. Belief based differences strengthens the spread of false misinformation and polarizing content, restrict the formation of clear perspectives of political matters. Consequently, their interaction is generally narrowed to particular matters or temporary events instead of long term structured political participation. The incomplete political insight not only weaken capability for group actions but also make youth exposed to misleading information, strengthening current rifts and reducing their ability to examine critically with alternatives opinions. (Velasco & D., Go! Young progressives in Southeast Asia, 2005) .Political polarization is a societal and political dynamic in which both public and political leaders become gradually more polarized in their perspectives, values and behaviors. The fragmentation emerges in multiple ways, including differences in political viewpoint, governance priorities, political affiliations and views on major societal matters.

As polarization amplifies, people and communities often identify closely with their selected affiliations often encouraging an in group or out group perspectives. The increasing divide reduce possibilities for productive conversations, mutual adjustment, developing shared viewpoints making political system more disconnected and hostile. (McCarty & N, 2019) .The magnitude of political polarization in a population can be analyzed using two multiple methods. primarily, by reviewing the allocation of political attitudes, the emergence of differentiated groups and concentrations, reflecting a split distribution, highlights the magnitude to which groups associate with highly conflicting beliefs. Additionally, tracking long terms patterns in public opinion, where progressively



enduring trends towards specific political positions expose the changing pattern through which polarization become more serve with time. (Fiorina, et al., 2008)

The political engagement of Filipino young generation has been consistently highlighted in historical accounts, showing emerging adults routinely contribute to national discussion and socio-political reform. In modern digital sphere, there role become more important, as young generation are deeply involved with social media where misinformation circulates rapidly and amplifies belief-based polarization. The movement and participation therefore not only shape political campaign, but also intersect with methods polarized viewpoint misinformation that spread in public. (Velasco & D, Rejecting "old-style" politics? Youth participation in the Philippines, 2005) . Political polarization can harmfully shape the democratic system by focusing power in minority. When public become highly polarized ideological boundaries, it brings out the situation judgment process focused, limiting minority system, multiple opinions, and undermining political organization. The concentration can make authorities less transparent, restrict civic engagement, increase the risk of undemocratic practices as the opinions of minority groups, or opposing ideas can be repressed in support of leading parties. (Lee, F, & E, 2015). Media output does not equally promote to the amplification of political polarization among spectators. While specific media channels may increase polarizing stories, others providing neutral reporting that can diminish ideological divides. The role of media on viewers is conditional upon various factors, including existing opinions, targeted consumption and trustworthiness media outlet. Not all data distributed through news and online platforms naturally shapes public opinions. Viewers perceive information uniquely, shaped by thinking tendencies, and societal setting. (Valenzuela, et al., 2019) . Over the last decade, members of society have gradually demonstrated marked belief differences, representing the social and cultural norms. The intensified polarization emerges in the way people adhere more strictly with specific partisan or certain viewpoint, often resulting in diminished receptiveness to contrasting opinions (Jones, D, & A, 2002)

Hypotheses

H1: Exposure to misinformation on social media significantly influences individuals' political opinions in favor of their preferred party.

H2: Increased exposure to biased or false political content on social media is positively associated with higher levels of political polarization.

H3: Socioeconomic, cultural, and emotional factors moderate the relationship between misinformation exposure and susceptibility to biased political narratives.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative, survey-based research design to evaluate the influence of misinformation on political polarization. A structured questionnaire is used to collect data on participants' social media usage, exposure to political content, perception of misinformation, and political attitudes.

Population

The population consists of undergraduate students from **UMT Sialkot**, chosen for their high engagement with social media and likelihood of exposure to political content and misinformation.



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Sampling Method

Simple random sampling was applied, ensuring each student had an equal opportunity to participate. This method minimizes selection bias and enhances the representativeness of the sample.

Sample Size

The study included 150 undergraduate students, deemed sufficient to gather reliable data and perform meaningful statistical analyses within available time and resources.

Data Collection Instrument

A **structured questionnaire** was developed, consisting of:

- **Demographics:** Age, gender, education level, social media usage
- **Media exposure and influence:** Assessing engagement with political content on social media
- **Perception of misinformation:** Evaluating belief in false or biased political content
- **Political polarization indicators:** Measuring political opinions, party loyalty, and ideological rigidity

Data Analysis

Data will be analyzed using **descriptive statistics** (frequencies, percentages, mean, standard deviation) and **inferential statistics** (correlation, regression) to test the hypotheses. The relationship between misinformation exposure and political polarization, as well as the moderating effect of cultural, emotional, and socioeconomic factors, will be evaluated.

Limitations

- The sample is limited to students from a single university, reducing generalizability.
- Rapid changes in social media trends may affect findings over time.
- Responses are self-reported, which may introduce response bias.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

This chapter presents the regression analysis conducted to examine the influence of misinformation and biased political content on political polarization among social media users. Regression analysis was used to test the proposed hypotheses and determine the predictive strength of misinformation exposure on political attitudes.

Table 4.1: Crosstab for the Frequency of the Age of the Respondent

respondent	18-25	26-35	36-45	46-60	Total
frequency	135	22	2	2	161
%	83.9	13.7	1.2	1.2	100.0

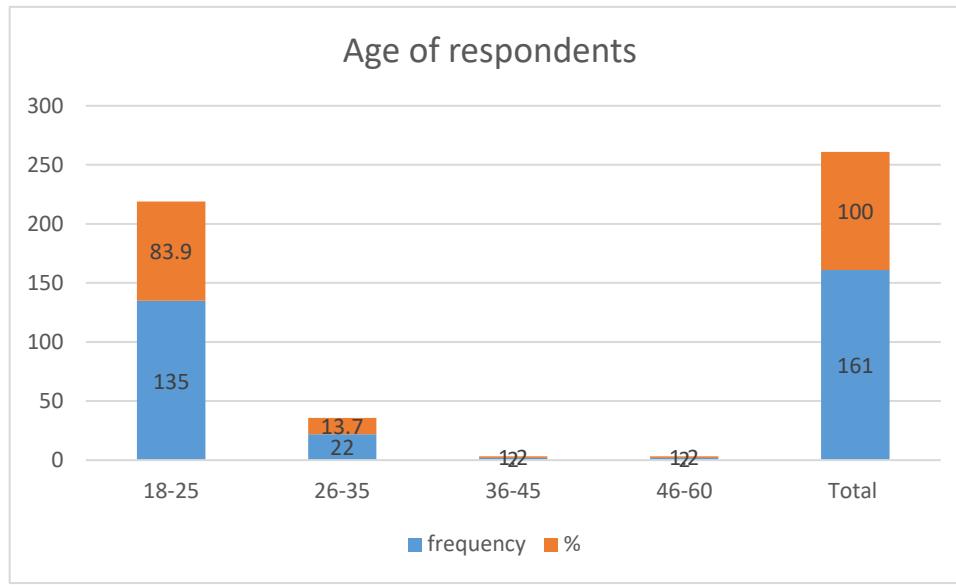


Table 4.1 shows that the majority of respondents are aged 18–25 years, accounting for 83.9% of the sample. Respondents aged 26–35 form a much smaller proportion (13.7%), while very few respondents fall within the 36–45 and 46–60 age groups (1.2% each). Overall, the sample is heavily dominated by younger respondents.

Table 4.2 *Crosstab for the Frequency of Gender of Respondents*

Respondent	male	Female	Other/prefer not to say	Total
Frequency	107	49	5	161
%	66.5	30.4	3.1	100.0

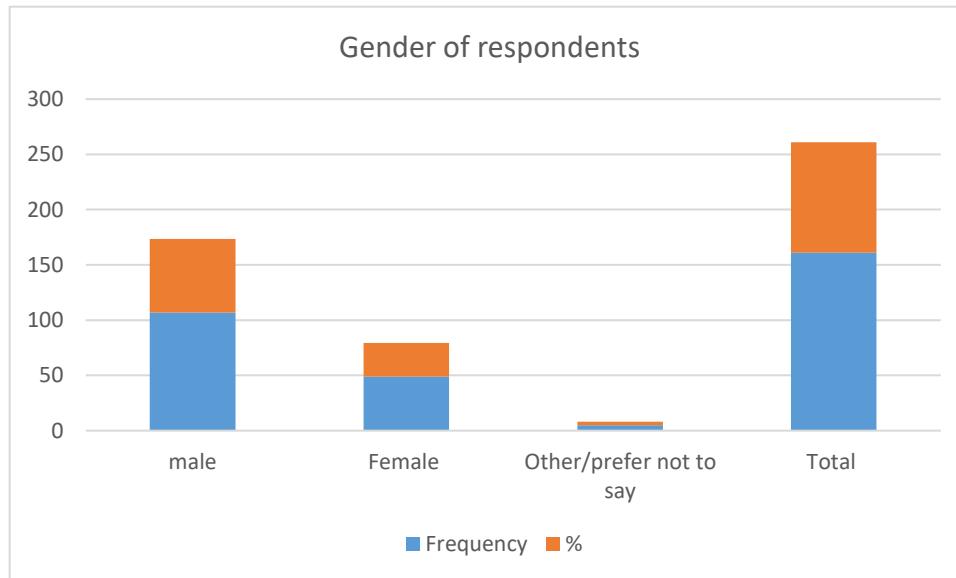


Table 4.2 indicates that male respondents constitute the majority of the sample at 66.5%. Female respondents account for 30.4%, while a small proportion (3.1%) identified as other or preferred not to disclose their gender. Overall, the findings suggest a male-dominated respondent population.

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Table 4.3: Crosstab for the Frequency of Education Level of Respondents

Respondent	High school or below	Undergraduate	Graduate	postgraduate	other	Total
Frequency	25	96	23	11	6	161
%	15.5	59.6	14.3	6.8	3.7	100.0

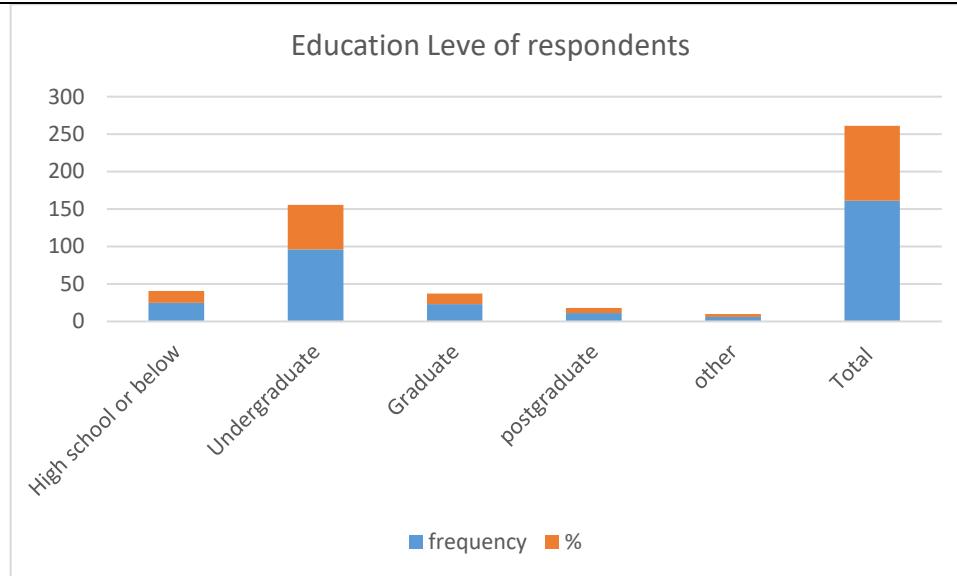


Table 4.3 shows that most respondents are undergraduates, representing 59.6% of the sample. Respondents with high school education or below account for 15.5%, while those with graduate and postgraduate qualifications constitute 14.3% and 6.8% respectively. This indicates that the sample is largely composed of individuals pursuing or holding undergraduate-level education.

Table 4.4: Crosstab for the Frequency of Occupation of Respondents

respondent	student	Government employee	Private sector employee	Self-employed/business	other	Total
frequency	109	7	16	21	8	161
%	67.7	4.3	9.9	13.0	5.0	100.0

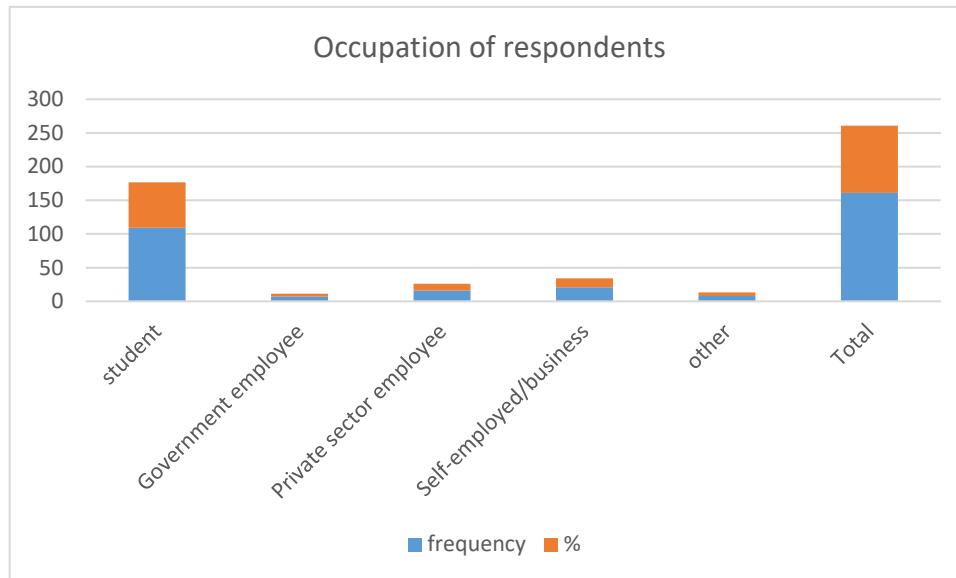


Table 4.4 indicates that the majority of respondents are students, comprising 67.7% of the sample. Self-employed or business respondents form 13.0%, followed by private sector employees at 9.9%. Government employees (4.3%) and those in other occupations (5.0%) represent relatively smaller proportions, showing a respondent pool dominated by students.

Table 4.5: Cross Tab of Primary Source of Political News of Response

respondent	Television	Social media	Online news websites	Newspaper/magazines	other	total
frequency	16	107	11	18	9	161
%	9.9	66.5	6.8	11.2	5.6	100.0

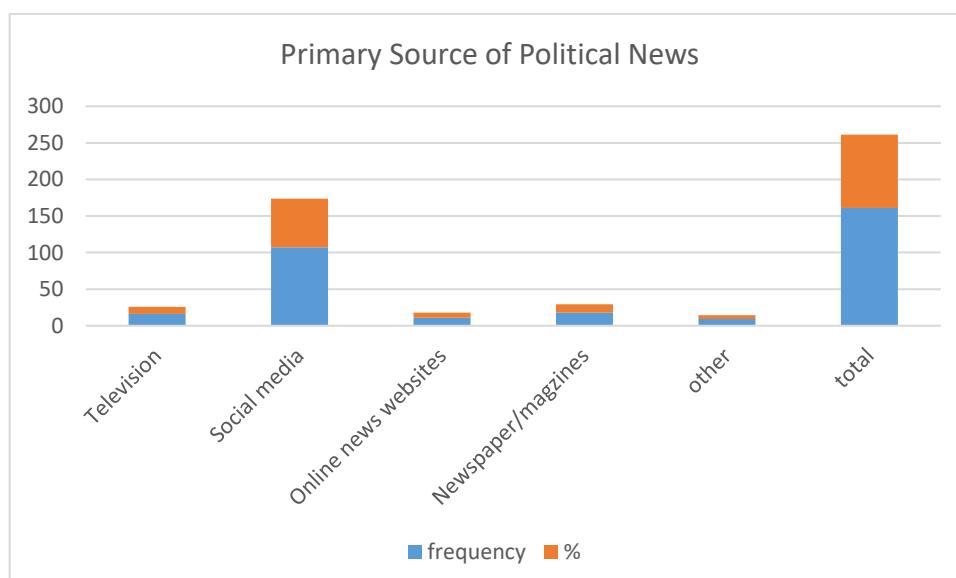


Table 4.5 shows that social media is the primary source of political news for most respondents, accounting for 66.5%. Traditional media such as newspapers/magazines (11.2%) and television (9.9%) are used by a smaller proportion of respondents. Overall, the findings indicate a strong reliance on digital platforms for political news consumption.

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Table 4.: *Crosstab for the Frequency of Engagement with Political Content on Social Media Of Respondents*

respondent	daily	Several weeks a time	weekly	occasionally	Rarely
frequency	50	33	34	22	22
%	31.1	20.5	21.1	13.7	13.7

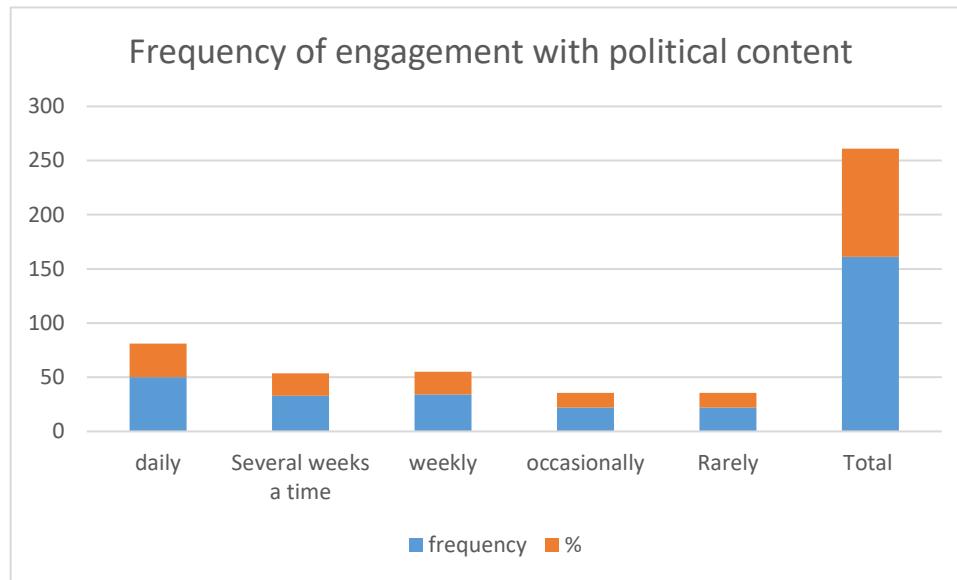


Table 4.6 indicates that a significant proportion of respondents engage with political content on social media daily (31.1%). Those who engage weekly (21.1%) or several times a week (20.5%) also form a considerable share of the sample. Overall, the results suggest that most respondents are regularly exposed to political content on social media.

Table 4.7: *I frequently follow political content shared by my preferred political party on social media*

respondent	Strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	Strongly agree	Total
frequency	19	30	64	38	10	161
%	11.8	18.6	39.8	23.6	6.2	100.0

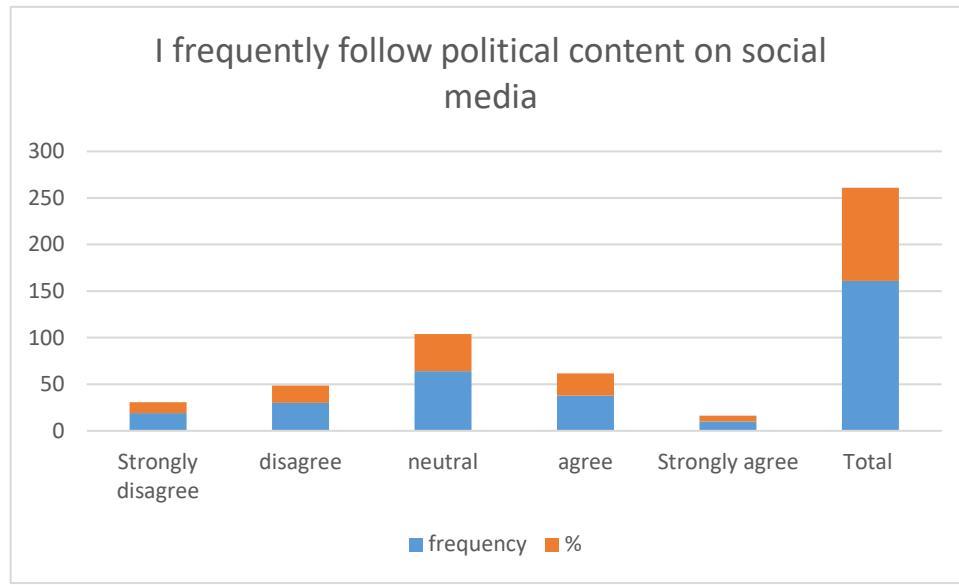


Table 4.7 shows that a large proportion of respondents hold a neutral view (39.8%) toward frequently following political content shared by their preferred political party on social media. Those who agree or strongly agree together account for 29.8%, indicating moderate engagement with party-specific content. In contrast, 30.4% of respondents disagree or strongly disagree, suggesting mixed levels of partisan following.

Table 4.8: Political content from my preferred party shapes my opinions about other parties or politicians

respondent	Strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	Strongly agree	Total
frequency	12	33	58	48	10	161
%	7.5	20.5	36.0	29.8	6.2	100.0

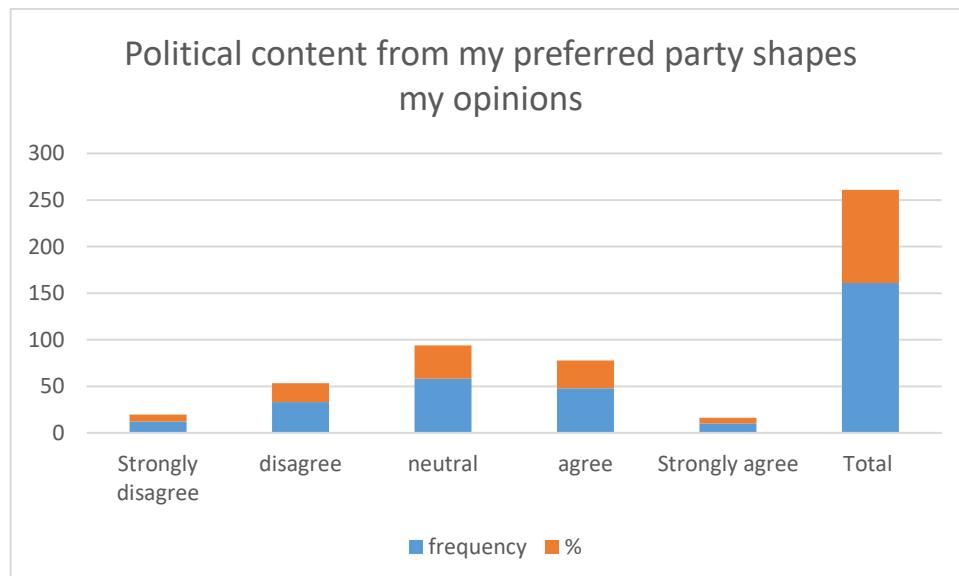


Table 4.8 indicates that most respondents are either neutral (36.0%) or agree (29.8%) that political content from their preferred party shapes their opinions about other parties or politicians. A smaller proportion strongly agree (6.2%), suggesting some influence of party



content on political perceptions. However, 28.0% of respondents disagree or strongly disagree, indicating varied levels of influence.

Table 4.9: Exposure to information from opposing political groups increases my skepticism about their claims

Respondent	Strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	Strongly agree	Total
Frequency %	14 8.7	27 16.8	63 39.1	44 27.3	13 8.1	161 100.0

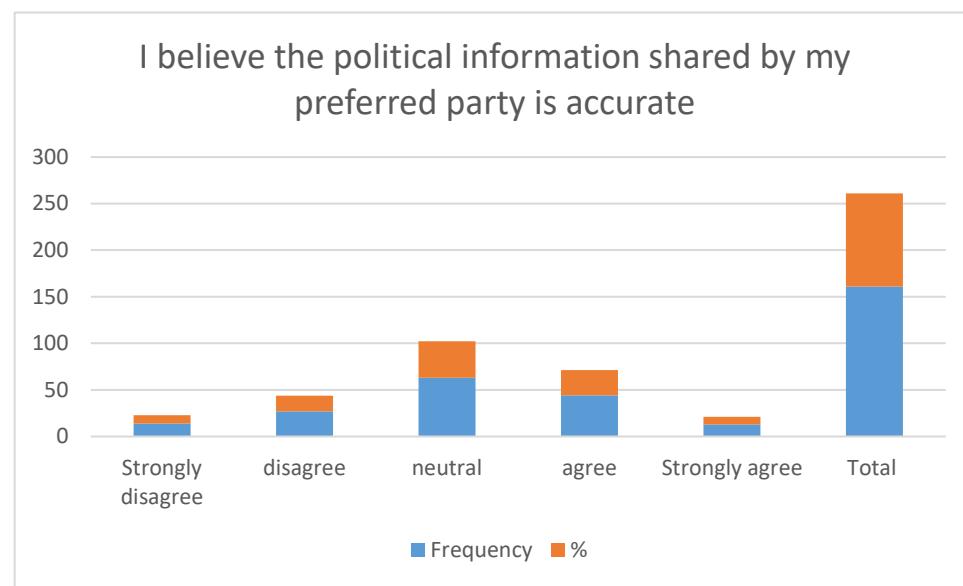


Table 4.9 indicates that most respondents are either neutral (36.0%) or agree (29.8%) that political content from their preferred party shapes their opinions about other parties or politicians. A smaller proportion strongly agree (6.2%), suggesting some influence of party content on political perceptions. However, 28.0% of respondents disagree or strongly disagree, indicating varied levels of influence.

Table 4.10: Exposure to political news from my preferred party increases my confidence in my political beliefs

Respondent	Strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	Strongly agree	Total
Frequency %	18 11.2	18 11.2	59 36.6	51 31.7	15 9.3	161 100.0

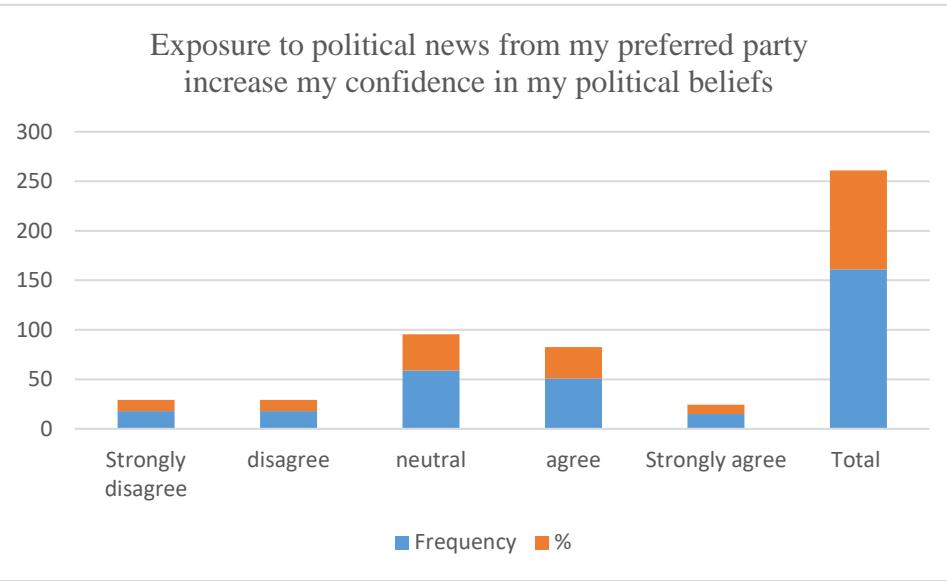


Table 4.10 shows that the largest proportion of respondents remain neutral (36.6%) regarding whether exposure to political news from their preferred party increases confidence in their political beliefs. Those who agree or strongly agree together account for 41.0%, indicating a noticeable positive effect. In contrast, 22.4% of respondents disagree or strongly disagree, suggesting differing levels of influence.

Table 4.10: Political content from opposing parties often appears misleading or biased to me

Respondent	Strongly disagree	Disagree	neutral	agree	Strongly agree	Total
Frequency	13	22	63	48	15	161
%	11.2	11.2	36.6	31.7	9.3	100.0

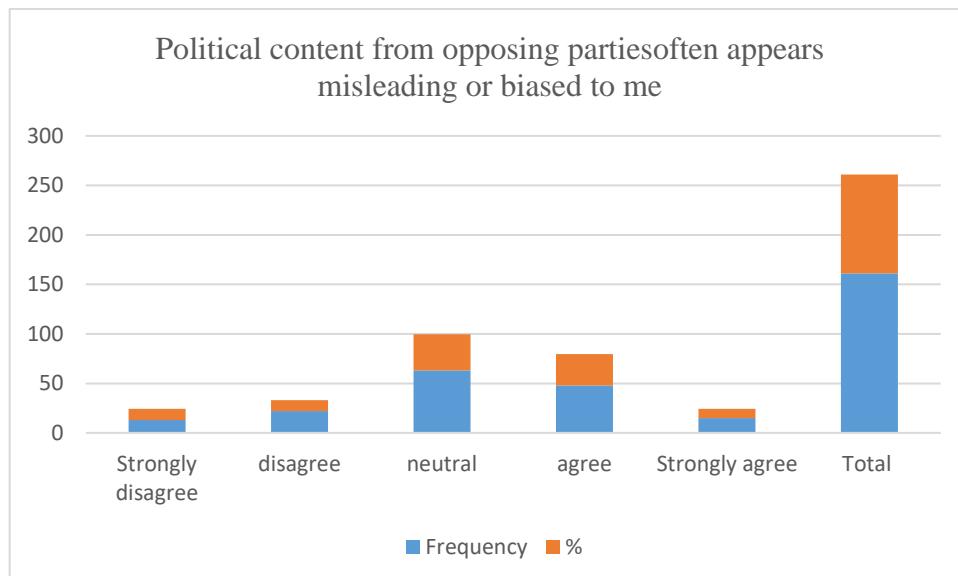


Table 4.10 indicates that a large proportion of respondents are neutral (36.6%) about whether political content from opposing parties appears misleading or biased. Those who agree or strongly agree together make up 41.0%, suggesting a considerable perception of



bias in opposing party content. Meanwhile, 22.4% of respondents disagree or strongly disagree, reflecting mixed opinions on this issue.

Table 4.11: Exposure to information from opposing political groups increase my skepticism about their claims

Respondent	Strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	Strongly agree	Total
Frequency	21	18	63	47	12	161
%	13.0	11.2	39.1	29.2	7.5	100.0

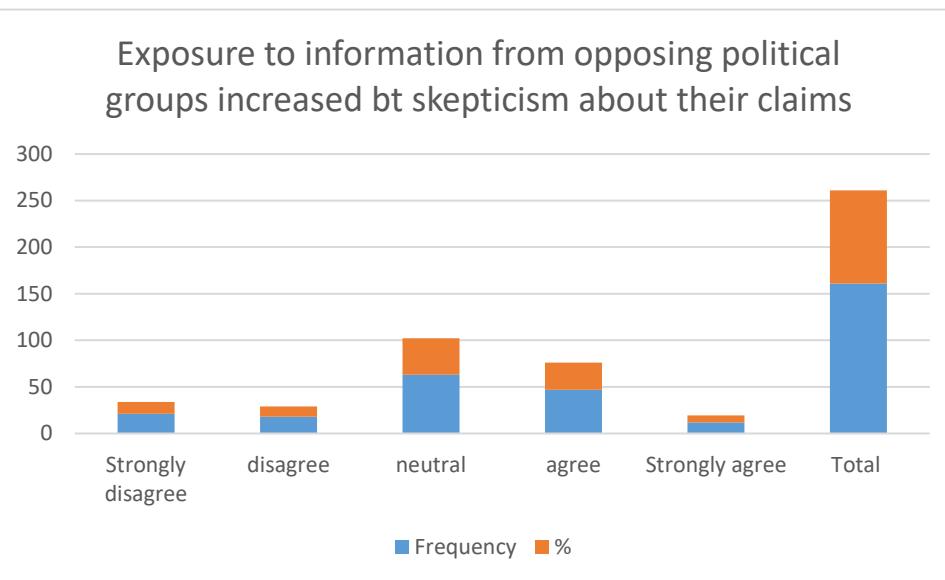


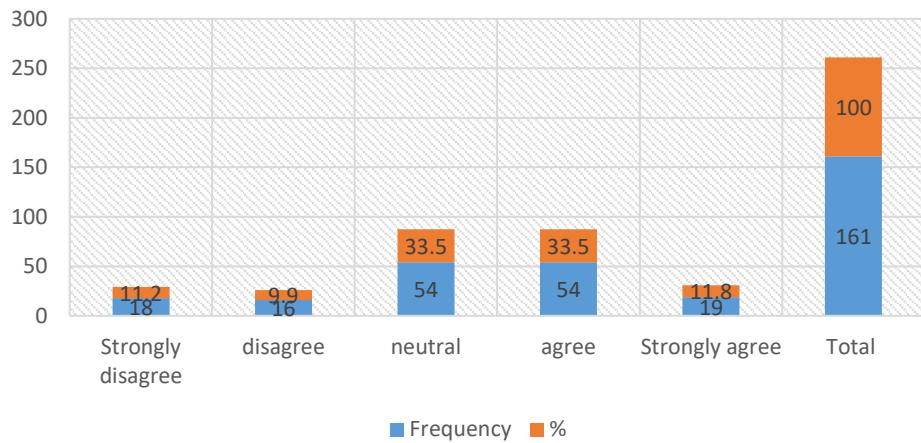
Table 4.12 shows that most respondents are neutral (39.1%) about whether exposure to information from opposing political groups increases their skepticism. Those who agree or strongly agree account for 36.7%, indicating that a significant portion become more skeptical. Meanwhile, 24.2% of respondents disagree or strongly disagree, showing varied reactions to opposing political information.

Table 4.12: Emotional or cultural factors influence how I interpret political information on social media

Respondent	Strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	Strongly agree	Total
Frequency	18	16	54	54	19	161
%	11.2	9.9	33.5	33.5	11.8	100.0



Emotional or cultural factors influence how I interpret political information on social media



The table indicates that an equal proportion of respondents agree (33.5%) or remain neutral (33.5%) that emotional or cultural factors influence how they interpret political information on social media. Those who strongly agree account for 11.8%, showing some acknowledgment of these influences. Meanwhile, 21.1% of respondents disagree or strongly disagree, suggesting varied impact of emotional and cultural factors.

Table 4.13: Social media posts from opposing parties make political discussions more divisive

Respondent	Strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	Strongly agree	Total
Frequency	12	14	54	67	14	161
%	7.5	8.7	33.5	41.6	8.7	100.0

Social media posts from opposing parties make political discussions more divisive

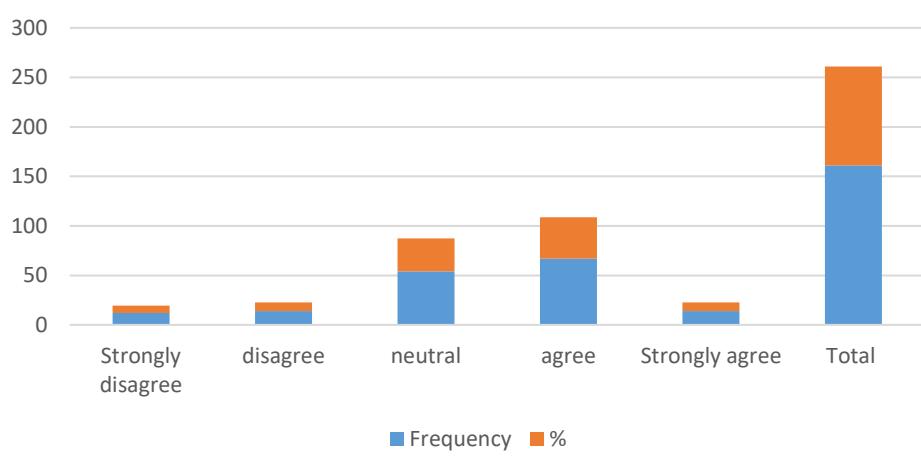


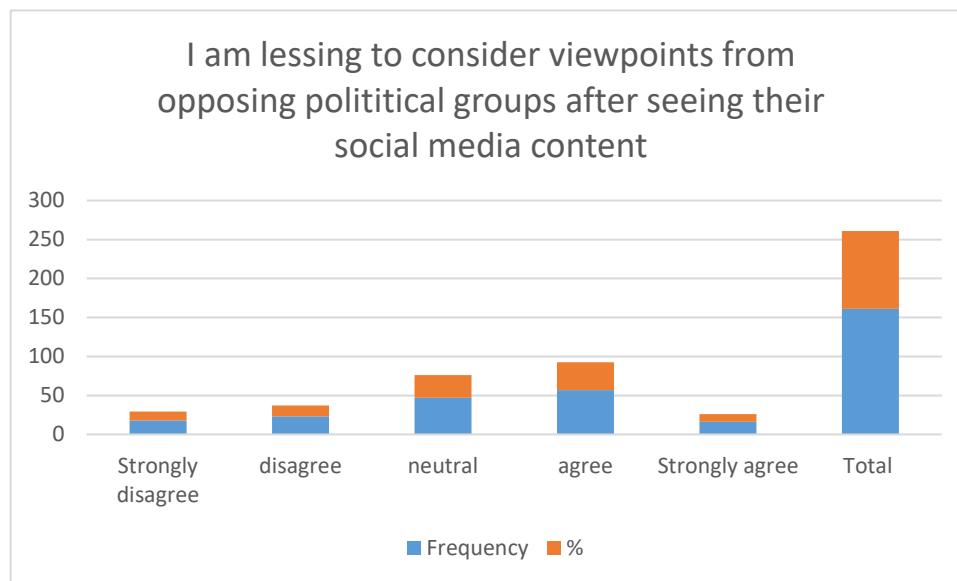
Table 4.13 shows that the largest proportion of respondents agree (41.6%) that social media posts from opposing parties make political discussions more divisive. A third of respondents remain neutral (33.5%), while 16.2% disagree or strongly disagree, indicating



some variation in perceptions. Overall, the results suggest that many respondents perceive social media as contributing to political polarization.

Table 4.14: I am less willing to consider viewpoints from opposing political groups after seeing their social media content

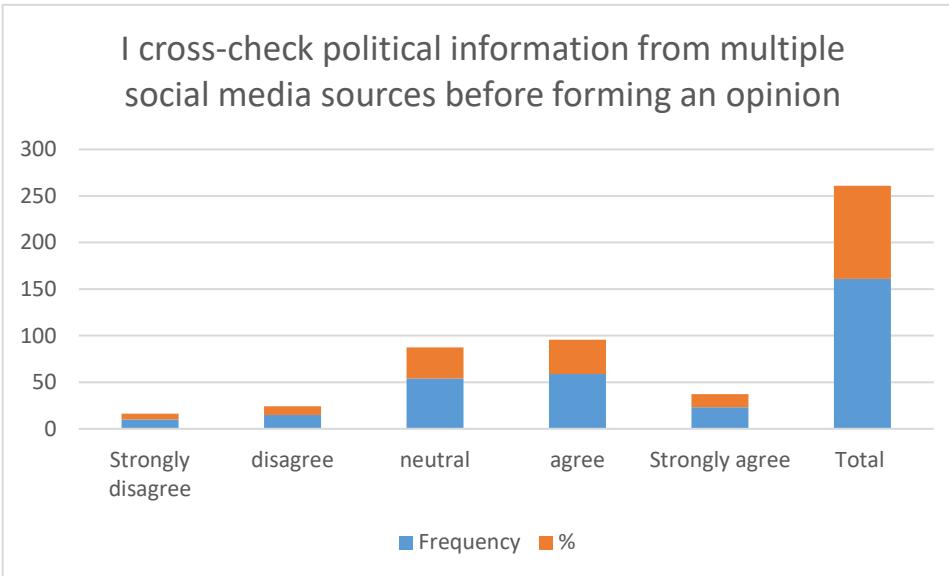
Respondent	Strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	Strongly agree	Total
Frequency	18	23	47	57	16	161
%	11.2	14.3	29.2	35.4	9.9	100.0



The table shows that a significant portion of respondents agree (35.4%) that they are less willing to consider viewpoints from opposing political groups after seeing their social media content. Nearly 29.2% remain neutral, while 25.5% disagree or strongly disagree, indicating some resistance to this effect. Overall, social media content from opposing parties appears to reduce openness to alternative political perspectives for many respondents.

Table 4.15: I cross-check political information from multiple social media sources before forming an opinion

Respondent	Strongly disagree	disagree	Neutral	agree	Strongly agree	Total
Frequency	10	15	54	59	23	161
%	6.2	9.3	33.5	36.6	14.3	100.0



The table shows that most respondents either agree (36.0%) or strongly agree (14.3%) that they cross-check political information from multiple social media sources before forming an opinion. About a third (33.5%) remain neutral, while 15.5% disagree or strongly disagree. Overall, the findings suggest a majority of respondents engage in verification of political content on social media.

Table 4.16: Comparing political news from multiple sources helps me from a more balanced understanding

Respondent	Strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	Strongly agree	Total
Frequency	11	13	56	58	23	161
%	6.8	8.1	34.8	36.0	14.3	100.0

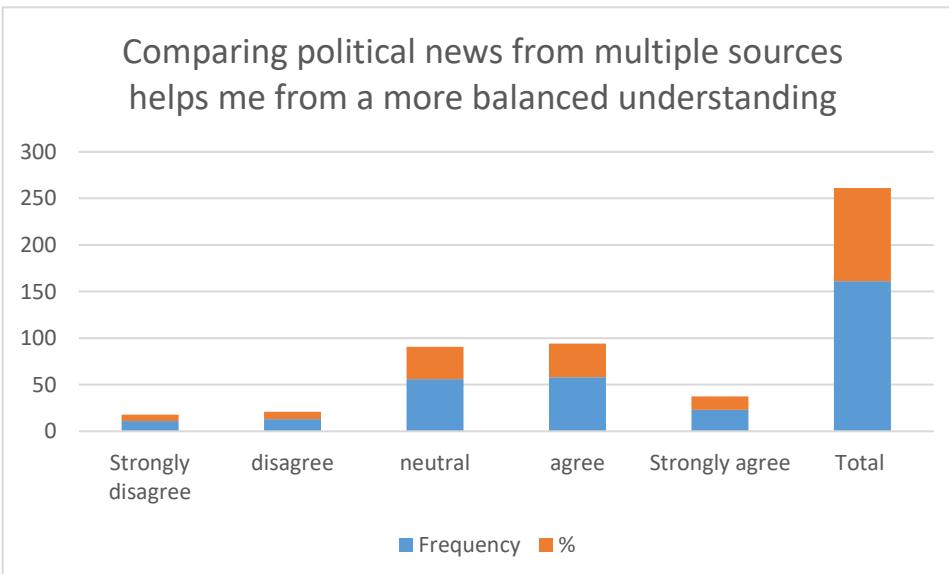


Table 4.15 indicates that most respondents agree (36.0%) or strongly agree (14.3%) that comparing political news from multiple sources helps them gain a more balanced understanding. About 34.8% remain neutral, while 14.9% disagree or strongly disagree.



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Overall, the results suggest that cross-referencing multiple sources is perceived as valuable for balanced political insight.

Table 4.16: Exposure to political content from various media outlets reduce my tendency to strongly favor one party

Respondent	Strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
Frequency %	18 11.2	16 9.9	54 33.5	54 33.5	19 11.8	161 100.0

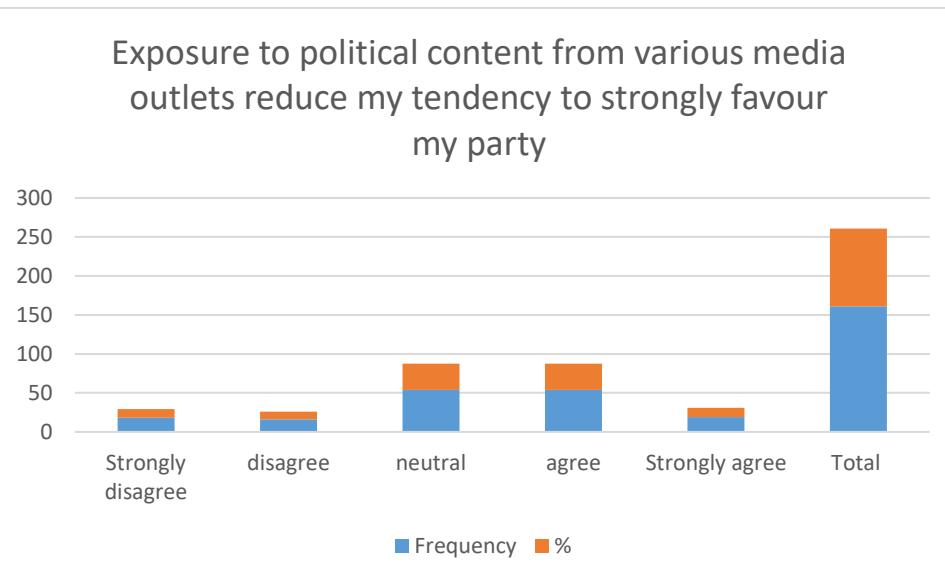


Table 4.16 shows that an equal proportion of respondents are neutral (33.5%) or agree (33.5%) that exposure to political content from various media outlets reduces their tendency to strongly favor one party. Those who strongly agree account for 11.8%, while 21.1% disagree or strongly disagree. Overall, the results suggest that diverse media exposure can moderate partisan bias for many respondents.

Table 4.17: Crosstab of frequency of Socioeconomic factors influence my trust in political views

Respondent	Strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	Strongly agree	Total
Frequency %	10 6.2	15 9.3	58 36.0	60 37.3	18 11.2	161 100.0



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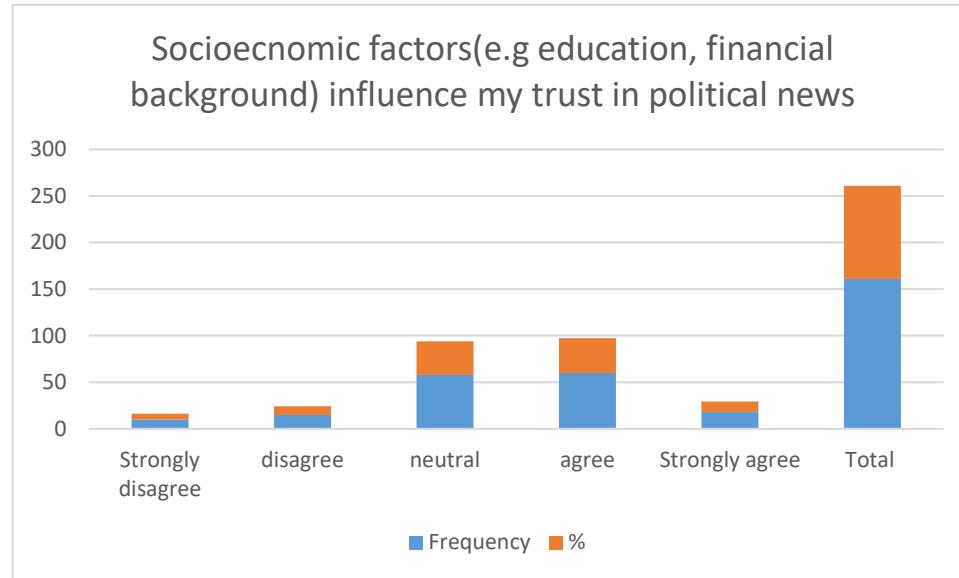


Table 4.17 indicates that most respondents agree (37.3%) or strongly agree (11.2%) that socioeconomic factors, such as education and financial background, influence their trust in political views. About 36.0% remain neutral, while 15.5% disagree or strongly disagree. Overall, the findings suggest that socioeconomic factors play a notable role in shaping political trust for many respondents.

Table 4.18: I can critically evaluate misinformation and distinguish it from accurate political news

Respondent	Strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	Strongly agree	Total
Frequency	8	14	56	68	15	161
%	5.0	8.7	34.8	42.2	9.3	100.0

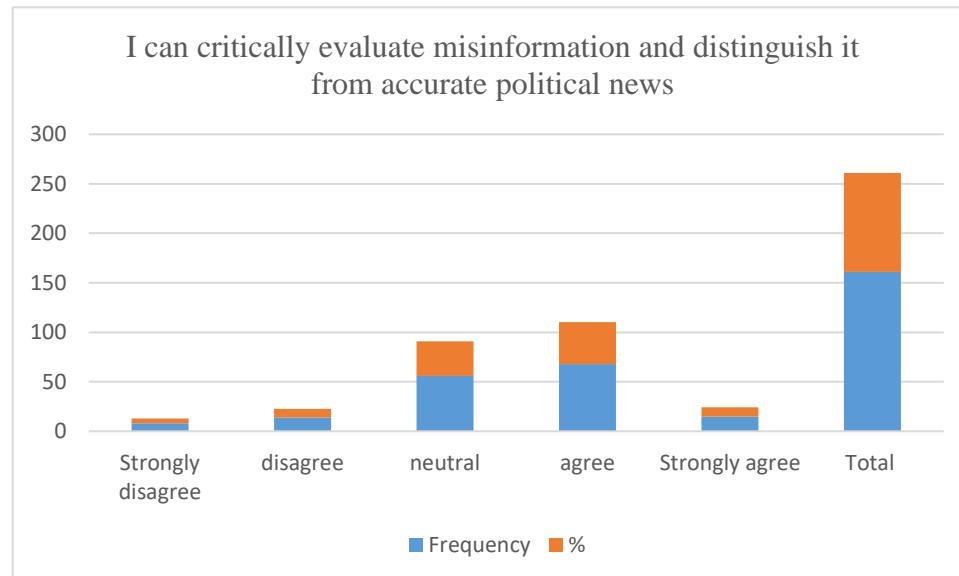


Table 4.18 shows that most respondents agree (42.2%) or strongly agree (9.3%) that they can critically evaluate misinformation and distinguish it from accurate political news. About 34.8% remain neutral, while 13.7% disagree or strongly disagree. Overall, the



findings suggest that a majority of respondents feel confident in assessing the accuracy of political information.

Table 4.19: Overall, exposure to diverse media sources mitigates the polarization of my political views

Respondent	Strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	Strongly agree	Total
Frequency	16	20	58	53	14	161
%	9.9	12.4	36.0	32.9	8.7	100.0

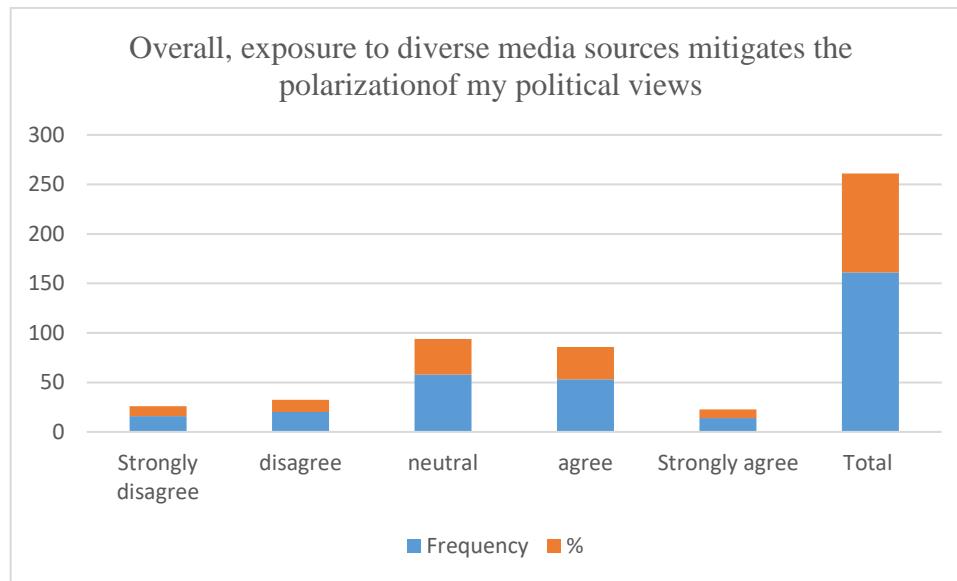


Table 4.19 shows that a substantial portion of respondents remain neutral (36.0%) regarding whether exposure to diverse media sources mitigates the polarization of their political views. Those who agree (32.9%) or strongly agree (8.7%) together account for 41.6%, suggesting that many perceive a moderating effect of diverse media. Meanwhile, 22.3% of respondents disagree or strongly disagree, indicating some skepticism about this influence. Overall, the findings imply that while diverse media can reduce polarization for some, opinions are mixed.

4.2 Regression Results

Table 4.20: Regression Analysis on Effect of Misinformation Exposure on Political Opinions

Variable	B	std. Error	beta (β)	t-value	sig. (p)
Constant	1.12	0.21	—	.33	0.000
Misinformation Exposure	0.41	0.06	0.38	.83	0.000

$R^2 = 0.14$, $F = 46.6$, $p < 0.001$

Table 4.20 indicates that misinformation exposure significantly predicts political opinions ($B = 0.41$, $\beta = 0.38$, $t = .83$, $p < 0.001$), explaining 14% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.14$). This means that higher exposure to misinformation on social media strengthens individuals' alignment with their preferred political party. H1 is accepted.



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Table 4.21: Regression Analysis on Effect of Biased Political Content on Political Polarization

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t-value	Sig. (p)
Constant	.98	0.24	—	4.08	0.000
Biased Political Content	.47	0.07	0.42	6.71	0.000

$R^2 = 0.18$, $F = 45.0$, $p < 0.001$

Table 4.21 shows that biased political content significantly increases political polarization ($B = 0.47$, $\beta = 0.42$, $t = 6.71$, $p < 0.001$), explaining 18% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.18$). Individuals exposed to misleading content from opposing parties become more ideologically rigid and less open to alternative viewpoints. H_2 is accepted.

Table 4.22: Regression Analysis on Moderating Role of Socioeconomic, Cultural & Emotional Factors

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t-value	Sig. (p)
Constant	0.87	0.22	—	3.95	0.000
Misinformation Exposure	0.33	0.06	0.31	5.50	0.000
Socioeconomic, Cultural & Emotional Factors	0.29	0.08	0.29	3.62	0.001

$R^2 = 0.26$, $F = 31.4$, $p < 0.001$

Table 4.22 analysis indicates that socioeconomic, cultural, and emotional factors significantly moderate the relationship between misinformation exposure and polarization (Misinformation: $B = 0.33$, $\beta = 0.31$, $t = 5.50$, $p < 0.001$; Moderators: $B = 0.29$, $\beta = 0.29$, $t = 3.62$, $p = 0.001$). The combined model explains 26% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.26$), showing that individuals' background and emotional context amplify susceptibility to biased political narratives. H_3 is accepted.

Table 4.23: Hypotheses Summary

Hypothesis	Statement	Statistical Result	Decision
H_1	Exposure to misinformation on social media significantly influences political opinions	$\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$	Accepted
H_2	Exposure to biased political content significantly increases political polarization	$\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$	Accepted
H_3	Socioeconomic, cultural, and emotional factors moderate the relationship between misinformation exposure and political polarization	$\beta = 0.29$, $p = 0.001$	Accepted

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This study concludes that social media plays a decisive role in creating digital echo chambers that intensify political polarization through the widespread circulation of misinformation and biased political content. The findings demonstrate that exposure to partisan and misleading information significantly influences political opinions and reinforces ideological divisions among young users. Moreover, the study highlights that political polarization is not solely driven by media exposure but is also shaped by



individuals' socioeconomic conditions, cultural backgrounds, and emotional affiliations. These factors strengthen selective exposure and limit engagement with opposing perspectives. In the context of Pakistan's evolving digital media landscape, the study underscores the urgent need for media literacy initiatives, critical news consumption practices, and responsible platform governance to mitigate the polarizing effects of misinformation. By addressing digital echo chambers, policymakers, educators, and media practitioners can promote healthier political discourse and democratic engagement in society.

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