

Communication and Cognitive Factors in Shaping Women's Political Efficacy in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Political efficacy plays a critical role in shaping individuals' political engagement and serves as a key indicator for civic participation and democratic performance. In developing countries such as Pakistan, women often encounter societal and institutional obstacles to political engagement. This study explores how communication and cognitive factors enhance women's political efficacy by addressing the gender gap in political engagement. It examines the impact of interpersonal communication, political interest, and political knowledge on both internal and external political efficacy among Pakistani women. Adopting a quantitative approach, data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire, distributed to female employees of women's organizations in Karachi, Pakistan. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was used to test the hypotheses. The results showed that interpersonal communication, political interest and political knowledge increase women's political efficacy. This study contributes to the existing literature on gender-based political behaviour by identifying factors that strengthen women's political efficacy and empowerment within political spheres in Pakistan. The paper also discusses the limitations and offers suggestions for future research.

Keywords: Interpersonal Communication, Political Interest, Political Knowledge, Political Efficacy, Social Cognitive Theory, Political Cognition, Pakistani Women

INTRODUCTION

In a democratic society, political efficacy (PE) is considered one of the most significant indicators of political attitude (Almond & Verba, 1963). McDonnell (2020) suggests that psychological factors, such as PE, not only encourage political participation (PP), but also serve as a prerequisite for sustained engagement in political affairs. Weiss (2020) further argues that a higher sense of PE can lead to greater PP. Individuals who understand the political system well and believe their actions can influence it are more likely to participate actively in political affairs (Bandura, 2002; Geurkink et al., 2020). Therefore, it plays a crucial role in shaping political attitude as it measures how much a population believes that participating in politics can influence the direction of government (Longley, 2021). Being positive predictor of political engagement, trust and satisfaction (Ardèvol-Abreu et al., 2020), it also influences PP because trust in political systems and politician's increases PP among citizens (Amin & Ritonga, 2022). Further, citizens are more likely to vote for politicians or parties they believe can address their concerns or represent their interests that, in turn, strengthens their PP (McDonnell, 2020).

Contrary to Zaslove et al. (2021) argument that inclusive PP by all citizens is essential for a society to function effectively, women still do not have the freedom to participate in political matters freely around the globe, especially in underdeveloped countries (Das, 2022). United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (2021) revealed lower

participation of women than men in political sphere around the globe. Giné and Mansuri (2018) conducted a study on the voting behaviour of women in Pakistan and found that women participate less than men because of a lack of political knowledge (PK), efficacy, controlled mobility, and patriarchal norms. Similar results were found in India (Sharma, 2020), Bangladesh (Paul et al., 2019), Malaysia (Okpe et al., 2021) and African countries (Mlambo & Kapingura, 2019). These studies highlighted the factors such as lower literacy rates, gendered socialisation, traditional norms and economic dependence on men, all of which discourage women from engaging in political discussions – often deemed a male domain (Kostelka et al., 2019).

Building on this, Liu (2020) measured internal and external PE to examine the gender gap in PP across 13 Asian countries and found improved voting turnout of women in the electoral process, except Malaysia. However, persistent gender disparities in broader political affairs remain intact, largely due to constraints such as limited PK, PE, and trust in government. The study further affirmed that while internal and external PE can influence collective action and mobility, they have minor effect on participation in the electoral process. Literature suggested (see for example, Stauffer, 2021; McDonnell, 2020), the long-standing socialisation process tend to distance women from political affairs, reducing both their sense of PE and political interest (PI). Since PI primarily contributes in shaping participation in political affairs, women who lack trust in political institution and doubt that their actions can influence governmental policies are less likely to engage in political activities (Halim et al., 2025; Kitanova, 2020).

However, in terms of women's political engagement in Pakistan, previous studies have mostly associate it with various sociocultural and socioeconomic factors that contribute to either limited or active involvement in political matters (Awan, 2023; Begum, 2023; Sharif & Hina, 2018). This is largely due to prevailing cultural norms that depict women as politically less competent and morally dependent, which simultaneously weakens their sense of PE and weakens their partisanship, confining them to a less active political role. On the contrary, women who have a strong sense of self-efficacy and greater self-confident can handle challenges and are more politically engaged and interested. Studies (e.g., Le & Nguyen, 2021; Hyde & Mezulis, 2020) affirmed that other factors such as cognition and communication can potentially enhance women's political engagement including PE. Wolak (2020) argued that using various communication channels, PE has also been shown contributing in enhancing PK of individuals. For instance, individuals who possess higher levels of efficacy show an interest in gaining PK through social media (Bhatti & Tareen, 2021) and peer groups (Memon, 2018), which guides their political decisions (Prillaman, 2023). Well-informed individuals actively participate in politics, which strengthens democracy (Ullah et al., 2024). Moreover, efficacy significantly motivates individuals to discuss and share political views within their social circles, particularly via digital media and online platforms, which further encourages participation in national political affairs (Holum, 2022). This is yet to be proven for females in the context of Pakistan.

Thus, this study focused on how communication factors such as interpersonal communication (IC) and cognitive factors such as PI and PK affect PE levels among women in Pakistan. As this study focused on a cohort traditionally underrepresented in the political sphere, the findings may provide valuable insights into enhancing women's political participation, thereby contributing to the strengthening of democratic processes and advancement of gender equality in the political domain. By examining communication and cognitive elements together, this study has the potential to bridge the gap across these previously unexplored dynamics in the context of Pakistan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Political Efficacy (PE)

McDonnell (2020) refers to efficacy as a sense of self-importance and the belief that an individual can influence and bring about change in political matters. PE is conceptualised as the conviction that one can influence political and social issues on a personal level (Bandura, 1997; Kim, 2021; York et al., 2020). This sense of efficacy reinforces a belief in one's worthiness to create change. Such confidence enhance interest, knowledge-hunting, and participation in politics plays a significant role in societal development (Dan & Arendt, 2021). Contrarily, Citizens who lack confidence to engage with the political system are less likely to participate and tend to become civically disengaged (Karv et al., 2022).

PE lies in the cognition domain, which is responsible for influencing and changing an individual's contribution to political engagement (Ardèvol-Abreu et al., 2021; Ardèvol-Abreu et al., 2020). It is further discussed in terms of two dimensions: external political efficacy (EPE) and internal political efficacy (IPE). The former demonstrates that an individual can influence and bring change in political system by participating in different forms of political activities (Fierro et al., 2023) and, the latter is an individual's self-assessment of an individual on their own ability to understand and partake in political affairs (McDonnell, 2020; Stauffer, 2021). EPE may be a more significant predictor of political involvement than IPE because EPE shapes political opinions that consequently influence PP, whereas IPE is more likely to affect self-esteem and self-efficacy, which might not translate into political

involvement (Bene, 2020). In other words, people with greater feelings of self-confidence have high likelihood to be interested in political affairs (Wolak, 2020).

Empirical evidence suggests that politically empowered women demonstrate a greater propensity to engage in civic activities and advocate for equitable representation (Kumar et al., 2019). The development of women's PE is facilitated through various means including educational opportunities, media exposure and IC (Heger & Hoffmann, 2021). It has been affirmed that women show efficacy towards any party or politician when they notice that they are concerned about solving their problems (Goyal, 2024; Kim, 2019). When women believe that a politician or political party could help them solve their problems, they consider them trustworthy of their vote (Boulianne, 2019). Therefore, PE constitutes a critical determinant of civic engagement, and its cultivation among women is imperative for enhancing their participation and representation in the political domain. Consequently, this contributes to a more comprehensive and equitable democratic process that accurately reflects the heterogeneity of society.

Interpersonal Communication (IC) and Political Efficacy (PE)

IC includes online or in person political discussions with family, peers, social circles, and co-workers (Hollenbaugh et al., 2020; Matthes et al., 2019) that is essential for political engagement. As Andersson (2020) explained, from childhood through the socialisation process, individuals build their levels of efficacy and find out about political systems and decision-making procedures with the coordination of IC. This political awareness occurs because of the development of self-efficacy, use of a variety of information sources, blending of more conventional and modern communication technologies via interpersonal and mass media channels (Memon, 2018). In this context, it has been suggested that despite being mediated by PE, information seeking, and sharing, childhood IC patterns continue to influence adult civic and political behaviour (Graham et al., 2020). Similarly, Weinberg (2024) observed that early age socialisation that comes from family and relatives has a comparatively long-standing effect on an individual's political beliefs. Likewise, the construction of political beliefs and thoughts begins at early age communication and media usage.

As Matteson (2020) highlights, political discussions and communication that one has with his/her family mobilise his/her political engagement among people. IC within the family, peer groups, neighbourhood, and later on social media has a considerable impact on individuals' IPE. Furthermore, with the rapid growth of social networking sites, IC has been divided into face-to-face and online discussions. The more people communicate freely and openly about political matters, the more they develop PE (Intyaswati et al., 2023). Since childhood, the development of women's IPE has been significantly influenced by family communication patterns and social interactions. Both traditional in-person discussions and online engagements provide women with exposure to political information and diverse perspectives, strengthening their self-efficacy and awareness (Bos et al., 2022). In Pakistan, where sociocultural constraints often impede women's PP, it is assumed that IC through household conversations, peer groups, or social media, functions as a vital conduit that, enables women to confidently navigate political spheres. Hence, we hypothesise the following:

H1a: There is a relationship between interpersonal communication and internal political efficacy among women in Pakistan.

H1b: There is a relationship between interpersonal communication and external political efficacy among women in Pakistan.

Political Interest (PI) and Political Efficacy (PE)

PI is one of the most influential predictors of political behaviour. People who are more involved in political affairs such as casting votes and attending rallies are more likely to participate in political activities. Moreover, findings from a study conducted by Maurissen (2020) on Belgian adolescents revealed that PE and PI are significant factors that stimulate political engagement among youth. Further, Liu (2020) claimed that of all factors involving political behaviour, PI is the most consistent factor that leads to higher levels of PE.

Citizens who are more interested in knowing about their political affairs will develop a better sense of understanding and efficacy of the system. This results in active engagement among citizens, specifically among women. Wolak (2020) stated that people with less PI will have lower levels of PE, which certainly affects their political engagement. As women are always perceived as custodians of the domestic sphere, they are restricted from partaking in political matters, which eventually decreases their PI. This consequently affects their level of PE which is consistent with the sociopolitical and cultural context of Pakistan. In this country, gender norms confine women to the domestic sphere, thereby limiting access to educational opportunities, political engagement and civic participation (Cheema et al., 2019). The systematic exclusion has resulted in a reduced sense of PE among women, discouraging their active involvement in politics. Additionally, its culturally penetrated patriarchal mindset continues to enforce male dominance in decision-making even in political matters that restricts women's PP (Mufti & Jalalzai, 2021). Therefore, we hypothesise the following:

H2a: There is a relationship between political interest and internal political efficacy among women in Pakistan.

H2b: There is a relationship between political interests and external political efficacy among women in Pakistan.

Political Knowledge (PK) and Political Efficacy (PE)

PK is the range of factual information about politics stored in long-term memory that inspires people to participate in political affairs (Fern et al., 2019). It involves factual information that people gather using different modes of communication. Citizens who are more knowledgeable will participate actively and responsibly in their country's political affairs (Halim et al., 2021). As PK was treated as a meaningful facilitator of PE, it has been suggested that PK and PE are positively associated with each other (Hopp & Kazmi, 2023; Katznelson, 2020). Furthermore, scholars affirm that citizens obtain PK through news media which eventually improves their PE. The higher the level of PE, the more likely they will participate in political affairs (Geers et al., 2020). Kim et al. (2020) posit that citizens with higher PK confidently engage with politics. This knowledge helps them better understand the situation(s), and they have more opportunities to engage in different discussions. They further elaborated that PK guides people to make better political decisions with the help of their PE, together with the use of media and communication tools. The informational use of media helps people develop PK (Ida et al., 2020). which consequently improves the level of PP among citizens (Kim et al., 2020).

Similarly, in terms of women's political engagement, scholars have highlighted that PK is substantially related to PE and participation (Lilleker et al., 2023). PK increases the IPE among women, and with greater level of efficacy they can participate more actively in voting and other political activities (Goyal, 2024). In societies like Pakistan, where women encounter socio-cultural barriers to political engagement, enhancing political literacy can facilitate the mitigation of these obstacles (Khayyam, & Tahir, 2019). Familiarity with political rights, governmental structures, and policy formulation processes augments women's PE, empowering them to make informed decisions and critically evaluate the agendas of political parties, and candidates (Mufti & Jalalzai, 2021). In light of the previous literature, we proposed that the higher PK among women enhances PE as well, which cultivates agency and empowers them to contribute substantively to socio-political development. Hence, we hypothesise the following:

H3a: There is a relationship between political knowledge and internal political efficacy among women in Pakistan.

H3b: There is a relationship between political knowledge and external political efficacy among women in Pakistan.

Based on the discussion and proposed hypotheses, Figure 1 presents the research framework of the current study that highlights the factors responsible for enhancing PE among women in Pakistan. PE is treated as dependent variable which is further divided into two-dimension IPE and EPE. While the independent variables include IC, PI, and PK.

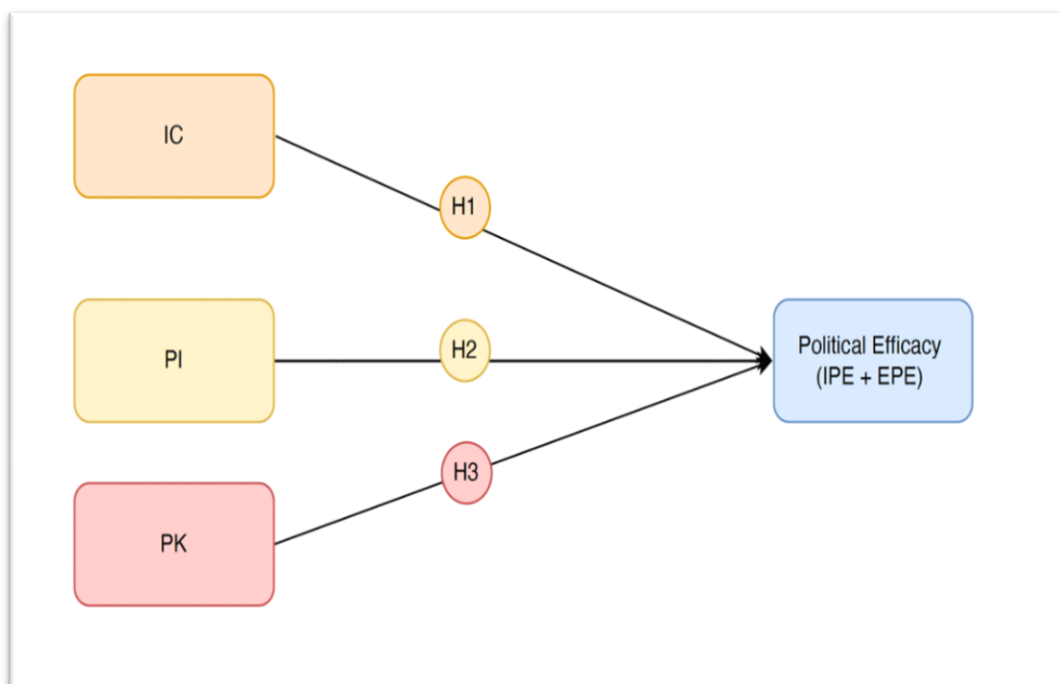


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Proposed Factors Responsible for Enhancing PE among Women in Pakistan.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) explains that individuals acquire beliefs about their capabilities through the mutual influence of personal, environmental, and behavioural elements (Bandura, 1992). PE representing an individual's perception of their ability to influence political processes, can be conceptualized as a learned behaviour shaped by communication and cognitive factors that interact to form this perception (Madsen, 1987). SCT emphasizes learning through observation and imitation, wherein individuals develop beliefs and behaviours through social interactions (Anqi & Yanqun, 2023). By engaging in political discussions, individuals exchange ideas, observe others' political understanding and receive feedback. These social exchanges can enhance confidence in comprehending and participating in political activities, thereby increasing PE (Boulianne & Ohme, 2022).

Similarly, PI corresponds to intrinsic motivation in SCT framework. Individuals with a high interest in politics actively seek information, engage in discussions, and observe politically competent others. Such engagement promotes self-reflection and self-efficacy through firsthand experiences (Karv et al., 2022). By participating in politically relevant environments, individuals develop great self-assurance in navigating political situations. Additionally, PK influence PE through perceived capabilities. SCT suggests that individuals feel more efficacious in domains where they possess extensive knowledge. By accessing and utilizing political information, individuals can better comprehend complex political systems and acquire tools to make informed decisions confidently (Lee et al., 2022). While SCT effectively explains the role of individual and social learning process in development of political efficacy, its relevance may be challenged in sociopolitical and cultural context that shape political engagement.

In Pakistan, women's PE is affected by various factors including lack of political literacy and restricted opportunities for women to acquire and replicate political behaviour. Cultural practices frequently confine women to domestic roles, diminishing their presence in political spheres (Naheed et al., 2021). Although SCT provides significant insights into individual-level factors influencing political behaviour, its applicability in enhancing women's PE, particularly in Pakistani contexts, encounters considerable limitations. SCT predominantly emphasises on personal and social learning processes, and thus tends to overlook the influence of structural barriers, such as patriarchal norms, economic dependence, and legal constraints, which significantly hinder women's ability to partake in and discuss political affairs (Zakar et al., 2018).

Despite possessing high self-efficacy, women may encounter barriers such as exclusion from male-dominated political networks; a structural limitation that are not sufficiently addressed by SCT. While SCT prioritises individual learning and behavioural modification, it often neglects the significance of collective action in political empowerment. Initiatives such as the "*Aurat March*" in Pakistan demonstrate how collective efforts can challenge entrenched social norms and advance women's rights, leading to broader societal transformations that individual actions alone may achieve. In summary, SCT offers a framework for understanding the interplay between IC, PI, and PK in shaping PE in western contexts. This study seeks to extend the application of SCT by examining its assumptions within the Pakistani sociopolitical environment.

METHOD

A quantitative research design was employed in this study because it is appropriate for studying the relationships between variables, along with the generalisation of results on a larger population (Creswell, 2013). It is a suitable methodology that can infer the study's outcomes to the target population. A self-administered questionnaire was utilised for data collection, as it allows respondents to answer confidentially and honestly. Prior to conducting analysis, a pilot study was conducted to check the reliability coefficients of the measurement scales utilised in this study.

Population and Sampling

The population of the study comprised of women who were employees of women organisations in Karachi, Pakistan. Thirty-seven women organisations in Karachi were selected. These organisations are working to empower women in different walks of life: economic, political, and socio-cultural spheres, promoting equal rights for women. They provide necessary assistance to women and other marginalised groups and demand accountability (UNICEF, 2020). Moreover, they promote women's independence economically, socially, and politically (Moletsane, 2018). As members of these women organisations are from the same socio-cultural background, they better understand the importance and significance of women participation politically. The sample size of 260 (from 780 total population) was determined by adopting Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table. To achieve a substantial response rate, considering the chance of errors while completing questionnaires, prior research suggests that the size of the population can be increased by adding at least 50% of the required sample (Hair et al., 2019; Salkind,

2010). Subsequently, following Hair et al.'s (2019) recommendation, 390 questionnaires were distributed among women staff members. After data cleaning, 352 questionnaires were accepted for further analysis.

In terms of sampling, the researchers adopted stratified random sampling technique to collect data. Firstly, strata were identified, following a random selection of subjects from each stratum (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The researchers selected organisations as strata since these units contain diverse sizes of populations. By applying proportional allocation, the participant numbers from each organization were determined. The sampling strategy produces a sample that coherently represents the complete diversity of the target population between 37 women organisations and respondents were selected utilising simple random sampling. Furthermore, a self-administrated questionnaire was conducted to collect empirical data from the female staff members of selected women organisations in Karachi. Data was collected between August and November 2023.

Instrumentations and Measurements

The questionnaire was divided into five sections with a total of 39 close-ended questions. Participants selected an appropriate answer from a five-point Likert scale that ranged from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). The items in the questionnaire were adapted from previous studies and modified to suit the current context. The study consists of three independent variables: IC, PI, and PK.

To measure IC, scale has been adopted by Min wo et al. (2014) which was initially used to measure the how media shapes IC among adolescent's civic and political participations. The reliability coefficient for this measure was 0.89. Respondents provided answers to eight listed questions such as "They often discuss about political matters with family, friends, and people outside of their family", "They often comment/post or share political news within their circle", and "They often utilise online messaging to share or gather political information" etc. To measure PI, the measurement scale from Halim et al. (2021) was adapted. The instrument was utilised to measure PI of youth in Malaysia; this is found suitable for the context of this study. The scale was constructed to assess the PI in youth of Malaysia, where a number of socio-political and cultural similarities exist with Pakistan. These two nations are emerging democracies in the Southeast and South Asia respectively and similar related factors play a role in the participation of individuals in politics that includes media influence, and IC by families. In addition, the scale focuses precisely on the general awareness, interest in the processes of politics, inclinations to participate, the constructs that should also be considered and applied to the situation in Pakistan. The scale has 10 items with a reliability coefficient of 0.93, including questions such as "My family and friends are interested in politics," "I am interested in politics," "I discuss political matters with other people," and "I do not have time to show interest in political matters." To measure PK, nine (9) items were adapted from Halim et al. (2021), with a coefficient value of 0.09. The instrument was previously used for measuring PK among youth in Malaysia. The section includes items such as "When the general election in their country is, they know about the prime minister and age for voting, they are aware about the current political scenario and political parties in their country" etc.

Lastly, to measure the levels of PE in this study, the measurement scale by Craig et al. (1990) was adopted. The reliability coefficient for this measure was 0.80. The variable is further divided into two dimensions, IPE and EPE, which included twelve (12) items such as "Respondents consider themselves well qualified to participate in politics, they have good understanding of political issues and government roles in a country, voting is the only way to have their say about governmental matters, politicians are only interested in people's votes, not in their opinions".

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This section presents the results of the analysis, including the demographic profile of respondents, measurement model, structural model, and evaluation of the proposed hypotheses.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic distribution showed that most of the respondents (41%) belonged to the 31-45 age group, followed closely by those aged 18-30 years (38%). The age cohort of 46-60 years has the lowest representation (20%). Most respondents (135, 38.4%) were bachelor's degree holders followed by those with intermediate (29%) and matriculation certification (9.1%). Interestingly, 21.8% women had master degree and, as expected, lowest percentage of women had doctoral degrees (1.7%).

The residential distribution showed that more than half of the participants (54.8%) were from the rural areas and 45.2% were living in urban areas of Karachi city. Marital status showed a similar trend, with 55.1% married and almost 45% unmarried women. A significant number of respondents (45.7%) were earning between 32,000-50,000 PKR per month, while only 7.7% were earning over 70,000 PKR per month. As expected, majority of the women were Muslims (84.9%) followed by Hindus (7.7%) and Christians (7.4%).

Measurement Model

The data was analysed using PLS-SEM, involving estimation of measurement and structural models. The measurement model assessed construct validity by checking Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted. Discriminant validity was also assessed to evaluate overall measurement fit. The structural model was employed to test the hypotheses. According to Adeyemi (2024), both measurement and structural models must be assessed. Assessing the measurement fit in the model is crucial (Henseler et al., 2009). The measurement model was used to assess correlations among all exogenous and endogenous latent constructs. Table 1 shows the results of the reliability and convergent validity of the constructs. Factor loadings greater than 0.70 indicate an acceptable level of internal consistency of indicators (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 1. Factor Loadings, Reliability & Convergent Validity

Constructs	Items	Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
EPE	EPE1	0.788	0.879	0.909	0.624
	EPE2	0.765			
	EPE3	0.784			
	EPE4	0.815			
	EPE5	0.790			
	EPE6	0.796			
IC	IC1	0.685	0.868	0.896	0.519
	IC2	0.768			
	IC3	0.731			
	IC4	0.731			
	IC5	0.718			
	IC6	0.715			
	IC7	0.728			
	IC8	0.685			
IPE	IPE1	0.818	0.892	0.917	0.649
	IPE2	0.800			
	IPE3	0.808			
	IPE4	0.804			
	IPE5	0.825			
	IPE6	0.779			
PI	PI1	0.699	0.899	0.917	0.525
	PI2	0.714			
	PI3	0.731			
	PI4	0.725			
	PI5	0.725			
	PI6	0.703			
	PI7	0.758			
	PI8	0.712			
	PI9	0.733			
	PI10	0.744			
PK	PK1	0.753	0.894	0.914	0.543
	PK2	0.712			
	PK3	0.709			
	PK4	0.736			
	PK5	0.740			
	PK6	0.741			
	PK7	0.784			

	PK8	0.712			
	PK9	0.739			

Table 1 shows that all values are in the acceptable range. Cronbach's alpha should be more than 0.70, and average extracted values (AVE) should be greater than 0.50 (Hair et al., 2019). The provided constructs meet the required internal consistency criteria. Another component of the measurement model is the assessment of discriminant validity, which can mainly be assessed by employing two approaches. These include the Fronell and Larcker Criteria and Hetro-trait and Mono-trait ratio. Hair et al. (2019) highlighted that discriminant validity is concerned with the degree to which latent constructs differ from each other. Table 2 shows the results of the Fornell and Larcker criteria, and Table 3 presents the results of the Hetro-trait and Mono-trait ratio.

Table 2: Fornell and Larcker Criteria (Discriminant Validity)

	EPE	IC	IPE	PI	PK
EPE	0.790				
IC	0.506	0.721			
IPE	0.661	0.515	0.806		
PI	0.506	0.414	0.506	0.725	
PK	0.487	0.440	0.501	0.411	0.737

Table 3: HTMT (Discriminant Validity)

	EPE	IC	IPE	PI	PK
EPE					
IC	0.574				
IPE	0.745	0.583			
PI	0.565	0.467	0.563		
PK	0.547	0.499	0.0.561	0.459	

The diagonal values in Table 2 exceeds the inter-construct correlations, indicting adequate discriminant validity among the constructs. According to Hair et al. (2016) inter-construct correlation values lower than 0.9 represents adequate discriminant validity. The results of the Table 3 meet this criterion, ensuring the discriminant validity among latent constructs.

Structural Model

The structural model was performed using PLS-SEM in order to test hypotheses and assessing fitness of model (see Figure 2). Moreover, the statistical significance was assessed using probability values. Table 4 summarized the results of the hypotheses testing, affirming that the data significantly supported all hypotheses because all t- values are greater than 1.96, and p-values are less than 0.05. The results indicates that all independent variables i.e., IC, PI and PK, positively effects the dependent variables i.e., IPE and EPE.

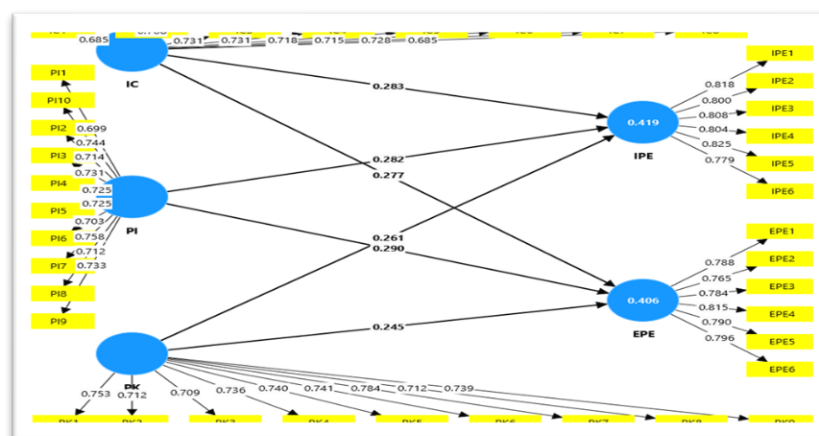


Figure 2: Measurement and Structural Model of Women PE

Table 4. Results of Direct Effects

Hypotheses	Path	Beta	Standard Deviation	T-Statistics	P-Values
H1a	IC → IPE	0.283	0.059	4.834	0.000
H1b	IC → EPE	0.277	0.061	4.522	0.000
H2a	PI → IPE	0.282	0.058	4.858	0.000
H2b	PI → EPE	0.290	0.060	4.805	0.000
H3a	PK → IPE	0.261	0.058	4.494	0.000
H3b	PK → EPE	0.245	0.058	4.213	0.000

Fitness Mode

The fitness model was assessed using the R-Square analysis. The value of R-Square shows how much variance has been explained by exogenous constructs in defining the impact on the endogenous variable. Table 5 displays the results of the R-Square and Adjusted R-Square analysis. The R-Square adjusted value for EPE is 0.401, indicating 40.1% of the variance is explained by exogenous variables for EPE. R-Square adjusted value for IPE is 0.414 which means that 41.4% variance is explained by exogenous constructs in IPE.

Table 5. R-Square Results

	R-Square	R-Square Adjusted
EPE	0.406	0.401
IPE	0.419	0.414

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings from this study reveal that an increase in IC, PK, and PI significantly influence both IPE and EPE among women in Pakistan. specifically, a better IC contributes to higher overall PE by ensuring deeper understanding of political system, polices and rights including great confidence. This aligns with the findings of Asrikah and Anom's (2023) who found that IC is an effective tool for increasing PE. The result is also consistent with Chen et al. (2021) who found that social interaction and IC facilitates engaged learning and political discourse – specifically in the contexts where women's PE is lower. Collectively, these findings show the prospective of interpersonal networks to empower women politically.

It was also found that higher PI leads to a significant increase in PE because politically interested women are highly likely to seek information about political candidates, parties and prevailing political issues. This finding is consistent with Wasike (2023) who affirmed that PI is linked to IC and PE. Women who take more interest in political affairs are motivated in partaking political matters. Consequently, the motivational component of PI, as emphasised by Fraile and Sánchez (2019), highlights its relevance in increasing PE and encouraging active participation among women. Such active involvement strengthens their belief in their ability to understand and influence political affairs.

The study, Furthermore, confirms a significant role of PK in shaping women's PE, as the acquired knowledge enables them to be well informed and politically active. This finding is aligned with Padilla et al. (2022) and Choi et al. (2020). These studies demonstrate that knowledge growth by both formal and informal processes empowers women to question conventional values and express their political choice, thus expanding their overall PE. The findings are also in line with Ali et al. (2023) who discovered that educated women are more likely to discuss their abilities that could potentially ensure systemic change.

Other than these findings, the study also presents significant theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, SCT offers a valuable framework for understanding how IC, PI, and PK enhance women's PE. However, its emphasis on individual learning and behavioural modelling limits its capacity to account for the broader societal and structural barriers that restrict women's engagement in politics. These contextual barriers can disrupt the expected relationships between knowledge, interest and efficacy, while IC may reinforce political engagement, patriarchal structures often restrict women's access to open political discourse. Similarly, although PI is essential, it may not lead to active engagement without institutional support. Likewise, PK can empower women intellectually, but its practical impact is constrained without legal and social reforms.

Practically, the findings underscore the importance of enhancing women's political literacy, communication skills, and critical thinking abilities. These competencies are essential for increasing PE and participation. Media organizations can play a vital role by improving the representation of women and producing informative content that enhance political engagement. Furthermore, both governmental and non-governmental organizations should

support women's active political engagement by effective-on-ground policies being align with sociopolitical and cultural context of the country. By enhancing cognitive abilities and utilising social media channels can further empower women, allowing them to participate actively in politics and make valuable contributions to the political environment.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

As this study has analysed the direct relationships between communication and cognitive factors in assessing levels of PE among women, it suggests that PE may also function as a significant mediator between these factors and women's PP. The main limitation of this study was the hesitance of women to openly discuss their political interests or sense of political efficacy, as political engagement is considered a sensitive subject in Pakistan. Additionally, the research was limited to the data collected from Karachi, both rural and urban areas of the city. As a result, the findings may not be generalizable to the broader population of women in Pakistan. These limitations underscore the challenges of investigating political attitudes within right-wing socio-political contexts. The findings provide a foundation for future researchers and policy makers to pursue multidisciplinary studies aimed at bridging the gaps between various elements that contribute to low political engagement of women, specifically in socio-political contexts like Pakistan. Furthermore, future research could explore the specific governmental or non-governmental initiatives that are particularly designed to increase PK and PI along with use of social media, thereby more nuanced insights into collective impact of these factors may be explored.

CONCLUSION

By integrating the empirical findings with theoretical insights from SCT, the research demonstrates that both communication and cognitive factors play a crucial role in enhancing women's PE. This study confirms that IC, PI, and PK are significant drivers of PE among women in Pakistan. This, in turn, is essential for fostering PP of women. The study clearly shows that improvement in IC, PI, and PK positively contributes to internal and external PE. As a woman develops stronger feelings and belief in their ability to influence political processes, their confidence in partaking in political matters increases. Such improved sense of PE results in active participation, including higher voting turnout, especially in the global south political context such as Pakistan where structural barriers to women's political engagement remain prominent.

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