

Universities as Agents of Healing the Societal Fissures: A Stakeholder Approach to the Good and Sustainable Governance in Higher Education Sector

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the role of social cohesion, media, higher education, empowerment, and interfaith harmony in good governance of the public universities in Pakistan. Primary data was collected from the public sector universities in Pakistan. Data analysis was conducted by using SPSS and Mplus 8 software. Results confirm that social cohesion, media, higher education, empowerment, and interfaith harmony have a significant influence on good governance in public universities in Pakistan. Data was collected from public sector universities in Pakistan. Hence, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to universities in other countries. The inclusion of civil society, social cohesion, media, higher education, empowerment, and interfaith harmony in university structures and functions can resolve issues in the higher education sector. This can be done through building awareness and monitoring university's activities and performance for good governance in higher education sector. The article extends stakeholder theory of corporate governance by inquiring important stakeholders such as civil society and cohesion, media, higher education, gender empowerment and interfaith harmony and their role in improving university governance. Policies can be revised in this context to maximize sustainability by achieving a harmonious balance among these factors. The study also highlights that key variables ensure good corporate governance as per stakeholder's approach in the context of higher education sector.

Keywords: Social cohesion, media, higher education, empowerment, interfaith harmony, sustainability, good governance in university.

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Introduction

Pakistan is a multi-cultural and pluralistic society, where major fraction of the population shares the similar socio-religious norms and values. Increased intolerance and violence after the incident of 9/11 has resulted in the feeling of insecurity and social segregation among the people, both at global and local level. This phenomenon has eroded the norms of social trust and reciprocity which are the indicators of social stability and peaceful co-existence among people with different religious, ethnic or sectarian identities in a modern society. According to Tawil and Harley (2004) such social divisions and conflicts among people are also increasing both at micro and macro levels. Governance, higher education, and media are the social arenas which can be key contributors in engendering positive ideals and practices among the people (Gartler & Wolfe, 2004). Scholars have studied the role of these institutions in promoting higher education, social cohesion and religious harmony among the societal members. Understanding and respecting people, their religion, beliefs and contributions of plurality in fostering harmony and peaceful coexistence in the society have also been studied by various scholars (Gutterman, 2023). The study underlies few constructs which need to be understood in order to map the entire scenario empirically and find the relationship between these concepts.

Rationale of the Study

In contemporary society, the fractures within communities and nations are increasingly apparent, exacerbated by various socio-economic, political, and cultural factors. These divisions manifest in polarized viewpoints, social unrest, and even conflict. Addressing these societal fissures is not merely a matter of policy reform or economic interventions; it requires a fundamental shift in how individuals perceive and interact with one another. Education emerges as a pivotal tool in fostering understanding, empathy, and tolerance among diverse groups, thereby potentially healing these deep-seated division

Theoretical Framework: Stakeholder theory

In 1970, the stakeholder theory was integrated into the field of management and was initially defined by Freeman (1984) as a means of understanding corporate accountability from a broader perspective. He argued that stakeholders in an organization are any groups or individuals who can influence or are influenced by the organization's objectives. Over the time, different authors have capitalized the concept and have offered varying views on the definition of stakeholders. For example, Alkhafaji (1989) defined stakeholders as only those individuals who have an interest in the survival of the organization.

Barry (2002) included all members of the society where the professional organizational services are rendered, as well as the workforce and the members of supply chain. Beauchamp and Bowie (2004) expanded the definition to include employees, vendors, the local community, and even society as a whole. McDonald and Puxty (1979) emphasized that companies have a responsibility not only to their shareholders, but also to the society in which they operate. Consequently, the stakeholder theory provides a more comprehensive explanation of the role of corporate and organizational governance, as it considers the various constituents of a firm, in contrast to the agency theory or stewardship theory. Therefore, stakeholders of a company include its employees, customers, suppliers, shareholders, prospective investors, creditors, governments, banks, and society at large (Gutterman, 2023).

The stakeholder theory posits that organizations are distinct entities that are interconnected with various parties in the pursuit of their objectives (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). Furthermore, it asserts that it is the responsibility of management to make informed decisions and exert their utmost efforts to achieve outcomes that satisfy all the stakeholders. Additionally, Wang and Dewhirst (1992) emphasized the importance of the governing entities in safeguarding the interests of stakeholders and not neglecting their duties in this regard. Likewise, Hillman, Keim and Luce (2001) stressed the significance of an effective quality audit in enhancing good governance practices, which ultimately benefits all stakeholders involved in the business. DeZoort et al. (2002) underscored the importance of stakeholders and argued that ensuring and protecting their interests is a fundamental objective of the organization which further promotes organizational sustainability, good governance, and policy administration (Gutterman, 2023). Dey (2008) further elaborated that good governance mechanisms have a positive relationship with an organization's performance and the welfare of stakeholders.

Literature Review

The first concept involved in the study is social cohesion. Cueller (2003) defines social cohesion as; social relationships and interactions in a society. The researcher explains that social cohesion is a result of democratic efforts towards instituting social equilibrium, economic vitality and equality by restraining un-channelized economic development and avoiding social ruptures. So, democratic endeavor is the operating force behind social cohesion that builds good and sustainable governance.

Social cohesion is the glue that connects the individuals at both micro and macro-societal levels. This alludes to the social networks which are characterized by mutual trust, norms of reciprocity, and participation into social, cultural and political affairs of a group. Jenson (1998) elaborated the typology of social cohesion with five dimensions, which are; affiliation (integration, sharing mutual values and sense of belongingness to

the same community), insertion (mutual sharing of job market), participation (in socio-cultural arenas and managing public matters), acceptance (religious freedom and pluralism), and legitimacy (upholding public-private institutions). Bernard (1999) extended the Jenson's typology by providing two dimensions. These include the sphere of human activities which encompass political, socio-cultural and economic dimensions. The second terrain pertains to social relations, which can be; formal in the form of friendship or collegueship, and can be substantial like relations with family or relatives. Hence, social cohesion also encompasses the relationship dimension. Therefore, social cohesion is social connectivity which strengthens values and builds trust among the members of society. Civil society also plays an important role in building social relationships in the context of Sustainable Development Goals. Social cohesion refers to the strength and distribution of social capital in a society (Heyneman, et. al, 2007), and the function of intense intercommunal linkages, integration of individuals and communities with market and state (Colletta & Cullen, 2000). This facilitates collective promotion of goals in their own right, if the participant or the human actors have positive notions of others and towards oneself (Molina et. al., 2023; Forrest, & Kearns, 2001). Measures employing Putnam's (2000) thesis integrate his conception of social capital including structural and cultural dimensions (which pertain to either belonging to or strength of the social networks) and the cultural norms i.e. social trust. This rationale facilitates in establishing the first independent variable for the current inquiry i.e. social cohesion as an indicator of good governance.

The second important construct is media. Media are the channels of conveying information from a sender to receiver. The effectiveness of a message depends upon the apt coding and encoding of the message. Media is equally influential as compared to social cohesion and interfaith harmony in improving governance. Numerous studies have investigated, at individual level, the association of the news media and the civic engagement i.e. political participation, social trust and confidence in government. Media influences university governance through highlighting stakeholders welfare and social responsibility upon which higher education is founded (Friedrichsmeier et. al., 2019).

Researchers have explored the relationship of media and social cohesion in ensuring governance. Camara (2008) conducted a detailed examination on the symbiotic association of the contribution of mass media and growth of political culture with regard to West Africa's endeavors for democratic governance. The study emphasized the existence of free, active and responsible media and civil society for the realization of a democratic society. Norris, Walgrave and Aelst (2006) also highlighted a strong relation between press freedom, democracy, good governance and human development. Media serves governance in various capacities; as a watchdog (to check the powerful by establishing transparency, accountability and public scrutiny) around the globe, as a

source of information, as a platform to promote civic activities (through facilitating political debates and informed electoral choices), and by highlighting agenda for policy makers to make government responsive to social problems and exclusion. This literature helps to develop the second independent variable for the present research i.e. the role of mass media (by acting as watch dog) in the promotion of good governance (Friedrichsmeier et. al., 2019).

Another important concept is higher education. The role of higher education and social cohesion is acknowledged as the most dominant contribution as a public good (Heyneman, et. al, 2007), tolerance and political participation (Lipset, 1959), democratic stability (OECD, 2020; Puryear, 1994) which has further implications for higher education; (i) The universities can eliminate social divide by maximizing the contact of diverse individuals (Kanbur, Rajaram, & Varshney, 2011), (ii) The higher education influences individuals' advancement in turn collective progress along with implications for social mobility which thus develops national and global leadership, broader markets and an integrated and resilient society (Heyneman, et. al, 2007), (iii) universities can enhance the improvement, development and management of compliance mechanisms (European Commission, 2023) to reinforce social control in the wake of local clashes turning into catastrophe due to governance failure (UNESCO, 2021; Meyer & Baltes 2003), (iv) higher education, on the foundation of social capital model of social cohesion, facilitates development, socialization and transmittal of shared sustainable norms and values, exploration of social change/inclusion, tolerance, pluralism and responsible citizenship (Abdelaziz, 2022; Heyneman, et. al, 2007), (v) Heyneman et. al. (2007) investigated the contribution of public Islamic higher education, Islamic educational leaders, Islamic universities and colleges in the democratization, civic engagement and good governance. On the basis of these citations, the third independent variable is established i.e. the role of the higher education (by integrative democratic measure) in the promotion of good governance.

The public role of higher education has received an impetus in recent years. This is due to the focus upon sustainable democratic system in the wake of diverse societies in terms of sundry ethnic, socio-economic and religious orientations (Holford et. al., 2023). Though diversity has many positive aspects, nevertheless, it is rampant with numerous challenges like weak social bonds, fragmented societies and issues of social cohesion, inclusion, identity and community. These educe additional concerns regarding development and maintenance of a sustainable democratic governance system. In this context, higher education institutions can help tackle such governance problems by employing the integrative forces deep-rooted within its governance structures, internal practices, processes and relationships with different stakeholders (Biesta, 2007). Zgaga (2009) states that higher education and universities can render a crucial public role in

introducing *democratic citizenship education* by instructing students to become responsible citizens in democratic society, as affirmed through Bologna Process and Council of Europe (Abdelaziz, 2022; Keating, et. al. 2009). Also, the participation of students in institutional decision-making boosts individuals' valuable engagement in the public sphere including public higher education institutions (Barnett et al. 2007). According to Bargh et. al (1996) fundamental transformations have realized not only in the scale and character of higher education system and institutions, but also in the connections between universities, science, innovation, society, and culture which have altered the environment of governance (Bauer et. al., 2021).

The qualitative interviews of 32 undergraduate African American males, in White's research-oriented universities, signified the accumulation of social capital and empowerment due to the social networks developed through extra-curricular involvement and educated leadership. Also, the education enhances the social mobility and advancement which is vital for good governance (Harper, 2008). The inquiry on black male students, employing observations and interviews over 18 months, revealed that membership in political organizations brings social capital and sense of community (Kolb, 2007). Higher education also resolves complex multivariate issues of governance structures and accountability in which relational networks can render distinct significant role (Probst, 2022).

Together these concepts not only synergize mutual trust and reciprocity but also empower the communities to improve their lives. The process of empowerment has been defined as a way by which masses gain control over their lives and their community (Rappaport, 1987) and achieve a significant insight into their environment (Zimmerman, et al., 1992). According to pro-poor growth's standpoint, empowerment is an attempt to pursue better lives; deprived men and women need to modify the prevalent power mechanisms to yield influence over the economic, social and political processes which have been constraining their sustenance possibilities. Empowerment emerged as a significant topic in the development debate during 1980s, with reference to women and gender empowerment which, later on, included the marginalized groups. Since 1990s, the concept penetrated the vernacular of mainstream development, which invited criticisms from the social reformers for the trend is synonymous to involving marginalized strata in existing structures instead of fundamental transformation of such structures much needed for the uplift of such deprived classes (Luttrell & Quiroz, 2009). In development context, the *rights-based approach* resolves to assimilate the norms, principles and standards of International Human Rights System in the shape of plans, processes and policies of development. These rights link equity and empowerment to the process of improving governance (UNHCHR, 2001). Here, it refers to prioritizing *Equity*, with reference to the universal rights including those for the marginalized, along with supporting

empowerment of such groups to assert their rights (Pieterse, 2010). To summarize, powerlessness and socio-economic inequality are associated with poor governance which in turn is a detriment to long-term growth. Conversely, high echelons of equity influence trust and social cohesion which breed economic stability and durable institutions. Empowerment has the potential to check corruption (for better governance) through exercising accountability and transparency, by enhancing masses' access to information, legal-political processes and problem solving apparatuses. Obviously, the improved and effective governance also establishes, strengthens and sustains empowerment. This discussion leads to the development of the fourth independent variable for the study i.e. the role of the empowerment (through influencing the economic, social and political processes) in the promotion of good governance.

Furthermore, the purpose of Interfaith harmony is perceived to facilitate understanding and tolerance between various religious factions and traditions of a community life. It is helpful in establishing the communal life and is positively correlated with good governance and sustainability just as higher education and social cohesion are (Schoon et.al. 2010). Religious and social norms and beliefs are essential components of the identity of a huge number of populace in Pakistan. History of sectarian religious conflicts exhibits that these have laid grave damaging effects on social solidarity and peace in Pakistan. The lack of interfaith solidarity can cause the violence and religious terrorism at mass level as well. Affliction and intolerance at the sectarian level can be commonly observed in Pakistan. Hence, the need to unite people of different sects in Pakistan has increased more than ever before. Inter faith harmony is an international and exhaustive approach - taken from the wisdom of conventional traditions. It satisfies the needs and desires of the individuals from diverse religions, beliefs, cultures and values systems. The concept can integrate the society in multiple ways; by encouraging and acknowledging the efforts of others, and by comprehending and harmonizing knowledge in the true spirit (Farah, 2023). In short, harmony within religion and among religions is the call of the hour to promote peace in the world. Interfaith harmony – preached through curriculum; text books and balanced codification of law – can resolve the problems and differences among people of different with dissimilar thoughts, sects and religions. Moreover, the individuals should perform their roles in order to promote interfaith harmony in Pakistan (Rahmani et. al., 2021). This leads to the determination of fifth independent variable for the current inquiry i.e. the role of the inter-faith harmony in the promotion of good governance.

The sixth important concept is governance, which has age-old roots in human civilization. This phenomenon has been defined by World Bank in two ways. In the first sense, it exclusively relates to the management of national affairs through the exercise of political power. The second connotation involves power base to channelize socio-

economic resources towards development. Thus, the good governance is characterized by enlightened and progressive policy formulation; bureaucratic machinery instilled with professional ethos; an accountable executive and government; active and participative civil society, with the rule of law that determines sustainable behaviors (Swyngedouw, 2009). The democracy provides the logical argument and warrants that links the socio-economic factors (evidences) to the governance (conclusion) which is Gorard's (2013) requirement for robust and sound research design. Rizzo, Latif and Meyer (2007) states democracy's capacity to facilitate public to drive out incompetent, inefficient and corrupt governments and, at the same time, assists them to re-elect efficient regimes, thereby improves the quality of governance in the long run.

In the university governance perspective, the inclusion of Sustainable Development Goal for higher education in university practices enables good governance in higher education system which further contributes to sustainable development. In fact, one of the significant factors that make SGDs different from Millenium Development Goals is the growing diffusion and complexity of governance. This presumes that higher education institutions implement sustainable development measures by motivating students to face global challenges and uphold sustainability principles to ensure further good governance (UNESCO, 2021).

After discussing the interconnections of these variables and the insight gained from theory, the following conceptual framework is presented, upon which hypothesis are formulated accordingly.

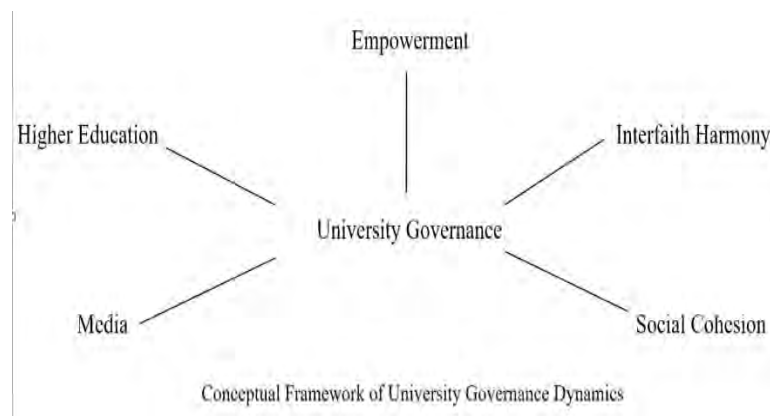


Figure No. 1 *Conceptual Framework of University Governance Dynamics*

Research Objectives of the Study

To assess the significance of relationship, the strength and direction, of the social cohesion, media, higher education, empowerment, and interfaith harmony with regard to sustainable and good governance in public universities in specific socio-cultural and political context of Pakistan.

Research Questions of the Study

Based on the rationale, following are the research questions of the study;

1. How does the social cohesion among human resource influence *sustainable and good governance* in public sector universities of Pakistan?
2. How does the media influence *sustainable and good governance* in public universities of Pakistan?
3. How does the higher education influence *sustainable and good governance* in public universities of Pakistan?
4. How does the empowerment influence *sustainable and good governance* in public universities of Pakistan?
5. How does the interfaith harmony influence *sustainable and good governance* in public universities of Pakistan?

Hypotheses

- H1: Social Cohesion has significant positive impact on *sustainable and good governance* in universities.
- H2: Media has significant positive impact on *sustainable and good governance* in universities.
- H3: Higher Education has significant positive impact on *sustainable and good governance* in universities.
- H4: Empowerment has significant positive impact on *sustainable and good governance* in universities.
- H5: Interfaith Harmony has significant positive impact on *sustainable and good governance* in universities.

Methodology

The data collection process was carried out through the administration of a survey questionnaire to employees working in higher educational institutions in Pakistan. This research employs a quantitative approach using a cross-sectional survey design. The survey instrument was used to collect data on various dimensions related to higher education, governance, empowerment, interfaith harmony, media and societal cohesion.

The research was initiated by contacting the university registrars and presenting them with a detailed outline of the study's objectives. Upon obtaining their approval to participate, a total of 700 questionnaires were distributed to permanent faculty members. Out of the total number of questionnaires distributed, 364 were considered valid and usable, resulting in a response rate of 52%. The sample ensured representation across different demographic groups, educational backgrounds, and geographical regions. The survey questionnaire was structured into sections focusing on: demographic information (e.g., age, gender, experience and designation etc.) and items on variables. The questions are primarily closed-ended with 5-point Likert-scale responses to facilitate quantitative analysis. Quantitative data analysis involved descriptive statistics to summarize respondents' demographics and key survey responses. Regarding the data analysis, the Mplus 8 version was utilized to test the hypothesis, while descriptive statistics were conducted using SPSS version 23.

The response rate is presented in Table 1, while Table 2 provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Table 1

Response rate.

| Activities | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Distributed Questionnaires | 700 | 100% |
| Returned Questionnaires | 385 | 55% |
| Usable Questionnaires | 364 | 52% |

Research Instrument

The variables utilized in this research were derived from existing literature. A five-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 (indicating complete disagreement) to 5 (indicating complete agreement), was employed to assess the items under investigation. The measurement of social cohesion was based on six items adapted from Eys et al. (2009). Media was measured through twelve items adapted from Simons et al. (2017). Higher education was evaluated using thirteen items adapted from Griffioen (2022). Empowerment was evaluated using thirteen items adapted from (Kraimer et al.,1999). Interfaith harmony was assessed using nine items adapted from Yusoff et al. (2018). University Governance was evaluated using twenty- one items adapted from Torku and Laryea (2021).

Table 2
Demographic Characteristics

| Demographic Variable | Categories | n | % |
|----------------------|---------------------|-----|-------|
| Gender | Male | 180 | 51.42 |
| | Female | 170 | 48.58 |
| Age | 20-30 years | 131 | 37.42 |
| | 31-40 years | 153 | 43.7 |
| | 41- 50 years | 66 | 18.8 |
| Experience | 1- 5 years | 119 | 34 |
| | 6 – 10 years | 120 | 33.29 |
| | 11-15 years | 70 | 20 |
| | 16-20 years | 41 | 11.71 |
| Designation | Associate Professor | 100 | 28.57 |
| | Assistant Professor | 100 | 28.57 |
| | Lecturer | 150 | 42.85 |

Common Method Bias

In order to assess the presence of common method bias in the data, the common latent factor technique was employed. The findings indicate a variance of 21.2%, which falls below the threshold of 50%. Consequently, it can be concluded that the data is devoid of common method bias.

Measurement Model

The present study employed Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) as CFA is the foremost step in the estimation of the model using SEM in MPlus 8. CFA was conducted to assess the internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the constructs pertaining to social cohesion, media, higher education, empowerment, interfaith harmony, and governance.

Model Estimation and Evaluation

The estimated results for the model appear in Table 3 (refer to Table 3). All values meet the threshold values.

Table 3

Model Fit

| Model Fit Index | S-B X^2 | <i>df</i> | RMSEA | CFI | TLI | SRMR |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------|-------|------|------|-------|
| | 964 | 331 | 0.07 | .924 | .914 | 0.070 |

Note. ML = X^2 = Satorra Bentler X^2 ; *df* = degree of freedom; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index.

Table 4 displays the loading of items, all of which were above 0.5. The composite reliability (CR) of each construct ranged from 0.873 to 0.921 surpassing the threshold value of 0.60, thereby confirming the internal consistency reliability of the constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 4

Factors loading

| Variables | Items | Factors loading | No of Items deleted |
|------------------|-------|-----------------|---------------------|
| Higher Education | | | 0 |
| | HE1 | 0.812 | |
| | HE 2 | 0.785 | |
| | HE 3 | 0.742 | |
| | HE 4 | 0.694 | |
| | HE 5 | 0.695 | |
| | HE 6 | 0.666 | |
| | HE 7 | 0.742 | |
| | HE 8 | 0.702 | |
| | HE 9 | 0.675 | |
| | HE 10 | 0.600 | |
| | HE 11 | 0.941 | |
| | HE 12 | 0.897 | |
| HE 13 | 0.847 | | |
| Media | | | 0 |
| | M 1 | 0.693 | |
| | M 2 | 0.671 | |
| | M 3 | 0.766 | |
| | M 4 | 0.701 | |
| | M 5 | 0.942 | |
| | M6 | 0.892 | |
| | M7 | 0.852 | |
| | M8 | 0.695 | |
| M9 | 0.666 | | |

| | | | |
|-----------------------|--------|-------|---|
| | M10 | 0.742 | |
| | M11 | 0.702 | |
| | M12 | 0.675 | |
| InterFaith Harmony | | | 0 |
| | IF1 | 0.714 | |
| | IF2 | 0.602 | |
| | IF3 | 0.695 | |
| | IF4 | 0.631 | |
| | IF5 | 0.714 | |
| | IF6 | 0.602 | |
| | IF7 | 0.695 | |
| | IF8 | 0.839 | |
| | IF9 | 0.721 | |
| Empowerment | | | 0 |
| | EMP 1 | 0.788 | |
| | EMP 2 | 0.755 | |
| | EMP 3 | 0.679 | |
| | EMP 4 | 0.666 | |
| | EMP 5 | 0.794 | |
| | EMP 6 | 0.796 | |
| | EMP 7 | 0.788 | |
| | EMP 8 | 0.745 | |
| | EMP 9 | 0.879 | |
| | EMP 10 | 0.866 | |
| | EMP 11 | 0.794 | |
| | EMP 12 | 0.696 | |
| | EMP 13 | 0.898 | |
| Social Cohesion | | | 0 |
| | SC1 | 0.941 | |
| | SC 2 | 0.671 | |
| | SC 3 | 0.766 | |
| | SC 4 | 0.901 | |
| | SC 5 | 0.942 | |
| | SC6 | 0.892 | |
| University Governance | | | 0 |
| | UG1 | 0.714 | |
| | UG2 | 0.602 | |

| | |
|------|-------|
| UG3 | 0.695 |
| UG4 | 0.631 |
| UG5 | 0.714 |
| UG6 | 0.602 |
| UG7 | 0.695 |
| UG8 | 0.721 |
| UG9 | 0.914 |
| UG10 | 0.802 |
| UG11 | 0.695 |
| UG12 | 0.831 |
| UG13 | 0.714 |
| UG14 | 0.802 |
| UG15 | 0.695 |
| UG16 | 0.839 |
| UG17 | 0.841 |
| UG18 | 0.921 |
| UG19 | 0.932 |
| UG20 | 0.902 |
| UG21 | 0.914 |

The average variance extracted (AVE) of all constructs exceeded the threshold value of 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), thus confirming the convergent validity of the constructs presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Composite Reliability, Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

| Constructs | Composite Reliability | Average Variance Extracted (AVE) |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Higher Education | 0.897 | 0.679 |
| Media | 0.901 | 0.702 |
| Inter Faith Harmony | 0.873 | 0.727 |
| Empowerment | 0.891 | 0.658 |
| Social Cohesion | 0.921 | 0.786 |
| University Governance | 0.904 | 0.759 |

Table 6 illustrates that the estimated intercorrelations among all constructs were lower than the square roots of the AVE in each construct, thereby confirming discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2006).

Table 6
Discriminant validity

| Constructs | Higher Education | Media | Interfaith Harmony | Empowerment | Social Cohesion | Corporate Governance |
|----------------------|------------------|-------|--------------------|-------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| Higher Education | 1 | | | | | |
| Media | 0.906 | 1 | | | | |
| Interfaith Harmony | 0.724 | 0.672 | 1 | | | |
| Empowerment | 0.610 | 0.628 | 0.427 | 1 | | |
| Social Cohesion | 0.549 | 0.527 | 0.413 | 0.402 | 1 | |
| Corporate Governance | 0.543 | 0.523 | 0.409 | 0.373 | 0.354 | 1 |

Structural Model

The results confirm *H1* that there is a significant positive impact of social cohesion on *sustainable and good governance* in universities ($\beta = .66$, $p < 0.05$). Media has a positive impact on *sustainable and good governance* in universities ($\beta = .415$, $p < 0.05$), thus *H2* is accepted. Additionally, the results validate a positive impact of higher education on *sustainable and good governance* in universities ($\beta = 1.622$, $p < 0.05$), thus *H3* is supported. Results further confirm that empowerment is strongly related to *sustainable and good governance* in universities ($\beta = .315$, $p < 0.05$). Thus, *H4* is supported. Finally, the results validate *H5* that there is a significant positive relationship between interfaith harmony and *sustainable and good governance* in universities ($\beta = .914$, $p < 0.05$). Table 7 displays the results of *H1* to *H5*.

Table 7
Direct Relations

| Relationship | <i>b</i> (SE) | C.I | P Values | Decision |
|--|---------------|--------------|----------|-----------|
| Social Cohesion -> University Governance | 0.661(0.05) | 0.540, 0.781 | 0.000 | Supported |
| Media -> University Governance | 0.415(0.06) | 0.328, 0.532 | 0.000 | Supported |
| Higher Education -> University Governance | 1.622(0.28) | 0.928, 0.942 | 0.000 | Supported |
| Empowerment -> University Governance | 0.315(0.04) | 0.302, 0.502 | 0.000 | Supported |
| Interfaith Harmony-> University Governance | 0.914(0.07) | 0.924,0.721 | 0.000 | Supported |

$p < 0.05$ (based on one-tailed test with 5000 bootstrapping)

Discussion

The results confirmed that social cohesion and social networks have vivid impact on *sustainable and good governance* in universities. This cohesion is realized through the active role of civil society and stakeholders. These can influence *sustainable and good governance* in universities through representation in alumni, senate or syndicate and such other university structures. These are important stakeholders who are affiliated with the university either through socio-economic, environmental, political, or educational factors. The more the university promotes the social cohesion, the more tolerance, peace, and community building will occur in the university. Such sustainable practices and behaviors

are ultimately carried into the society by internal stakeholders and thus influence the external stakeholders. This phenomenon thus contributes not only to the good governance of the universities but also society at large. Thus, a micro effect can result in actualizing a macro change in the era known for globalization and sustainable development.

The role of media is strongly established, and it plays a significant positive role in university governance. Media not only helps in formulation of public opinion but also renders the role of the watch dog on the activities and functioning of the universities. Thus, it keeps an efficient check on the performance and loopholes through emphasizing transparency and accountability. Media promotions also facilitate universities to get more admissions, spread mass awareness, promote freedom of speech and responsible action, and keep general public updated about the educational contributions for the society.

The results have confirmed that higher education plays a significant positive role in *sustainable and good governance* in universities. University education guides the masses about what is right and what is wrong. It is the most direct mode to engender awareness, skills, sustainable behavior and practices which are highly required for good governance, policy administration and stability of the universities. In fact, the curriculum and syllabi highly influence the students, faculty, ethics and culture of the university which in turn make human resource more responsible and thus work diligently for the good governance in the universities.

Empowerment has a profound impact upon the participatory and democratic policy and decision making in the universities. In the past, the ratio of male to female students and faculty members was not in equilibrium. But, the situation has improved in the academic sector. There are many universities where female students' ratio is higher than males in the classes. In the employment sector, the universities pose a redeeming picture as compared to past practices with reference to male to female proportion. This alludes to the fact that Pakistan is nearing a state where the women are contributing equally to the socio-economic, political, and environmental sustainability and good governance in universities.

Also, interfaith harmony has strong positive effect on university governance. Interfaith harmony establishes a strong bonding among the members as well as bring peace and brotherhood in the society. Nevertheless, the activities pertaining to sectarian, political, terroristic and neighboring countries have rendered a deep impact on the interfaith relations, harmony and tolerance in the country in the past two or three decades. Many cases have been reported in the news regarding sectarian and ethnic clashes in the universities. However, the high significance value and correlation shows that higher education can render a vital role to reinstate the interfaith harmony among the citizens through curriculum, awareness, training, and capacity building along with consciousness

raising seminars on tolerance and community integration. This will lead to the better performance, good governance, and sustainability in the universities.

All the above-mentioned indicators endorse the underpinnings of the stakeholder theory in enhancing university governance. The stakeholder theory refers to stakeholders in corporate governance context. This study has analyzed the theoretical assumptions in the universities perspective through quantitative inquiry and established that there are stakeholders in academic context which also further the organizational sustainability, good governance, and policy administration.

Theoretical Implications

The article expands the stakeholder theory of corporate governance by identifying key stakeholders related to civil society and cohesion, media, higher education, empowerment and Interfaith harmony in academic context. The study further highlights that the aforementioned indicators enhance good corporate governance which in this context is higher education sector or universities.

Practical Implications

The effective role of civil society, social cohesion, media, higher education, empowerment, and interfaith harmony can solve many inherent and everyday structural and functional problems in the higher education sector. All these variables promote awareness, equilibrium and check on the university's functioning which can ultimately lead to good governance and sustainability in the universities and higher education sector.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The study was limited to the faculty members and was only conducted in the public sector universities. Future research can be conducted by including staff and students as well as private sector universities. The research can also be replicated in other service sector industries.

Conclusion

The study effectively expands the theoretical base of the stakeholder theory of corporate governance. It also highlights the significant role of the social cohesion, media, higher education, empowerment, and interfaith harmony in achieving the better performance, sustainable development, policy administration and good governance in the higher education sector particularly universities in this case. The results show the strength of positive relationship between the independent variables and good governance in public universities which help understand the specific socio-cultural and political context of Pakistan.

Recommendation

There are also policy implications for the political and bureaucratic policy makers, regulators and implementers. It is recommended that well designed strategies pertinent to these variables need to be included in the policy, curriculum, educational and professional behavior and practices for improved educational, socio-economic and political stability and outcomes in the long run. In order to effectively address societal fissures through universities' governance frameworks, several key recommendations emerge from this study. Firstly, it is imperative to define clear and specific research objectives that delineate the scope and purpose of stakeholder engagement and empowerment perspective within higher education governance. This clarity ensures that the study remains focused on identifying and understanding the diverse perspectives of stakeholders—such as students, faculty, administrators, media and community representatives—who play pivotal roles in shaping institutional policies and practices. Secondly, adopting a robust methodological approach is crucial. Employing a mixed-methods strategy, encompassing both qualitative (such as in-depth interviews and focus groups) and quantitative (including surveys and statistical analyses) techniques, allows for a comprehensive exploration of stakeholders' perceptions and experiences. Also, the longitudinal perspective should be considered where feasible, allowing for the examination of governance changes' long-term impact on societal cohesion. By synthesizing these recommendations into actionable policy suggestions, stakeholders in higher education and policymakers can collaborate effectively to implement governance reforms that not only enhance institutional effectiveness but also contribute to healing societal divisions and promoting sustainable development.

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