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Mass Media and Political Communication: A Comprehensive Review

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ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: The role of mass media as a primary source of information enabling people to gain the information and further utilize it for making their political choices is of greater significance. Existing literature also witnessed the growing role of the mass media platform for political communication and strengthening a democratic system. Based on the importance of media in political communication, this study also highlights media use in the political communication process.

Methodology: Researchers randomly selected a sample of $n=$ 43 articles addressing political communication and mass media and further narrowed own $n=$ 16 articles as the most relevant ones.

Findings: The cited literature witnessed the role of media in political communication as strongly proactive and influential. This also affirms the role of mass media as the fourth pillar of democracy, strengthening and sustaining a strong democratic system in a country.

Conclusion: Thus, study concluded that mass media guarantee a strong political and democratic system in a country. Elucidation of collaborative media forms further supports the concept of political communication as a source of political information and political persuasion for the general public. We further discussed the study limitations and made recommendations for future research accordingly.

Keywords: Mass media, Political Communication, Public information, Electronic Media, Press; Digital Media.

Introduction

Media have a crucial role in the dissemination of socio-political information in society. Especially news media have the potential to reflect the system and the ongoing proceedings. With technology development, this role is even more influential, bringing certain positive outcomes (Pandey, 2017). News media keep people updated about what is happening in their surroundings. In this regard, the audience has become highly dependent on news media to gain information. The advent of media has demonstrated how people are now aware and empowered concerning news gathering (Happer & Philo, 2013).

Similarly, political and economic power has developed the media's performance as a watchdog, which is greater for strengthening democracy. The influential flow of information for the public is made possible

due to media despite many hardships in the past. The media systematically arranged the information and processed the communication through media discourse (Weiderman, 2009). This shows that news media have a normative role in democratic societies as they possess a right to keep an eye on government institutions and all the political processes. Also, the performance of news media during crucial times especially bringing political changes, is acknowledged by many media scholars and critics (Relly & Schwalbe, 2013). For instance, news media play a fundamental role during the electoral process. Besides reinforcing public debates and informing them about the political occurrences, they also keep an eye on monitoring the accountability of the electoral system. In this regard, both conventional and new media technologies have also facilitated the news media to keep people updated, highlighting the importance of news media during political processes (IDEA, 2015).

Here we can assume the role of media as a primary source of information, enabling people to gain the information and further utilize it for making their political choices in general and voting decisions in particular. In democracies, people need political information that they can use to select politicians who tend to prioritize the solution of social problems. In this regard, news media provide critical scrutiny of political matters (Besley et al., 2002). According to Paul Sanyaolu, (2017), the power of news media to strengthen democracy is diverse at different levels. Mostly it includes: political communication, informing the masses, reinforcing political attitudes, and influencing the voting decisions.

For this reason, journalists play a significant role in informing the public about the current political scenarios, social issues, and the vision of different political parties to solve these issues. Ukonu et al., (2017) argued a symbolic relationship between political information, communication, and news media. Media need to earn through advertisements, and political entities need media assistance for political communication, and the public requires information concerning the political process. Today everyone acknowledges the power of media, especially when it is about political concerns. Media can frame the information and leave subtle impacts through the political discourse of the relevant matters (J.A Sambe, 2015). For instance, Peshimam, (2013) discussed the role of print media during the 2013 General Elections in Pakistan. According to the researcher, one of the leading newspapers in Pakistan, "The Daily Dang" represented the electoral process as "Whose throne, whose ---The people will decide today." Also, the lead story of the Daily Jang contained a strip above it, motivating the readers to vote and reminding the voting technicalities. Moreover, the public also revealed the positive role of print media to reinforce motivating behavior during elections. However, critics also objected to the reporting as partial and imperfect (Peshimam, 2013).

Therefore, based on the importance of media in political communication, this study also highlights media use in the political communication process. Using all three dominant channels, i.e., electronic, social, and print media, will provide a broader picture of mass media as a source of political communication. Therefore, this review will significantly contribute to the existing literature concerning the significance of media framing during the electoral process. The first section of this article contains a general introduction regarding the role of media in the political process, mainly described as "political communication." The second part contains details and justifications regarding the selection of the relevant research methodology. The third section involves an extensive review of literature from all the previously mentioned media types. Finally, the fourth section involves discussion and conclusion. We have also given some discussed study limitations and made the relevant recommendations for future research accordingly.

Methodology

According to Ali, (2020), literature review-based studies provide strong, comprehensive evidence of relevant phenomenon witnessed by existing literature. Review studies are important as they highlight the study topic and provide a strong background to future researchers. Thus, the current article is also based on a literature review approach. We randomly selected a sample of $n= 43$ articles addressing political communication and mass media and further narrowed own $n= 16$ articles as the most relevant ones. We

gathered the cited literature mainly from two popular databases, i.e., Google Scholar and Directory of Open Research Journals. Notably, the article selection is also based on a designated inclusion/exclusion criteria summarized in Table 1 below:

Table 1: *Inclusion/ Exclusion Criteria for the Study Literature*

S/R	Exclusion Criteria	Inclusion Criteria
1.	Articles not enlisted in the Goggle Scholar and DOAJ	Articles enlisted and appearing in Google Scholar and DOAJ
2.	Articles discussing media and politics in the general context	Articles strictly focusing on political communication and its impacts in historical context
3.	Articles from the predatory journals	Articles from the registered journals having more than $n=6$ volumes
4.	Articles published before the millennium	Articles published between 2000 to 2021

Frequency of Articles According to the Year of Publication

The frequency of gathered literature is divided according to their years of the publication into four groups. In this regard, we found that the majority of studies were published from 2011 to 2015 (37.5%), the second-highest number of studies (25.0%) were published from 2016 to 2021, 18.75% were published from 2006 to 2010, whereas 18.7% of studies were published from 2000 to 2005 (See Figure 1).

Figure 1: *Frequency of articles according to the years of publication*
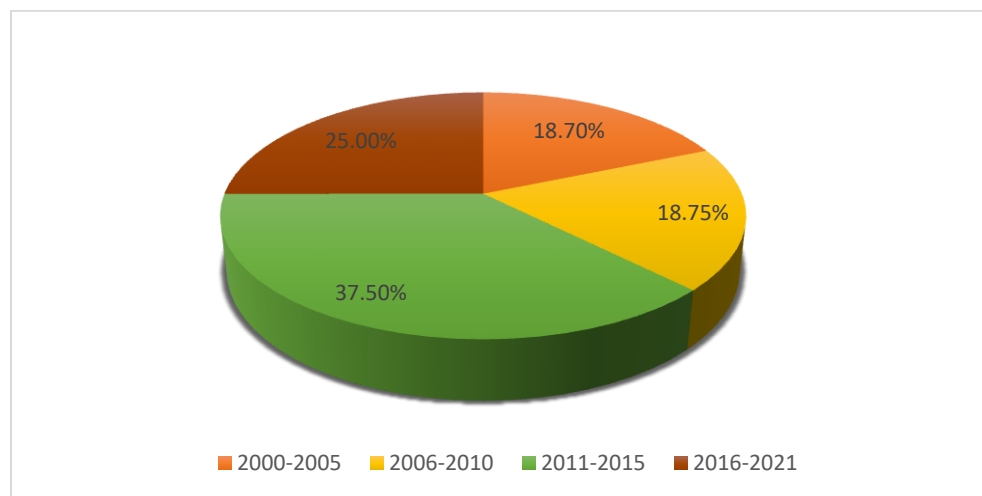
Article by Research Design

After calculating the number of articles according to their years of publication, we calculated the cited literature according to their designated research design. Thus, we found that longitudinal studies were most frequently cited with the total number of $n=9$ articles. $N=05$ or 12.5% of cited studies were based on other methodologies such as research perspectives, book chapters, and research essays. Finally, the lowest number of the article (12.5%) were based on quantitative methods, including survey-based studies, literature reviews, and others. Table 2 below summarizes the frequency calculation of cited articles according to their research design:

Table 2: *Articles by research design*

S/R	Methods	N	%
1.	Cross-Sectional	02	12.5%
2.	Longitudinal	09	56.2%
3.	Other	05	31.2%

Articles by Methodology

Finally, we also calculated the cited literature according to their methodological techniques. As summarized in Table 3, the majority (50.0%) articles were based on a qualitative method, *n*= 6 or 37.5% were based on other methods (research perspectives, book chapters, letters to editor), and only n= 2 or 12.5% of articles were based on quantitative methods. However, we did not find any study-based mix-method technique.

Table 3: *Articles by methodology*

S/R	Methods	N	%
1.	Quantitative	02	12.5%
2.	Qualitative	08	50.0%
3.	Mix-Method	00	0.0%
4.	Other	06	37.5%

Review of the Selected Literature

Social Media and Political Communication

According to Johansson, (2019), the rise of new media technology has tremendously increased the potential of communication accessibility and resharing behavior. As a result, we are provided with various social networking platforms that largely facilitate political communication, especially during elections. The rapid transition from conventional to new media technologies has also facilitated the political parties and politicians worldwide to share their stance with their supporters and take the party manifesto forward. Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, (2013) also validated the role of social media technologies in the political communication process. The researchers stated that major microblogging sites such as Twitter have greatly emerged as a direct source of political communication during the past few years. Especially during the elections, politicians directly share their opinions, share the details of their political activities, and interact with their supporters. As a result, political parties receive much appreciation and feedback from their supporters and influence the general public's political decision-making process.

A study conducted by Ali et al., (2020) also validated the role of social media in the political communication process. The researchers conducted a literature review and selected a sample of *n*= 33 research articles. Results revealed that different social networking platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Pinterest, Instagram, and many other platforms actively work as channels of sending and receiving political communication and information in a real, face-to-face yet virtual environment. The results indicate a strong impact of these political communication processes on the voting decisions of potential voters and social media users. Molony, (2014) cited an example of 2008's Presidential elections in the United States when Barrack Obama widely used Twitter and his other social media accounts to run his political campaigns. The effective use of social media by Barrack Obama was also highlighted in the New York Times as "repeating the history" by resorting to a mass media source. However, the only difference is that earlier politician's used traditional media platforms, but today, they have digital media sites to run their campaigns. Thus, the role of society to influence public opinion and public agenda is a widely affirmed phenomenon. The fundamental role of social media for political communication in

general and during elections is highly acknowledged in terms of mass media and politics (Gilardi et al., 2021).

Table 4: *Summary of Studies Regarding Social Media Television & Political Communication*

Source	Methodology	Book/Journal	Title	Summary
(Sampedro, 2011)	Research perspective	International Journal of Press/Politics	Introduction: New Trends and Challenges in Political Communication	Political communication from television and radio has switched to a transnational form. Despite the concept of a unified audience being ambiguous, the consistency with the political message in audience behavior is possible only with the help of electronic media messages.
(Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013)	Literature review	Social Network Analysis and Mining	Social media and political communication: a social media analytics framework	The rapid transition from conventional to new media technologies has also facilitated the political parties and politicians worldwide to share their stance with their supporters and take the party manifesto forward.
(McNair, 2017)	Book chapter	An Introduction to Political Communication	Glasnost, Perestroika and the Soviet Media	As Blair accepted the conservatism adopted by Thatcher-era and her parties, Cameroon was adamant about bringing ideological reformation by keeping pace with the new ideological grounds enticing for the British voters.
(Ali et al., 2020b)	Literature review	Journal of Research and Reviews in Social Sciences Pakistan	Accessing the Political Information through New Media: A Review Study	Different social networking platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Pinterest, Instagram, and many other platforms are actively working as channels of sending and receiving political communication and information in a real, fac8ie-to-face yet virtual environment.
(Gilardi et al., 2021).	Case study, Content Analysis	Political Communication	Social Media and Political Agenda Setting	The fundamental role of social media for political communication in general and during the elections, in particular, is highly acknowledged in terms of mass media and politics.

Electronic Media and Political Communication

According to Sampedro, (2011), political communication from television and radio has switched to a transnational form. Despite the concept of a unified audience being ambiguous, the consistency with the political message in audience behavior is possible only with the help of electronic media messages.

Besides, adding the concept of feedback or two-way communication in the conventional media outlets provides direct public response and guidelines to shape the political message accordingly. In this regard, McNair, (2017) cited an example of the former president of Great Britain and attributed him to the "real successor" of British politics. As noted, Cameroon well used television and other electronic media resources to undermine conservatives' stance. The basic aim was to decontaminate Tony Blair and his "conservative brand." As Blair accepted the conservatism adopted by Thatcher-era and her parties, Cameroon was adamant about bringing ideological reformation by keeping pace with the new ideological grounds enticing for the British voters.

It is also notable that, from the origin of the media research, television is considered a basic medium of democracy and spreading political information in different ways. The first educational broadcast controller of British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), John Scupham mentioned that "both radio and television are distinguished channels of communication as they have effectively shifted the concept of democracy from abuse to a justified, systematic, and fair system of the government building process (Gurevitch et al., 2009). A study conducted by Baek, (2015) also validated the role of political communication and its impacts on the voters' turnout rates in different democratic countries. The researcher adopted a longitudinal approach and found that the political messages through television positively affected and reduced voters' turnout rate in all the selected countries. Political messages, content, design, approaches, and political actors all significantly attracted voters and helped them in the decision-making process. For Hackett, (2002), the initial concern regarding the power of television on the audience, especially in terms of political communication, can be determined from the early years of media research. Both one-way and now two-way communication have widely facilitated the political groups and politicians to convey their message and stance regarding establishing a reformative and public-focused government. Hence, political communication, especially through electronic media platforms, is an interactive process to deliver information and messages between the news media, politicians, and the general public. This process has a unique aspect as it moves downwards to upwards, including the communication from politicians to the general public. Besides, horizontally with the media organizations to design, create, and effectively disseminate the required political messages (Norris, 2001).

Table 5: *Summary of Studies Regarding Television, Print Media & Political Communication*

Source	Methodology	Book/Journal	Title	Summary
(Gurevitch et al., 2009)	Longitudinal Study, Content Analysis	The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social	Political Communication- Old and New Media Relationships	John Scupham mentioned that "both radio and television are distinguished channels of communication as they have effectively shifted the concept of democracy from abuse to a justified, systematic, and fair system of the government building process.
(Sampedro, 2011)	Research essay	International Journal of Press/Politics	Introduction: New Trends and Challenges in Political Communication	Political communication from television and radio has switched to a transnational form. Despite the concept of a unified audience being ambiguous, the consistency with the political message in audience behavior is possible only with the help of electronic media messages.

(Rhodes, 2009)	Literature Review	The Australian Study of Politics	Political Communication and the Media	Fifty years ago, Professor A.F Davies told his students that Australian democracy would be shifted from intimate to mass level communication due to ruling press organizations. Consequently, the Australian public was in a better position where political activities, stance, part manifesto, the reputation of political leaders, and other relevant details were efficiently provided to the newspapers' readers.
(Hussain, 2012)	Review study	Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies	The Role of Media in Pakistan	Political communication and mass media as important factors of state control, state propaganda, and state involvement in filtering and transmitting the information.
(Baek, 2015)	Comparative Analysis, quantitative method	American Journal of Political Science	A Comparative Analysis of Political Communication Systems and Voter Turnout	Political messages, content, design, approaches, and political actors all significantly attracted voters and helped them in the decision-making process.

Print Media and Political Communication

The number of newspapers circulation and reading patterns are important determinants of influencing the readership perceptions and behavior. Especially in terms of political communication, newspapers are considered one of the strongest mass mediums capable of directly influencing the audience's perceptions and voting behavior. For many researchers, newspaper readership also decreases the voters' turnout behavior. This is more common in the United States here political cynicism a political polarization, both are affecting the general public to take part in voting process and make the favorable voting decision (Lee & Wei, 2008). The distinguished role of print media in political communication is further witnessed by Alfani, (2015) in the Indonesian democratic system. As noted that, newspapers are greatly facilitating the Indonesian readers about the political system on both national and international level. As a result, the example of Yudhoyono as one of the most success Indonesian political campaign got much appreciation and support due to the newspapers-based political communication that further led to the victory of the relevant political party. Rhodes, (2009) also cited an example of Australian press as a power tool of political communication. As stated that, more than fifty years ago, Professor A.F Davies told his students that Australian democracy would be shifted from intimate to a mass level communication due to ruling press organizations. Consequently, Australian public were in a better position where political activities, stance, part manifesto, reputation of political leaders and other relevant details were efficiently provided to the newspapers' readers. Besides, since then, the public is not separated from the political system.

On the contrary, the Australian public is a strong part of creating and sustaining a democratic political system. However, Hussain, (2012) sees political communication and mass media as important factors of state control, state propaganda, and state involvement in filtering and transmitting the information. As argued that, an enhanced role of newspapers and magazine have also increased our media dependency. As a result, the more information we gather from print resources, the more it shapes or reshapes our attitudes accordingly. The topics like agenda setting, gatekeeping, and framing are the prominent topics that

contaminate the political communication process, raising questions on the credibility of political communication through mass media in general and print media in particular (Kaid, 2004).

Discussion & Conclusion

The cited literature witnessed the role of media in political communication as strongly proactive and influential. This also affirms the role of mass media as the fourth pillar of democracy, strengthening and sustaining a strong democratic system in a country. Particularly, during elections, the role of all the types of media, i.e., television, radio, newspapers, and social media, remains significant for the political communication process. However, as compared to traditional media, social media is now considered a stronger source of political communication due to qualities such as ease of access, ease of use, direct communication, and feedback feasibility (Alghizzawi et al., 2019; Ali et al., 2020; Salloum et al., 2019).

Similarly, in the electoral and political campaigning context, convictions on media for reshaping the political behavior and influencing the voting decisions received both acknowledgment and criticism from the media researchers and scholars. As noted by Hänggli & Kriesi, (2010), today, communication is a multi-dimensional process, accompanied mainly by sociopolitical and economic interests of the elite and political celebrities. This chain of communication involves political information from politicians to mass media and then from media to the general public to provide relevant political information, keep them updated, and influence their political perceptions. Besides, the public also depends on these media platforms to gain maximum information, especially during the elections., when media dependency for political communication and information increases. According to Ali, (2020), the wider circulation of political information through different media platforms enables the audience to stay updated about the democratic process. A consistent connection with the updated information also accelerates public interest and aptitude towards mass media as a reliable source of information gathering. As a result, people feel them as a fundamental part of a democratic system where every voice matters.

Also witnessed by Peshimam, (2013), as noted that mass media guarantee a strong political and democratic system in a country. Elucidation of collaborative media forms further supports the concept of political communication as a source of political information and political persuasion for the general public. Political information produced and disseminated by mass media also provides strong insights into a strong bond between media and democracy. The proliferation of social media platforms also provides more accessibility to political information, strengthening the link between media, political communication, and a sustainable democratic system. Thus, according to Happer & Philo (2013), mass media deliver political information and keep people updated about the political situation on both national and international levels. The role of media to gather, filter, represent and inform the public is highly acknowledged due to its utmost importance in a democratic system (Relly & Schwalbe, 2013).

Study Limitations & Recommendations

Despite this study being unique due to reviewing the role of media in political communication from three perspectives, it also contains some primary limitations. **First**, it does not involve any primary data that could be manipulated and analyzed. **Second**, despite initially gathering many studies, the inclusion/exclusion criteria reduced the number of relevant studies to address and highlight political communication. Finally, the **third** limitation is based on the fact that political communication is both acknowledged and criticized due to the nature of media filters and sometimes news fabrication, so this study is based on an impartial approach concerning the role of mass media in political communication. However, we recommend future studies to examine the role of different media platforms, especially digital platforms, on the content filtration, representation, and public response to the shared information further dig out in-depth details about the role of media in political communication.

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