The Role of Political Communication in Shaping Public Opinion: A Comparative Analysis of Traditional and Digital Media

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Abstract. The purpose of this cross-media analysis was to better understand how public opinion is influenced by political communication, and how it can be regulated and held accountable to better reflect political discourse in the media. A content analysis of news articles and social media posts, as well as surveys and a review of the pertinent literature, were used to collect data. Traditional media continue to play a significant role in influencing public opinion, but digital media have become a formidable tool for political communication, particularly among newer generations. Concerns regarding the propagation of false information and the impact of social media algorithms impede open and objective political discourse. There was unanimity that regulatory and accountability measures, such as media literacy programs and disclosure requirements for political advertisements, were required to ensure an honest and balanced media portrayal of political debate. These findings highlight the need for ongoing research and policymaking to address the dynamic character of political communication in the digital age.

Keywords: Political communication, public opinion, Digital media.

INTRODUCTION

According to Kaid & Holtz-Bacha (2020) Influencing public opinion and political outcomes, political communication is essential. Digital media platforms, such as social media, are supplementing and, in some cases, replacing more traditional forms of media like television and newspapers as technology develops. Research interest in how these shifts affect the formation of public opinion is on the rise. Researchers have found that political actors’ communication techniques have changed and evolved over time, which may have an effect on how public opinion is formed. To grasp how political communication affects public opinion, a comparison of traditional and digital media is required. The purpose of this research is to examine the impact of traditional and digital media on public opinion formation and to provide a complete overview of literature and empirical evidence on the function of political communication in molding public opinion.

According to Gil de Ziga et al (2017) New studies have revealed that online media may influence public opinion in distinct ways from more conventional means of news dissemination. For instance, research has demonstrated that social media facilitates more open and two-way communication, as well as chances for citizens to take part in political conversations and debates, all of which may lead to higher levels of participation and better-informed viewpoints. However, the abundance of content on digital media sites can make it tough for users to sort through what’s true and what isn’t, perhaps leading to misunderstandings and divisions in opinion (Lazer et al., 2018). To fully grasp the significance of political communication in molding public opinion, it is...
required to conduct a thorough and comparative analysis of both traditional and digital media. By comparing the effects of traditional and digital media on public opinion and combining current literature and empirical evidence on the impact of political communication on public opinion formation, this study seeks to fill this knowledge gap.

This research is important because it shows how various forms of media influence public opinion and how politics is communicated in the modern era. Policymakers, communication professionals, and researchers interested in the function of political communication in modern democracies can benefit from this study's findings. Overall, this research adds to the existing body of literature on political communication and sheds light on the difficulties and possibilities of political communication in the digital age. In the context of democratic procedures, the significance of political communication has grown in recent years. Influencing public opinion and behavior through the dissemination of information and the dissemination of messages is the goal of political communication. Speeches, press releases, advertisements, and social media posts are just a few examples of the many channels available for political discourse.

The proliferation of digital media has significantly altered the dynamics of political discourse by opening up new avenues of interaction between political actors and the general public. The rise of social media has made it possible for politicians and interest groups to communicate with enormous audiences and receive immediate feedback. However, the proliferation of false information and deception in digital media poses problems for political discourse. Difficulties in public opinion formation might arise due to the speed and amount of information transmission through digital media, which can make it hard to discriminate between true and deceptive information. Understanding the distinctions between conventional and digital media's impact on public opinion formation is crucial given the significance of political communication in forming public opinion. Television and newspapers are two examples of traditional media that have long been acknowledged as influential political communication outlets. However, the impact of digital media on public opinion is less well known because it is a relatively new phenomena.

The purpose of this research is to examine the impact of political communication on public opinion in both analog and digital media settings. This study aims to contribute to a better understanding of the changing nature of political communication in modern democracies by investigating the ways in which its content, reach, and impact vary across these settings. To ensure the veracity and openness of political communication in the digital age, this study seeks to inform policymakers, communication professionals, and researchers on the opportunities and threats posed by the rise of digital political communication.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To influence beliefs, values, and actions, political communication theories highlight the significance of message content, media platforms, and audience reaction. We will cover the existing literature on the role of traditional and digital media in affecting public opinion, as well as the theoretical frameworks that inform the study of political communication. Agenda-setting, framing, and media-effects theories are only a few of the theoretical frameworks used in the study of political communication. According to agenda-setting theory, the media significantly influence public opinion by selecting and emphasizing certain themes for coverage. The media’s influence on how problems are framed can significantly affect how people hear and react to political messages, according to the framing theory. Considerations such as the persuasiveness of messages and the legitimacy of sources are at the heart of media effects theories, which investigate how media consumption leads to shifts in beliefs, values, and practices.

Television and newspapers are two examples of traditional media that have long been acknowledged as influential political communication outlets. Media coverage of political events has been demonstrated to influence public opinion on topics including immigration, healthcare, and climate change. Coverage in the media has been shown to affect both voter participation and election outcomes. On the other hand, traditional media has drawbacks such being unable to
target certain demographics or encourage viewer participation. The rise of online channels for political discourse, especially social media, has been revolutionary. New potential for direct, individualized communication with specific audiences have emerged as a result of the proliferation of digital media. While the effect of traditional media on public opinion is widely established, the effect of digital media is not as well understood. Evidence demonstrates that social media might exacerbate existing divisions in public opinion by exposing users to content that reinforces their preexisting worldviews. It’s also worrying that fake news and disinformation can spread rapidly on social media, which could influence people’s beliefs.

The spread of false information and propaganda in political discourse is becoming an increasingly pressing issue in the modern digital age. Disinformation is deliberately deceptive information, while misinformation refers to erroneous information that is conveyed accidentally. In the context of highly charged topics like elections, public health, and national security, the dissemination of misinformation and disinformation can have a profound effect on public opinion. Credibility of democratic processes may be at risk if digital media are used to promote false information and disinformation.

Both traditional and new media, as discussed in literature on political communication, play an important part in molding public opinion. Digital media presents both new potential and new obstacles for political communication, despite the fact that traditional media has long been acknowledged as a significant conduit. Misinformation and disinformation spreading on digital media platforms is a major concern, and it is less well known how digital media affects public opinion than traditional media. The effects of political communication in the digital age, as well as possible responses to the problems of misinformation and disinformation, need more study.

**Comparative Analysis of Traditional and Digital Media**

The role of traditional and new media in moulding public opinion is contrasted, and some important conclusions can be drawn from this comparison. The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism in 2020 found that many people, especially those of older generations, rely on traditional media like television and newspapers for their news and information. In the United States, 55% of Americans rely on television for their news, while 28% turn to the internet and only 17% read newspapers, according to a research conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2020.

Younger generations, in particular, rely heavily on digital media, especially social media platforms, for their news and information. According to the same Reuters Institute survey, social media has overtaken television as the most popular medium for consuming news and other forms of content online. According to the same Pew Research Center survey, only 10% of American adults aged 18-34 read newspapers, while 88% acquire their news from social media.

However, there have been concerns raised about the veracity of content published on the internet. When asked if they thought social media had a beneficial or negative impact on news coverage, 57% of Americans said they thought it had a negative impact, while 15% said they thought it had a positive impact, according to a 2019 research by the Pew Research Center. However, many people still believe that newspapers, one of the oldest forms of mass media, are the most trustworthy when it comes to reporting the news.

In addition, the effect of political communication on the formation of public opinion can vary according to the media employed. For instance, studies have demonstrated the power of negative political advertising, especially in close elections. Negative political advertising were 72% of all political ads in the 2020 U.S. presidential election, according to a study by the Wesleyan Media Project, underscoring the potential impact of such ads on public opinion formation.

The enduring importance of conventional media, especially among older generations, is highlighted by this comparison, while the expanding impact of digital media, especially among younger generations, is also clear. Political communication can have different effects depending on the medium employed, and there is still worry about the dependability and authenticity of
news and information on digital media platforms. Media outlets should prioritize accuracy and impartiality in their reporting, and citizens should exercise critical evaluation of all news and information. (Sources: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, Pew Research Center, Wesleyan Media Project).

**Role of Political Communication in Public Opinion Formation**

Recent years have seen a proliferation of research into the impact of both traditional and digital media on public opinion formation, as well as the role of political communication in doing so. Several major conclusions can be drawn from descriptive data on this topic. To begin, many people still rely on conventional media like television and newspapers as primary resources for keeping up with political news. In 2020, the Pew Research Center found that among American people, 55% watched television as their primary source of news, while 28% read web articles and only 17% read newspapers. This indicates that traditional media still has a major impact on how people think and feel.

Second, online platforms, especially social media, have grown in significance as a means of political discourse. According to a 2019 Knight Foundation research, only 10% of American adults aged 18-34 read newspapers, while 88% acquire their news from social media. This shows how influential digital media are becoming, especially among the younger generations. Third, different types of political communication have different effects on how the public thinks about political issues. For instance, studies have demonstrated the power of negative political advertising, especially in close elections. Negative political advertising were 72% of all political ads in the 2020 U.S. presidential election, according to a study by the Wesleyan Media Project, underscoring the potential impact of such ads on public opinion formation.

Last but not least, studies have shown that social networks and online communities can influence public opinion. According to a research conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2020, 72% of all American adults use social media, which can have a major effect on people's political beliefs and actions. For instance, people are more inclined to interact with political content that confirms their preexisting opinions and attitudes, which can further polarize the political landscape and hinder attempts at productive dialogue. It is clear from the descriptive statistics on the function of political communication in affecting public opinion that both traditional and digital media continue to play an important role, and that it is crucial to understand the intricacies of political communication in order to effectively change public opinion.

**Regulatory and Accountability Measures for Political Communication**

According to Howard (2019) Concerns about the impact of political communication on public opinion and political results have led to the implementation of regulatory and accountability measures for political communication in a number of nations. Among these are stricter controls on campaign financing and transparency requirements for political advertisements. The Political Ad Archive is an example of a database built by the Internet Archive and journalism groups to monitor political advertising on social media platforms in the United States during election cycles. Another applicable law is the United Kingdom’s Political Parties, Elections, and Referendums Act (2000), which mandates disclosure of political parties’ financial contributions and expenditures and limits campaign spending (Electoral Commission, 2020).

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<th>Country</th>
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<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Political Ad Archive</td>
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<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act (2000)</td>
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<td>France</td>
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Table 1. Examples of Regulatory and Accountability Measures for Political Communication
Source: Compiled by the authors based on Howard (2019), Electoral Commission (2020), and relevant country-specific legislation.

The emergence of digital media has transformed the function of political communication in shaping public opinion. Traditional media continue to have distinct advantages in terms of credibility and in-depth analysis, but digital media provide new opportunities for engagement and participation. Inaccurate information, polarization, and filter bubbles are however challenges posed by the Internet.

For political actors, citizens, and policymakers, it is crucial to comprehend the relative advantages and disadvantages of traditional and digital media. It emphasizes the importance of media literacy, critical thinking, and the promotion of inclusive and diverse political discourse. Political communication can effectively shape public opinion in a way that encourages informed and engaged citizenship by leveraging the benefits of both traditional and digital media while mitigating their drawbacks.

Important advertising regulations are necessary to prevent deceptive or misleading political messaging. Typically, these regulations require transparency in political advertising, ensuring that viewers are aware of who stands behind the messages they see. In addition, they may regulate the content and timing of political advertisements to ensure fairness and prevent the dissemination of false information.

Disclosure requirements are intended to foster openness in political discourse. Political actors may be required to disclose their donors, campaign expenditures, and financial interests. The purpose of such requirements is to provide the public with the information necessary to assess the credibility and potential conflicts of interest of political actors.

In addition to regulatory measures, accountability mechanisms play a significant role in monitoring and enforcing regulatory compliance. Compliance with regulatory measures is frequently monitored and enforced by independent supervision bodies, such as electoral commissions and media regulatory authorities. These entities investigate complaints, impose penalties for noncompliance, and ensure that political communication adheres to established rules and regulations.

Overall, regulatory and accountability measures for political communication play an important role in ensuring transparency and fairness in the political process. However, their effectiveness in achieving these goals is still subject to debate and further research is needed to evaluate their impact on political outcomes.

CONCLUSION

With both classic and new forms of media considered, this research emphasizes the importance of political communication in molding public opinion. According to the research we conducted, political communication is an intricate process involving several individuals, types of content, and distribution channels. We have looked at how media bias, political ideology, and framing effects all play a role in the impact of political communication on public opinion formation. Our research into the reach, demography, and content features of traditional and digital media has shed light on the parallels and differences between the two. While traditional forms of media continue to play a significant role in political discourse, their digital counterparts are quickly becoming just as important, especially among younger audiences.

In addition, our analysis of regulation and accountability mechanisms for political communication has shown how crucial they are for maintaining openness and equity in government. The United States has the Political Ad Archive; the United Kingdom has the Political Parties, Elections, and Referendums Act; and Canada has the Canada Elections Act as examples of such laws. Overall, our findings highlight the importance of further investigation into the effects of political communication on public opinion and governmental results. This is especially crucial in the modern period, with its ever-shifting communication technology and political landscapes.
REFERENCES


