
A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY OF LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE EVALUATION OF DIGITAL MEDIA AND ITS IMPACT ON POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract:

The fast-paced evolution of digital media has revolutionized ways of communication, politics, and dissemination of information in today's society. This paper is concerned with carrying out a systematic narrative literature review in order to investigate the historical emergence of social networking, blog, and digital communication technology as well as their interaction with the traditional media system. Through use of scholarly articles, books, policies, and research findings, this paper discusses how digital media has evolved historically, how it affects political communication, opinion building, media bias, elections, and democracy.

The results show that digital media has changed from text-based networked media into a multi-media and algorithm-led environment impacting the social, economic, and political realms. Although the development of digital media has improved citizens' participation, access to information, and politics, it has produced several problems, including misinformation, algorithmic bias, data protection, and reduced institutional trust. It can also be concluded from the review that both traditional and new media coexist since each serves a purpose when it comes to communicating. It is evident that digital media usage is an essential part of today's social and technical infrastructure; thus, greater attention should be paid to media literacy, ethics, transparency, and accountability than ever

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before. In order for future research to be conducted, problems like artificial intelligence must be explored.

Key Words: Digital Media, Literature Review, Social Media, Digital Public Sphere, Political Communication.

1. Introduction:

One fundamental change that is linked to the start of the twenty-first century pertains to the communication structure internationally. In contrast to the earlier period where printing and broadcasting were the key approaches used to transmit information, digitization and interactivity have given rise to a completely new communication strategy which has led to the total restructuring of economic and social structures. While the former approach involved vertical communication where the flow of information took place from organizations to individuals, the latter involves horizontal communication where there are no boundaries at all. In order to better understand the changing communication environment, the current literature review explores various academic research articles, historical cases, and empirical data. The theoretical basis of the work includes the history of social network sites, the psychology of user-generated content, and co-existence between the traditional approach to communication and the novel digital approach. Moreover, the paper focuses on the link between politics and the digital environment, as well as the role of digital media in political communication and political party activities.

2. Research Objectives

In order to offer an organizational framework for this massive literature, there are four main research objectives identified in this paper as follows:

1. To chart the development and design changes experienced by SNS, blogging, and digital technologies.
2. To discuss how traditional mediums of communication like print, letter writing, and cable television coexist alongside the new digital worlds of communication.

3. To analyze the two-fold effects of digital networks of communication on political activism, politics, state, media biases, and elections in democratic nations around the world.

3. Methodology:

In order to achieve integration of both qualitative and quantitative knowledge through various types of academic publications over time, the systematic narrative literature review method has been chosen. The search strategy along with relevant data sources concerning SNS and other related topics is described. Electronic databases such as Google Scholar and Scopus were applied for this research, with various combinations of keywords. Among the inclusion criteria are academic articles, books, and credible reports, while blog posts not based on peer-reviewed materials will be excluded from consideration. As the thematic analysis approach has been applied, 60 sources were divided into four themes including Platform Architecture/Psychology, Media Coexistence/History, Content Analysis/Theory, and Institutional Political Communication.

4. Evolution and Multi-Dimension of Digital Media

Such evolution of social media from just networks to complex multi-tiered ecosystems is a result of technological development and transformation of consumer behavior. The analysis of the course of evolution has been conducted thoroughly by Maryville University Online (2024). They have provided a detailed macro-evolutionary assessment explaining the transition from primitive digital media beyond its borders of textual communication [6]. The history of the emergence of social media can be characterized with three historical periods. Firstly, from late 90s to early 2010s social media were predominantly based on text, where content was chronologically posted and edited with HTML codes, profiles were created, and users could interact with one another in peer-to-peer networking [2,6]. It has allowed for the emergence of individualized digital communication, leading to the decentralization of information distribution and news publishing [4,6].

The second period was marked by the emergence of multimedia-based social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram. These platforms introduced algorithmic newsfeeds, high-quality image and video sharing, instant messaging functionalities, and user engagement metrics [5,6]. Consequently, digital marketing

expanded rapidly, and political actors increasingly adopted social media as a tool for election campaigning and public engagement [19,25]. The growing commercialization of social media also transformed interactions between consumers and businesses in the digital marketplace [25].

Since the 2020s till now, social media has evolved into an ecosystem where audio-visual and short form media like X (Twitter's rebranded platform), Instagram Reels, TikTok, and podcasts have been popular. The characteristics of this stage include streaming of content, production of short videos, decentralization of audio, artificial intelligence recommendations, and interaction with the audience in real time [6,7,8]. Furthermore, the current stage of social media has enabled direct to consumer political branding, concerns regarding data privacy and misinformation, as well as faster dissemination of news [19,20,23].

This evolutionary history makes it evident that digital media communication tools were never simply communication mediums functioning beyond society but rather became integrated into society, impacting identity formation, education, citizenship, community formation, business, and diplomacy [1,6,33]. Social media in modern times is a key player in influencing social action and democracy in the age of digitization [30].

It can be shown from the evolution process that digital media platforms are not external tools used by today's society but rather they form the very structure of the society itself. The structure of media in today's era is highly fragmented in terms of different types of platforms having unique senses and modes of communication. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, Instagram is considered the best social media platform for visual communication [7]. Instagram became a channel where visual communication became more dominant because of the emphasis on visuals, videos (Reels), and stories (ephemeral).

Parallel to that, there has been a massive rebirth in the area of audio in digital media. As mentioned by Gray (2025), the use of podcasts as one of the emerging digital media for information dissemination, entertainment, and identity creation has become more common [8]. Podcasts are defined as audio files that allow people to engage their target audience

regardless of location without being restricted by the rules imposed by conventional broadcast media.

Even though the visual and audio components have great importance in this context, there is also something else that needs to be mentioned while speaking about the issue of micro-textual features and blogs. According to Gunn (2024), “the history of the development of blogging from 1997 up to now” is highlighted [4]. However, these websites will exist only if they are able to prove their advantage over other projects and get people’s attention. One of the most significant experiences that must be analyzed at this stage relates to the closure of the website in question. It is the example provided by the articles published in the newspaper Dainik Jagran in 2014 and dedicated to the shutting down of the Orkut website.

5. Coexistence of Traditional and Digital Media

Despite the fact that digital mediums enable instant communication across the globe, studies carried out have revealed that digital mediums do not completely eliminate the need for traditional forms of communication. Mukesh Malawat (2019) explored the phenomenon of letter writing even during the era in which social networking sites like Facebook and WhatsApp dominate [3]. According to Mukesh Malawat, despite being a good form of communication, digital mediums cannot offer the emotional satisfaction that letter writing offers. From the above discussion, it is very evident that people will continue to write letters since letters offer emotional satisfaction rather than convenience.

There is a very dynamic relationship that exists between politics and market considerations in the process of change from traditional print to broadcast. According to Naregal (2000), there was significant development in terms of television and print media in India as a result of the Gulf War of 1991, leading to the rapid development of commercial cable TV networks [24]. The rise in the number of regional and national prints publications between the 1980s and the 1990s cannot be attributed merely to politics and ideology, according to Naregal (2000). Historical evidence shows that such development was very market-oriented, fueled by the need for substantial advertisement revenue [24].

The commercialization of media systems became an extremely important factor mediating the processes of globalization. As Fernandes (2000) pointed out, "the opening up of the Indian economy during the 1990s via liberalization policy has altered national identity in India through television and the print media [25]." According to Fernandes, far from undermining the nation-state system, the influx of global imagery served as a process of articulating the image of nationalism through media texts. The dominant political discourse promoted by media constructed an image that embraced middle-class consumerism while keeping its distance from state-based economic discourses. Thus, the "global" is imagined and articulated through culturally based symbols [25].

6. Media Theory, Public Opinion, and Audience

In regards to looking at the relationship between the media and public opinion, researchers have normally looked into the classical theories of such studies. Changes would then occur to these models depending on how they relate to the digital era. According to Maxwell (2004), "Agenda setting theory applies to the digital age because political parties have the ability to set their agenda within the social media sites that they create officially" [30]. Since political parties can easily reach out to their millions of followers through social media, they would not need the help of any journalistic process to make their local issues become national concerns. Due to the emergence of hybrid media system, lines have already been blurred between journalists and bloggers; thus, both elites and grassroots will now have their respective sayings.

It is important to note that the topic of media and communications and their influence on democracy has received extensive consideration in the past from the standpoint of literature. For example, the paper entitled India Today (2019) [13] provides an account of how the idea theory proposed by Shyama Prasad Mukherjee contributed to the development of the BJP with the help of concepts such as nationalism, politics, and communication. It is also possible to find more information on the role of communications and leadership in Indian National Congress archives in the newspaper entitled Dainik Jagran [15]. This historical perspective has also been analyzed in the book written by Marshall (2001) [14].

From a theoretical standpoint, the work done by Baran & Davis (2012) [16] on major theories of mass communication such as the Agenda-Setting theory, the Uses & Gratifications theory, and the Media Effects theories offers an excellent review that can be used to evaluate the role played by both traditional and digital media platforms. Similarly, Rideout, Foehr, and Roberts (2010) undertook a major research project on media usage among young people which provides some useful findings about high media usage, media multitasking, and changes in media usage behavior [17]. In terms of democratic governance Elklit & Svensson (2007) [18] list transparency, neutrality, accessibility of voters, and electoral integrity as the key elements for conducting free and fair elections. This is especially important considering the growing importance of social media and online communications in politics. Overall, these sources [13,18] show the connection between communication channels and politics.

Media correspondence has an impact on how democracy functions since it enhances communication and accountability. The Association for Intelligent Information Management (AIIM) [20] also places emphasis on the importance of information ethics and information security in the current digital age. It is clear from these two readings that communication and information management are critical elements that must be present to support democracy in the digital era [20,27].

The discussion about whether media consumers are active consumers or passive recipients still forms an important theme in the study of communication. According to Holmes (2005), the importance of Uses and Gratification Theory was highlighted in that it considers that media consumers are proactive in choosing particular types of media to meet particular psychological and sociological gratifications [33]. The public sphere's integrity is endangered by the media bias present in society as well as the crumbling distinction between journalism and objectivity. A content analysis was undertaken by Groseclose and Milyo (2005), who compared the references of some American news agencies against those of politicians and think tanks [35]. This research found a noticeable ideological change among several news agencies, as it was discovered that most of them were ideologically positioned left to an average American Congressperson, with a few conservative agencies like Fox News excluded.

According to Maxwell, M. (2004), [30], the Agenda-Setting Theory refers to a situation whereby the media shapes public opinions through the issues that are brought into the public consciousness as significant for discussion. The changing trends in political communication are discussed by Williams and Delli Carpini (2004), [31], where they claim that there is an ever-growing overlap between news, entertainment, and politics, hence affecting how people perceive political information. In relation to media technologies and how they affect communication processes and audience behavior, Holmes (2005), [33] offers a comprehensive insight. Also, Calle, J. (2005), [34], discusses how political transitions and the media political economy affect democracy. Additionally, Corner and Robinson (2006), [37] look at the relationship between media organization and political institutions in terms of media and political conflict. Moreover, Covert and Wasburn (2007), [40] show how media outlets display their ideological preferences in news programs.

The reason for such bias in institutions can be attributed to the demands of consumers. According to Xiang and Sarvares, economic modeling shows how media companies manipulate news in order to conform to the beliefs of the targeted demographic audience [41]. In very competitive environments, there will be an increasing amount of sensationalized and ideologically slanted news because consumers will prefer stories that confirm their biases over reality.

7. Political Communication and Electoral Integrity

When examining the intersection between media and politics, clarity in both methodological and conceptual approaches is essential. Sartori (1985) noted that concept clarity is the foundation of proper scientific analysis; without proper definition of political institutions and the function of the media, any comparative analyses across nations become scientifically invalid [10]. As part of the development of this theoretical base, Darren G. Lilleker (2006) established more than fifty fundamental concepts within political communication, thereby establishing the link between political theories and practical politics [36]. The model proposed by Lilleker serves as the embodiment of the transformation from the amateur stage of political communication to the advanced profession that incorporates public relations and information technologies.

Political communication culminates in the election process where the role of institutions is indispensable in upholding the integrity of the process. According to Nohlen & Stöver (2010), the impact of the rules on the behavior of the electorate was clearly illustrated in their book analyzing the electoral system in Europe [11]. One can take note of the Indian Election Commission when considering democratic institutions that have just emerged. This institution is mandated with the responsibility of voter registration and free and fair elections [12].

These pillars are crucial for the success of any democratic state. As per the explanation provided by Elklit & Svensson (1997), the key factors which qualify elections as "free and fair" are a transparent and impartial process of administering the election process; security of voters; and ensuring a leveled ground for the contest between political parties [18]. The overlap between these types of institutional arrangements and digital media brings about great shifts in the strategies adopted by the competing campaigns. In evaluating the shifting scenario of political engagement in India, Raj Padhiyar (2019) analyzed the distinctive digital campaigning strategy followed by the BJP in the 2014 general elections.

As for the study conducted on the Indian context, Aijaz Ahmad Mir (2022) analyzed the application of social media in the elections of the Indian Lok Sabha that took place in 2014 and 2019 [19]. It is stated that social media were of significant importance in terms of political marketing and influencing the public opinion. This means that geographical boundaries could not become obstacles.

8. Global Scale, Algorithmic Control and Accountability

The magnitude at which social media is used nowadays illustrates the tremendous control wielded by such media over global discussion. Prabhat Khabar (2024) stated that about 63% of people from around the world make use of social media, and hence such media are the main channels through which communication among humans takes place [21]. The vast number of users has made the global leaders quite powerful.

Nevertheless, the existence of such an infrastructure for communication creates a series of risks in terms of transparency of the platform and algorithmic bias. One case worth

mentioning is the one where the members of the Indian National Congress challenged the transparency of the algorithms used by social media platforms since Rahul Gandhi's follower count stagnated at 20 million, as reported by NDTV [23]. This situation highlights the inherent problem whereby private technology companies decide the fate of political discourse through their algorithmic designs.

Besides, the effects of media on public trust can be immensely destabilizing. Newton (2006) disputed the optimism surrounding the use of media as a resource for democracy, and claimed that contemporary mass media, especially television and sensational digital media, tend to erode public trust in the system and its representatives [39].

Weaponizing digital media through information operations and political corruption is a serious risk to democratic institutions. In his study of the impact of Tehelka, a Delhi-based news site that employed covert audio-visual recording technology to reveal corruption amongst senior military and political leaders. Mazarella (2006) highlights how digital media can be used to undermine political elites' activities and interests. However, this practice also marked an era whereby surveillance, audio tape scandals, and sophisticated media texts could be utilized as weapons of choice in political warfare [38].

In order to mitigate such threats, contemporary institutions adopt stringent information management policies. As stated by the Association for Intelligent Information Management (AIIM), information management entails the collection, storage, securing, and ethical utilization of information [20]. In the contemporary digital world characterized by the importance of data, information management plays a critical role in safeguarding organizational data, regulatory compliance, and veracity of public information from any disinformation practices.

9. Global Perspectives on Media and Democracy

The aforementioned disparity is also observed in youth populations from various cultures. The study done by Younis et al. in 2002 examined the use of Facebook among the youth population in Egypt and Qatar, contrasting it with the data obtained from empirical studies in the West [28]. The results from their study highlighted the fact that despite the youth

from transitional or developing nations using information technologies such as digital networks to cope with their social challenges, their civic identities, and level of participation, youth from advanced nations, especially the United States, were observed to have low levels of political knowledge and low civic engagement compared to their access to information.

On the other hand, models developed in Europe stress the importance of public-service broadcasting as a means of protecting the media industry from the unrelenting forces of the market place. According to Garnham, equal access to a variety of reliable information sources is an important basic right of citizens without which there can be no logical democratic discussion [32].

Based on a review of the literature examined, the picture that is presented regarding digital media ecology appears to be very holistic, taking into consideration factors such as those relating to the nature of content, architecture of platforms, and psychological features of the audience itself. For instance, although there are certain theoretical underpinnings from the early 2000s that may continue to be relevant when examining Instagram or X [2], the fact remains that a move towards algorithms and visuals means that this context has changed.

Another important issue that is mentioned in literature by Chung, Han & Koo (2015) is the issue of social presence and relational trust [1]. As the ownership of media by companies keeps increasing, accompanied by declining levels of trust in institutional providers of information, it becomes necessary for individuals to use interpersonal communication to establish the credibility of messages. While this might be a good idea to foster democracy, it poses serious challenges to the formation of echo chambers.

10. Discussion

One of the things that can be observed from the literature review is that much has been done when it comes to the usage of digital media regarding the level of complexity, mainly because of the algorithmic nature of the digital media. When it comes to classical digital media like blogging, Orkut, and Six Degrees, these types have mainly been used to help

people communicate through the textual form. Modern digital media like Instagram, X, TikTok, and podcasts have helped people engage in networking, politics, and marketing. Moreover, one can observe from the literature review that much has been done in regard to political discourse since communication between politicians and citizens has become easier.

In addition, research shows that both traditional media and digital media co-exist together. While many individuals prefer to use digital means of communication, it has also been seen that the traditional ways of communication are still around since they help achieve certain things which are beyond the reach of technology. As one can clearly see through the findings generated by these different studies, it becomes clear that digital media is no longer merely a tool of technology but has emerged as a socio-cultural institution which impacts various facets of society including that of identity formation, information acquisition, politics, economics, etc.

11. Conclusion and Future Research Suggestions

In conclusion, therefore, the above literature review clearly demonstrates that digital media not only serves as an easy-to-use communication medium but a powerful mechanism that affects different areas of our current life and communications. The literature review reveals that digital media has evolved from being simple mediums through which we send messages to becoming ecosystems where algorithms are used and affect the way humans communicate and even conduct politics and economics and shape their culture. Digital media, while providing many benefits, poses some worries concerning information pollution, biases, insecurity, and lack of credibility.

First of all, it should be mentioned that there are different media types and they complement each other as communication needs evolve through time. Given the increasing role of social media in politics, the topic demands more serious attention regarding the proper utilization of these platforms. Thus, further research may concentrate on exploring the effects social media, artificial intelligence, algorithms, and automation have on democracy and social cohesion. To sum up, the issue discussed in the paper is relevant since it is vital to ensure

that digital media have a positive effect on society in order to maintain a democratic discourse environment.

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