A Cross-national Relationship Between Political Communication and Democracy in the 21st Century

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Abstract

Political Communication and Democracy provides a comprehensive and inclusive analysis of political communication, highlighting its divisions through current political events and debates. It concerns the creation, processing, distribution, and impact of information among performers from the public, political system, and media. This paper examines whether Pakistan's democratic standards have been negatively affected by the modernization of political communications, as many people fear. This literary work outlines the elements of the strategic political communication system, also addressing pertinent theories on the interaction of media, cultures, and political elites. Additionally, this paper outlines the cross-national contribution of public service broadcasters for citizens to be informed and enlightened. The current study is based on primary as well as secondary sources. Primary sources are based upon government official records, while secondary sources deal with descriptive and critical analysis of articles, books etc. Accordingly, the findings demonstrate that the concept of democracy has undergone a substantial transformation in the twenty-first century, as the ongoing advancement of technology has greatly facilitated the expansion of political communication.

Key Words: Political Communication, Media Democracy, Comparative Political Communication, Strategic Communication, Press Freedom, Public Service Broadcasting, Digital Media and Politics.

Introduction

Political Communication interpreting and presenting data... with potential consequences for the use of dispense power. Gurevitch and Blumler declared the

concept of a "political communication system" to be outdated in 1977.[1] Later, in a short period of time, it was further developed into a framework for different types of research. Political communication used to focus mostly on mass media that could be seen by the general public, highlighting organized actors addressing important political issues in liberal democracies. Previously, these conditions could be defended.[2]

Literature Review

The literature on democracy and political communication emphasizes the ways in which citizens, political actors, and media systems interact to shape democratic practices. Gurevitch and Blumler's seminal works from 1977 defined political communication as an organized system in which information is shared, analyzed, and debated.[3] Subsequent researchers like Norris (2010, 2014) and Voltmer (2006) highlighted how the media can both uphold and undermine democratic norms, especially in democracies that are transitioning.[4][5] Political communication in "postmodern democracies" was first proposed by Brants and Voltmer (2011), who emphasized the fuzziness of the lines separating politics, entertainment, and commercialization.[6] As a watchdog, the media can increase democratic accountability, but it can also undermine democracy if it is swayed by elites or commercial pressures, as highlighted by McNair (2011).[7] Comparative viewpoints, like those offered by Esser (2016), highlight the increasing complexity of political communication in the digital age. Cross-national research demonstrates how media systems represent both local political cultures and global influences.[8] Scholarly research conducted in Pakistan (Shami & Ashfaq, 2018) emphasizes the growing importance of strategic political communication via digital platforms in addition to enduring issues like censorship, elite capture, and inadequate public service

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[1] Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. *The crisis of public communication* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 3.

[2] Norris, P., *Political Communication and Democratic Politics*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 5–7.

[3] Gurevitch, M., & Blumler, J. G. (1977). *Linkages between the mass media and politics: A model for the analysis of political communication systems*. See more J. Curran, M. Gurevitch, & J. Woollacott (Eds.), Mass Communication and Society (pp. 271–288). London: Edward Arnold.

[4] Norris, P. (2010). *Public Sentinel: News Media and Governance Reform*. Washington, DC: World Bank. Pp 12-15.

[5] Voltmer, K. (2006). *Mass Media and Political Communication in New Democracies*. London: Routledge. Pp 3-6.

[6] Brants, K., & Voltmer, K. (2011). *Political Communication in Postmodern Democracy: Challenging the Primacy of Politics*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. Pp 2-4.

[7] McNair, B. (2011). *An Introduction to Political Communication* (5th ed. London: Routledge. Pp 21-24

[8] Esser, F. (2016). *Comparing Political Communication Across Time and Space*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp 15-18.

broadcasting.[9] Collectively, these works show that although political communication is essential to democracy, its effects differ according to media pluralism, institutional strength, and public engagement.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

 The article's theoretical framework is based on two main perspectives: comparative political communication and strategic political communication. The use of communication tools by political actors, including governments, parties, and leaders, to sway public opinion, mold media narratives, and establish legitimacy in democracies is explained by strategic communication theory. It draws attention to the deliberate use of agenda-setting, framing, and media management to further political objectives, particularly during elections or policy discussions.[10] Conversely, comparative political communication offers a framework for examining the ways in which various national contexts—such as political institutions, cultural norms, and media ownership structures—influence communication practices.[11] While acknowledging the growing fragmentation brought about by digital and transnational media, this strategy also compares state-controlled, commercial, and public service broadcasting.[12] In addition to these, the idea of media democracy acts as a normative lens, arguing that democracy can only flourish when the media is independent, plural, and answerable to the public rather than to the political or commercial elites.[13] By placing Pakistan's experience within larger international discussions, the article makes the case that understanding 21st-century democratization requires examining the changing dynamic between media platforms and political communication.

Table 1: *Key Theories in Political Communication*

Theory	Scholars	Key idea
Agenda-Setting	McCombs & Shaw (1972)	Media influence the salience of issues in public opinion.
Framing	Entman (1993)	Media frames shape how audiences interpret issues.
Strategic Political Communication	McNair (2011)	Political actors use communication tools to shape legitimacy and outcomes.
Media Systems Theory	Hallin & Mancini (2004)	Different political systems foster different media structures.

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[9] Shami, M. S., & Ashfaq, S. (2018). *Political communication in Pakistan: Censorship, digital media, and elite dominance.* Journal of Political Studies, 25(1), 101–104.

[10] McNair, B. (2011). *An Introduction to Political Communication* (5th ed. London: Routledge. Pp 25-29.

[11] Esser, F., & Pfetsch, B. (2004). *Comparing Political Communication: Theories, Cases, and Challenges.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp 6-9.

[12] Hallin, D. C., & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp 10-13.

[13] Norris, P. (2014). *Why Electoral Integrity Matters.* New York: Cambridge University Press. Pp 33-36.

Emerging paradigm of Political Communication in 21ˢᵗ century

Unquestionably, significant structural changes in the twenty-first century have drastically changed this process, as traditional global political communication tools are shifting from newspapers, radio, and television to the Internet.[14] As a result, the development of a modern communications environment has prompted fundamental diversification across a number of domains,[15] particularly in the field of political communication, where structures and dynamics are changing. As a result, political communication began to understand that democracy is essential and has always been a step in the process of formulating policies and holding elections.[16] Personalized and public communication, social media and mass media, established and non-established communicators, and a blurring of the lines between political seriousness and entertainment are some of the characteristics that define political communication.[17] This area is not only hesitant to engage in endeavors that aim to maintain and gain power, but it is also closely linked to many other aspects of politics, including the symbolic legitimation of authority, the dissemination of citizen demands and interests, and the elucidation of alternative options in policymaking.[18].

In any case, regarding democracy in order to achieve particular aims and goals, political actors use a variety of communication techniques in this sense-making process of messaging. 2) Non-politicians, such as voters and columnists, communicate with these legislative actors using a variety of media. 3) News reports, editorials, columns, features, and numerous other media debates about politics are used to communicate about government actors and their actions. Each of the three authors agrees that political public spheres should be formed.[19]

Medialization; the power game dynamic between Political Communication and Democracy

Democracy is better than a system of governance that permits peaceful disagreement. Today, democracy is a widely accepted political concept. Democracy requires free and fair elections, and a true democratic system must include significant components such as the rule of law, freedom of human rights, and constitutional protection. Democracy does not create a utopia and opposes the eradication of conflict in political communication. Instead, it affirms that nepotism is inevitable in a society and that the goal is to keep these conflicts from degenerating into violent conflict. A democracy needs traditional institutions to accomplish that. The mass media is one of the most important institutions. Regarding Pakistan's

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[14] Norris, ibid 1-3.

[15] Katrin Voltmer, *The Mass Media and Political Communication in New Democracies* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 5–7.

[16] Norris, Pippa, 2014, *Encyclopedia of social sciences*, Harvard university publication, pp 1-22.

[17] Liesbet van Zoonen, *Entertaining the Citizen: When Politics and Popular Culture Converge* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), pp. 45–47.

[18] Brants, K, &Voltmer, K, *Political Communication in Postmodern Democracy Challenging the Primacy of Politics*, Palgrave macmillan publishers, pp 1-38.

[19] Brants, K, &Voltmer, K, (2011), *political communication in post-modern democracy*, Palgrave Macmillan publishers, pp 4-10.

political history, it first emerged as an ideological state, and its people have been waiting for systems that can restore the real driving force behind the country's existence. Regretfully, the political elite, bureaucracy, and military had not fulfilled their expected role. Nonetheless, the mass media is having a significant impact on how societies evolve. The expansion and effective penetration of the political communication system into all the various general aspects of the country is necessary for the process of development.[20]

Media Democracy; re-categorization of key influences

Democracy and the mass media are always linked to one another. Because political communication allows opinion leaders to shape public perceptions of a nation's political system and political leaders, the media is regarded as a mirror of society. Media democracy is both a concept and an advocacy movement that seeks to make the mainstream media more pluralistic and reflective of a wide range of viewpoints and ideas rather than merely disseminating and producing news stories with entertainment and informational themes and routine political, economic, and social articles.[21]

The concept of media democracy is complicated, but it basically means that the media are the conduit for this information and should respond to public interest. The mass media have become less interested and effective in carrying out this role because of strong commercial pressures and ownership concentration, which weakens democracy by preventing voters and citizens from engaging intelligently in discussions of public policy.[22] Because of this, the media should be more democratic since it is fundamentally a reflection of people's opinions, likes, dislikes, and, most importantly, interests. According to a fundamental principle of media democracy in recent years, the concentration of media ownership in the hands of a small number of individuals and companies has led to a reduction in the diversity of voices and opinions heard in the mass media, a deterioration in the news media's ability to act as the public watchdog and conduct investigative reporting, a rise in the commercialization of news and information, and an increasing emphasis on the bottom line, which prioritizes celebrity endorsements over thought-provoking conversations.[23]

However, political communication is essential to promoting democracy. The types of media that are common in the kingdom are determined, however, by the nature of media organizations themselves (e.g., the policies established by media proprietorships) and the working conditions of journalists and financiers (who are essentially the shareholders of communication clustered in any state). The media, among other things, protects human rights, informs voters, promotes tolerance,

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[20]Voltmer, Katrin, (2006), *Mass media and political communication in new democracies*. London: Routledge. Pp, 273.

[21] Curran, J., *Media and Democracy* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 102–104.

[22] Brian McNair, *An Introduction to Political Communication* (6th ed., London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 8–10. C. Edwin Baker, *Media Concentration and Democracy: Why Ownership Matters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 3–6.

[23]Sajjad, Malik, N.D, *what is Media Democracy*, media democratic society for alternative media and research, Friedrig Ebert Stiftung ltd, pp 1-7.

influences public opinion, and guarantees the transparency and accountability of the government. But after that, different social groups control and sway them. However, the media can also have a detrimental impact by engaging in anti-democratic actions. They may lead to fear division and violence. They may contribute to democratic decay rather than fostering it. Additionally, the media facilitates communication between the governed and the governors and provides a platform for public discussions that result in better policy and decision-making.[24]

The legitimacy of Political Communication approaches in democracy

Notably, two primary political communication approaches are specifically utilized to comprehend the democratic process. These methods can be summed up as comparative political communication and strategic political communication. Strategic political communication can be used to achieve goals during election campaigns or in the policy-making process. It can also be used to achieve goals like influencing media coverage and fostering greater unity within the company."[25]. However, comparing nation-states as the subject of analysis is becoming increasingly problematic given the rapid growth of cosmopolitan communications and trans-border information flow. The central idea of the comparative study of political communications is the opposite of this. Although it is generally believed to focus more specifically on contrasting spatial units, it can also be used to refer to local communities, media markets, and global regions. Despite its increasing limitations, this strategy remains effective in the third era of digital communication due to the complexity and fragmentation of contemporary channels.[26]

Conceptual Typologies of Comparative Communication

As they are parallel to one another and play a vital role in visualizing media participation, typologies are essential to achieving the goals and objectives of the aforementioned comparative political approach to democratization.[27] Thus, the categorical typologies and the current conceptual typologies are separated into two distinct typologies. Similar to classifying and distinguishing the various regimes that exist within each sovereign state, the earlier tradition of comparative political communications focused on developing and reflecting media system typologies.[28] Comparing public service, state-owned, and commercial broadcasting systems serves as an example of the persistent features of the media landscape. This method is typically employed in the contemporary communications era. Drawing

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[24]Mcnair, Brain, 2011, *Political Communication, Media, and Democracy, an Introduction to political communication*, Roultedge ltd, pp 15-26.

[25]Shami, Swera, &Ashfaq, Ayesha, 2018, *Strategic Political Communication*, Public Relations, Reputation Management & Relationship Cultivation through Social Media, journal of the research society of Pakistan, vol, 55 (2), pp 139-154.

[26]Esser, Frank, 2016, *Comparing Political Communication; an update, National center of Competence in research challenges to democracy in the 21st century*, Swiss national science foundation, pp 1-36.

[27] Daniel C. Hallin & Paolo Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 10–11.

[28] Katrin Voltmer, *The Mass Media and Political Communication in New Democracies.* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 14–16. See more James Curran, Media and Power (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 135–137.

comparisons between the global television and radio broadcasting landscape was helpful. have emerged in the third era of digital communications, but have proven to be highly problematic due to the multifaceted and fragmented nature of modern conduits.[29] The second major typology in political communication is called Existing Conceptual Typologies. They have a strong normative component and are culturally specific. Because classification schemas are hard to operationalize, they continue to be descriptive.

All empirical and normative analyses of political communications are, in short, comparative if this is interpreted as involving conflicting units, such as media effects (like framing and agenda-setting), media channel types (like TV versus the internet), or program genres (like news or soap operas).[30]

Public service beyond Broadcasting: Autonomy and Accountability

Public broadcasters are regarded as agents of the media, which is widely acknowledged as the most appropriate medium for people's voices. A key component of media democracy, public broadcasting serves as a popular counterbalance to commercial media. The term "public broadcasters" frequently refers to one of the primary subsets of political communication in both public and private institutions, which explains the oversight role and authority they possess.[31]

In general Politicians who hold the center of the political system and media professionals, particularly journalists who edit news, commentary, and reports, are the two main actors involved in the political communication sphere and are both the addressees and coauthors of public opinions. Without them, public broadcasting could not function.

Since public broadcasters have always successfully performed the watchdog role by examining the actions of governments and bringing attention to people's problems, their role in democratic governance in Pakistani history cannot be denied. They remain a cornerstone of contemporary democratic theory and practice. It has increased awareness, reinforced the public conversation about the continuation of democracy and judicial independence, fostered national unity, and influenced public opinion on matters of diplomatic association, making it both an authoritative and unlikely determinant of information down the pike.[32]

It has made numerous contributions to strengthening and deepening the democratic process in Pakistan. First, during the 2018 general election campaign, a number of news outlets successfully created a political and emotional connection with people outside the nation, including Pakistani diasporas, for the cause of independence. Second, the broad casting agencies act as an effective opposition while also acting

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[29] Paolo Mancini, "*Comparative Media Systems: New Directions Beyond Hallin and Mancini*," International Journal of Press/Politics, 17(1), 2012, pp. 136–137.

[30] Norris, P, 2010, political communication for comparative politics, oxford university press, pp 1-41.

[31] Larsen, Hakon, 2014, The Legitimacy of Public Service Broadcasting in the 21st Century The Case of Scandinavia, Nordicom Review 35 (2), pp. 7-65.

[32] R, Adam, F., Mcfadyen,s, & Hoskins, C, 2001, public service broadcasting beyond 2000: is there a future for public broad casting?, Canadian journal of communication, 26(1), pp 3-15.

as a watchdog over the government in partnership with civil society. Third, the public broadcaster's watchdog role in guaranteeing maximum fair play and discouraging malpractices and transparency in national elections is crucial, especially in light of the need for electoral reforms and the flaws in Pakistan's electoral system. Fourth, media coverage of national issues fosters national consensus on priorities and policy paths for problem solving.[33] Pakistani broadcasting services are criticized for their lack of professionalism and uniqueness in spite of these accomplishments.

Re-connected the Strength of political communication and democracy in Pakistan

The regulating laws and official censorship in countries where political communication is governed by the government, are inherently conservative, or are experiencing violence and conflict prevent them from fulfilling their various functions. However, in comparison, a state such as Pakistan in sociopolitical affairs, political communication has become a very potent and influential instrument. The significance, however, is more public-oriented and mostly owned by private organizations and agencies that are less influenced by the government. Although its influence is undeniable in democracies, media policies, media personalities, and media content can either directly or indirectly affect the audience.

Table 2: *Comparative analysis of Press Freedom and Democracy Score*

Country	Press Freedom Rank (2025, RSF)	Press Freedom Score 2025	Democracy / Freedom Score (2025, FH)
India	151st	32.96	100/63
Pakistan	158nd	29.62	100/32
United States	57th	66.59	100/84

This comparative table shows how closely press freedom and democratic quality are related in three important states in 2025. With a low press freedom score of 32.96 and a ranking of 151st, India exhibits a marked decline in media independence. This is reflected in its lower Freedom House democracy score of 63/100, which places it in the Partly Free category. Pakistan performs even worse, ranking 158th with a democracy score of just 32 out of 100 and a press freedom score of 29.62, highlighting severe structural limitations on political and media rights. With a press freedom ranking of 57th and a higher score of 66.59, as well as a democracy score of 84/100, the United States, on the other hand, performs significantly better despite its difficulties. The U.S. maintains comparatively stronger democratic institutions despite concerns about press freedom, while Pakistan and India serve as examples

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[33] Newton, Keen, 2016, Public Service and Commercial Broadcasting: Impacts on Politics and Society, The Political Quarterly, john Wiley and son's publishers, Vol. 87, No. 1, pp 1-8.

of cases of democratic erosion linked to media repression. This comparison implies that weaker press freedom strongly correlates with weaker democratic governance.

Pakistan is one of those countries where the term "democracy" has been used as a trademark, but sadly, true democracy has never existed here because the country has experienced both military regimes and protracted temporary democracies because of the interests of various political and religious groups.[34][35] Therefore, political communication is an essential component of any functioning democracy, regardless of the circumstances in Pakistan. It makes it possible for the nation to conduct mandatory self-analysis; it aids the younger generation in developing new, independent viewpoints and ideas that can significantly advance the ongoing democratization process.[36]

Conclusion

To sum up, the development of political communication in the twenty-first century has significantly altered the characteristics of democracy, especially in places like Pakistan where the consolidation of democracy is still precarious. Though it has also created new problems of sensationalism, elite domination, and unequal access, the modernization of communication technologies has increased opportunities for participation, information access, and the visibility of diverse voices. The study demonstrates how strategic political communication, mediated through both traditional and digital platforms, is crucial in redefining the relationship between citizens, political elites, and the media as well as in influencing policy discussions and public perceptions.

At the same time, independent media organizations and public service broadcasters play a crucial role in preserving pluralism and supplying trustworthy information for democratic participation. In the end, political communication has improved how the state and society interact, but it has also changed what democracy means. This highlights the necessity of more robust institutional frameworks, media accountability, and citizen literacy to make sure that communication promotes democratic strengthening rather than deterioration.

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[34] Ayesha Jalal, Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia: A Comparative and Historical Perspective (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 89–91.

[35] Christophe Jaffrelot, Pakistan: Nationalism without a Nation? (London: Zed Books, 2002), pp. 221–223.

[36] Shami, P., & Ashfaq, A. (2018). Political communication and democratic consolidation in Pakistan. Pakistan Journal of History and Culture, 39(1), 45–47.

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