

Shaping Minds: The Role of Mass Media in Constructing Public Policy Opinion and Decision Making

Sarmila Bagale

M. Phil from Tribhuvan University
sarmilakbagale@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-5995-6233>

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Abstract

This study investigates how media influence government public opinion and policy-making, drawing on behaviour and rational choice theory. In modern democracies, public opinion plays a critical role in shaping government policies, governmental decisions, and social movements. It both reflects societal sentiments and is influenced by formal and informal institutions, with the media—ranging from newspapers, radio, and television to digital platforms—serving as a central actor. Often described as the fourth pillar of democracy, the media mobilizes citizens, fosters dialogue, exposes injustices, and monitors power, shaping narratives that influence collective perceptions. However, misuse of media can undermine democratic processes. Using a focus group discussion approach with randomly selected participants from Bharatpur Metropolitan City communities, this paper examines the mechanisms through which media affect political understanding and decision-making. Findings indicate that mass media significantly shape public opinion, set societal agendas, and influence perceptions of government initiatives. The study further highlights the growing importance of social media platforms in mobilizing citizens and disseminating policy information. The study concludes that media remain indispensable in informing the public and guiding perceptions of governance and development programs. It recommends that government communication strategies incorporate local dialects to enhance comprehension and engagement across both urban and rural populations.

Keywords: Decision-making, government policy-making, media influence, mobilize, public opinion

Introduction

In modern democracies, public opinion significantly influences government policy, social movements, and political accountability through constructing public opinion. It shapes both formal governmental institutions and societal forces. The media—encompassing newspapers, radio, television, and digital platforms—serves as a central actor, often called the fourth pillar of democracy, by mobilizing citizens, fostering dialogue, exposing injustice, and monitoring power

This study examines how social media influences public opinion compared to traditional media. In the digital age, social media shapes perceptions and engagement

through algorithmic curation, user-generated content, and network effects. By analyzing these mechanisms alongside traditional media's impact, the research highlights the evolving dynamics of public opinion formation, offering insights into how information dissemination and societal engagement are increasingly mediated by digital platforms. In any vibrant democracy, public opinion serves as a foundational pillar of governance, reflecting societal values and influencing policy formulation, lawmaking, and the election of officials. When collective opinion reaches a tipping point, governments are often compelled to respond, highlighting the significance of an informed citizenry. Bagale (2025) agrees, "Media, since its inception, has played an exceptional role in connecting people and communities. It serves as a mass communication tool to share information and influence emotions, thoughts, and behaviors" (p. 120). Since its inception, the media has played a vital role in connecting people and communities. It functions as a tool for mass communication, shaping emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. Over time, it has shifted from a supply-driven model to a participatory platform, allowing millions to influence discourse and policy. In Nepal, journalists illuminate both local and regional lives, addressing public concerns and shaping opinion. Globally, the media enables rapid coordination of collective actions and holds governments accountable. By providing essential information, it fosters democratic participation, civic responsibility, and public awareness, especially during crises, influencing both social and political developments.

In this context, the media plays a pivotal role as the channel through which information flows between the people and state and vice versa. Traditionally celebrated, the media's mandate has been to inform, educate, and hold those in power accountable. From early print newspapers advocating independence movements to televised debates shaping electoral outcomes, media influence has been profound and far-reaching. The rise of 24-hour news cycles, social media platforms, and algorithm-driven content has complicated the landscape. Information is more accessible than ever, yet the proliferation of misinformation, sensationalism, and ideologically polarized content presents new challenges. Media is no longer monolithic but exists as a diverse array of platforms—print, broadcast, digital, and social media—each capable of shaping public opinion. The mass media wields significant power in disseminating innovations and mobilizing people toward causes that benefit the nation. It serves as a critical tool for educating and engaging the public, encouraging active participation in societal and political initiatives (Anorue et al., 2011). As noted, the impact of communication depends on the issue, audience, and context, as well as the channels through which it is delivered. Broadcast media, particularly radio and television, play a central role in shaping public opinion and influencing political decision-making.

Media exposure—defined as the frequency and intensity with which individuals encounter and retain media content—has a profound effect on shaping perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors (Coyne et al., 2019). By providing information, raising awareness, and facilitating education, media enables individuals to understand global, social, and environmental issues (Huang, 2016; Iheanacho et al., 2021; Okoye et al., 2022). Exposure to media not only informs but also influences behaviour, as channels such as television, the internet, and newspapers remain key sources of knowledge on topics like climate change,

natural disasters, and public health crises (Wei et al., 2014; Emetumah et al., 2023). In political contexts, public opinion is central to guiding citizen behaviour and influencing the direction of political events. Mass media amplifies this influence by providing a platform for opinions to be shared broadly, particularly in privately owned outlets free from government manipulation (Jumbo et al., 2022). Public opinion also plays a crucial role in policy formation, reflecting citizens' responses to governmental actions and inactions (Owolabi, 2019). Both in democratic and authoritarian systems, political groups actively cultivate public opinion, underscoring its importance as the backbone of a nation's political culture.

Public opinion refers to the collective attitudes, beliefs, and sentiments held by a population regarding issues, events, policies, or individuals. It reflects the views and preferences of society at a given time, influenced by factors such as media coverage, personal experiences, cultural values, socioeconomic status, and political ideology. Childs (1940) defines it as: "Public opinion is any collection of individual opinions, regardless of the degree of agreement or uniformity. The degree of uniformity is a matter to be investigated, not something to be arbitrarily set up as a condition for the existence of public opinion" (p., 58). Public opinion is typically measured through surveys, polls, and other research methods to gauge societal sentiments. In democratic societies, it plays a crucial role by informing policymakers, politicians, and decision-makers about the preferences and priorities of the populace, shaping public policy, social movements, and electoral outcomes. As Gadzaliand et.al.(2023) emphasizes, "Public opinion plays a central role in the democratic process and decision making in society. Governments, public institutions, non-governmental organisations, and even companies often take public opinion into account when formulating policies, developing products or services, and assessing responses to certain initiatives" (p. 716). The rise of social media has profoundly transformed public opinion formation. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram serve as central spaces for the exchange of ideas, perspectives, and news.

Social media enables users to engage directly with content through likes, shares, comments, and retweets, influencing the flow of public discourse. Algorithmic curation tailors content to individual preferences, often creating echo chambers that reinforce existing beliefs. The instantaneous nature of social media allows rapid dissemination of information, amplifying certain narratives and mobilizing public opinion around specific issues. However, this influence also presents challenges, including misinformation, polarization, and selective exposure. Despite these risks, social media remains a powerful force in shaping societal attitudes, political behavior, and cultural norms. Its impact underscores the evolving nature of public opinion in the digital era, highlighting both opportunities for engagement and the need for critical media literacy. Against this backdrop, this study examines the influence of mass media in constructing public opinion and decision-making in Bharatpur Metropolitan City, highlighting the media's pivotal role in shaping both public perception and policy outcomes. This study examines how media constructs and influence public opinion, the mechanisms behind its impact, and the implications for democratic participation and governance. By integrating theoretical frameworks and empirical insights, it highlights the media's dual role as both a democratic

enabler and a potential tool of manipulation, emphasizing the need for ethical journalism, media literacy, and regulatory vigilance in the digital age.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study are:

- i. Evaluate the perception of Bharatpur Metropolitan City residents towards government policies projected through the mass media.
- ii. Examine the media's effects in constructing public policy opinion and decision-making.

Literature review

Bagale (2025) examined that Nepali news media significantly shape government policy by framing issues, setting agendas, and influencing both public opinion and decision-makers. By applying mediatization and decision-framing theories, she shows how media amplify citizens' voices, foster engagement, and enhance transparency. Her empirical analysis—interviewing policymakers and analyzing media content—reveals that media in Nepal not only inform and educate, but also mobilize civic participation, thus playing a critical role in policy debates and democratic governance. Her assumption is “As mass media becomes one of the most relied-upon sources for delivering information, it has increased awareness and fostered engagement, and the rise in cognitive and political awareness among the population has resulted in an increasingly vocal and participatory citizenry, whose views—expressed openly and often on media—play a crucial role in shaping political outcomes” (p. 121). Happer and Philo (2020) examined the role of media in shaping public beliefs, attitudes, and its broader influence on social change. Drawing on multiple empirical studies, their findings indicate that the media significantly shape public debate by setting agendas and directing attention toward specific issues. However, the study also revealed that the media often restricts the information available to audiences, limiting understanding and excluding alternative solutions from public discourse. The research concludes that both traditional and new media are crucial for disseminating public information and fostering societal development. Similarly, Owolabi (2019) explored the role of mass media in forming and influencing public opinion. Using content analysis of secondary data, the study highlighted the media's power in shaping public perspectives and recommended reducing political bias while ensuring equitable information flow between the government and citizens. Chi-Hong (2023) investigated how public perception of media and attitudes toward news influence altruistic behavior. The study found that media exposure, credibility, and social influence significantly shape individuals' perceptions of media content, with exposure having the greatest effect. Moreover, positive attitudes toward media were associated with increased altruistic behavior, with attitude serving as a mediating factor. Abu (2023) examined social media's role in shaping public opinion and economic decisions using qualitative methods, including literature review and content analysis. Findings demonstrated that social media facilitates interaction, information sharing, and discussion, significantly influencing collective opinions and economic behavior in a digital age. Remoortere and Vliegthart (2023) studied media influence on politicians' popularity, linking media coverage and tone to polling outcomes. Their research

revealed that media visibility impacts popularity, particularly for lower-ranking politicians, and that negative coverage reduces popularity more than positive news increases it, highlighting a negativity bias in political reporting.

Collectively, these studies underscore the mass media's pervasive influence in shaping public opinion, social behavior, political perception, and economic decision-making, reinforcing its central role in contemporary society. The role of media in shaping public opinion is deeply intertwined with political development and democratic expression. During the Enlightenment and the American and French revolutions, print media—pamphlets, newspapers, and newsletters—emerged as vital tools for disseminating revolutionary ideas, mobilizing public support, and holding elites accountable. These early forms of media fostered political dialogue, collective identity, and the foundation of public opinion as a political force. The evolution of media technologies—from print to radio, television, and digital platforms—has greatly expanded its reach and influence. In the 20th century, radio enabled leaders like Roosevelt to communicate directly with citizens through 'fireside chats,' building trust and shaping public consensus during crises. Television further amplified this impact by offering visual storytelling that influenced political perception and civic engagement. Media has also played a pivotal role in shaping ideological struggles and social movements.

During World War II, propaganda mobilized public sentiment and constructed national narratives. In the Cold War, media became a battleground for ideological supremacy, with Western outlets promoting democracy and consumer culture while Soviet media reinforced socialist values. Domestically, media coverage of the American Civil Rights Movement, including televised images of police brutality in Birmingham and Selma, galvanized public opinion, generating moral outrage and pressuring lawmakers to enact reforms. From revolutionary pamphlets to digital platforms, the media have consistently documented and catalyzed social change, amplified marginalized voices, and shaped historical consciousness. Its historical trajectory underscores its unparalleled ability to influence political realities, public ideology, and collective action—highlighting both its enduring power and the challenges it poses in today's digital era.

Evolution of public opinion and social media

The concept of public opinion, while seemingly straightforward, has evolved significantly over centuries, shaped by shifts in communication, governance, and societal structures. Its trajectory reflects changes in human interaction, information dissemination, and the functioning of democracy. Understanding this evolution sheds light on collective decision-making, political participation, and the influence of media and technology on societal attitudes. In ancient Greece and Rome, philosophers like Plato and Aristotle explored the role of the public in governance. Plato emphasized rule by "philosopher kings" in the public's interest, while Aristotle examined the collective will of citizens within the polis. During the Enlightenment, thinkers such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau advanced ideas of individual rights, social contracts, and government accountability, laying the foundation for modern democracy. The 19th and 20th centuries saw the rise of modern democratic practices, expanded suffrage, and mass media, which amplified public influence on policymakers. Tools like opinion polling emerged, offering insights into societal

attitudes. Mass communication—from newspapers and radio to television and the internet—further shaped public perception, framing issues and influencing discourse.

Arnold-Forster's in his article "*Walter Lippmann and Public Opinion*," offers a nuanced reassessment of Lippmann's political thought. Rather than portraying him merely as a technocratic elitist, Arnold-Forster (2023) argues that Lippmann developed a *social-psychological* theory of opinion formation that challenged liberal-constitutionalist democratic models. He situates Lippmann historically — shaped by World War I, modern mass media, and psychological theory — showing how Lippmann's skepticism about rational, fully informed publics led him to call for expert "intelligence bureaus" to interpret complex social realities. Chomsky and Herman's *Manufacturing Consent* (1988) analyzes how mass media serve elite interests, shaping public opinion through structural biases rather than overt propaganda. They introduce the "propaganda model," showing how ownership, advertising, sourcing, flak, and ideology filter news, limiting dissenting perspectives. The work critically reveals the media's role in sustaining political and economic power, challenging assumptions of a free and independent press. The article deepens our understanding of Lippmann not just as a critic but as a democratic thinker wrestling earnestly with modernity's scale and complexity. In the 20th century, social psychologist Lippmann (1913) studied the cognitive and social processes of opinion formation, exploring propaganda, stereotypes, and group influence.

Today, public opinion remains central to political theory, sociology, and communication studies, reflecting the dynamic interaction of individual beliefs, social forces, and institutional structures in shaping collective attitudes. The formation of public opinion is a complex and dynamic process shaped by multiple interrelated factors. Media, both traditional and digital, plays a central role by framing issues, disseminating information, and influencing public discourse. Social interactions within communities and personal experiences expose individuals to diverse perspectives, challenging or reinforcing preexisting beliefs. Cultural norms, values, education, and political ideologies provide +.context and guidance for opinion formation, while economic status, demographic characteristics, and psychological biases further shape perceptions. External events, such as crises or political developments, can rapidly shift public sentiment, underscoring the fluid nature of public opinion. As Tocqueville observed, once an opinion takes root in a democratic society, it tends to persist and reinforce itself, demonstrating the enduring power of collective belief. Agenda-setting theory suggests that media shape what issues the public considers important, acting as a gatekeeper of discourse rather than dictating opinions. Framing theory builds on this, showing that the way media present facts, narratives, and language influences interpretation, as in portraying a protest as a 'riot' versus a 'demonstration.' Spiral of silence theory highlights how dominant media narratives pressure individuals to suppress dissenting views, creating the illusion of consensus. Democratic theory views media as a public sphere for informed debate, supporting participation and deliberation, but commercialization and political influence can distort this role, limiting genuine citizen engagement and critical discussion.

In the digital age, social media has become a critical arena for shaping public opinion. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram facilitate rapid information

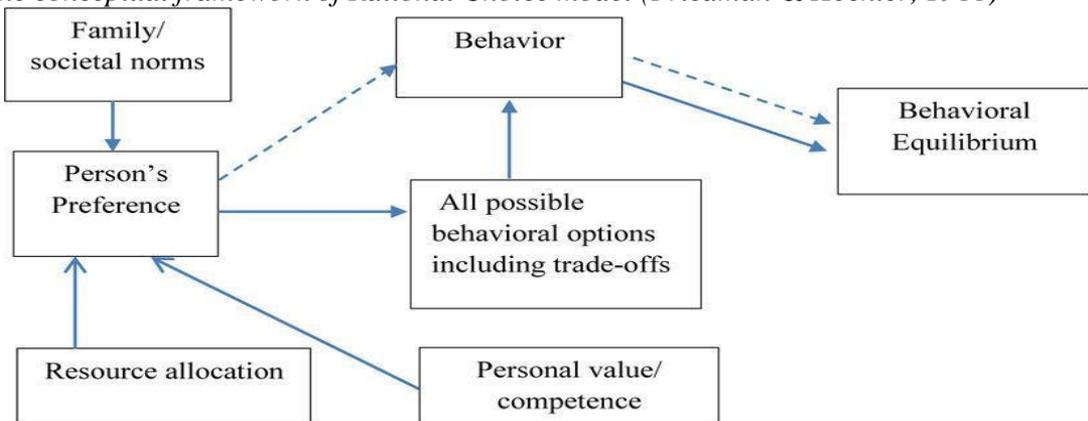
dissemination, enabling users to share news, ideas, and perspectives widely. Social media also influences agenda-setting, highlighting specific topics through trends, hashtags, and viral content. Algorithms can create echo chambers and filter bubbles, reinforcing existing beliefs and limiting exposure to alternative viewpoints. At the same time, social media empowers individuals, activists, and organizations to amplify their voices, mobilize support, and engage in public discourse. However, challenges such as misinformation, polarization, and manipulation pose risks to the integrity of opinion formation. Overall, social media's pervasive influence highlights the importance of media literacy, critical engagement, and responsible use to ensure informed, inclusive, and balanced public discourse in contemporary society.

Theoretical framework

This study is anchored on rational choice theory. Rational choice theory asserts that political behavior is best understood through “value-neutral” assumptions, which view individuals as self-interested, purposeful, and rational actors seeking to maximize personal benefits. This paper traces public opinion theories from Lippmann and Dewey to contemporary psychological approaches, emphasizing that understanding media effects requires examining both audience reception and how media content is produced and distributed, a process increasingly complex in today's rapidly evolving media landscape.

Figure 1

The conceptual framework of Rational Choice model (Friedman & Hechter, 1988)



Grounded in methodological individualism, it treats assumptions about human nature as empirically observable. The theory argues that self-interest is a fundamental aspect of human behavior, but this perspective can conflict with the ideals of normative democratic theory. It often produces a political system resistant to change and biased against pursuing the public interest. Its relevance to this study lies in the implication that if citizens of Bharatpur Metropolitan City overcome tribal loyalties and vote for credible leaders committed to effective policies, the country can achieve meaningful development.

Methodology

This study followed the focus group discussion from the research area, i.e. Bharatpur Metropolitan City, especially from ward no. 7, 11, 13 and 19. This design entails a group interview of people with similar interests. Tegan (2023) elucidated that a focus group is a small group of people to answer questions in a moderated setting. From these four research areas in Bharatpur Metropolitan City, 5 opinion leaders were randomly selected from the villages; i.e. 20 opinion leaders were discussed as a group. The focus group tool was used for data collection. Group size significantly affects discussion quality; scholars suggest neither very small nor very large groups. Focus groups typically include 4–10 participants (Ritchie & Lewis, 2000), though some recommend 6–12 (Morgan, 2002). Appropriate size ensures manageability and sufficient data (Creswell, 2012). Focus group discussions collect participants' opinions on a defined topic, revealing real-world perspectives through open, balanced dialogue (Neville, 2007). They also highlight how social interaction shapes viewpoints and produces data through group conversation (Ritchie & Lewis, 2000). Finally, the analysis was done using discussion building technique.

Data analysis

The discussion findings indicate that residents of Bharatpur Metropolitan City have broad access to multiple mass media platforms, including radio, television, newspapers, and especially social media. Their high level of exposure shows that they actively rely on these channels to gather information about civic issues and government activities. Most participants shared favorable views of government policies as presented through the media. They felt that media coverage generally helps them understand policy goals and implications. However, a smaller group of respondents pointed out that despite clear communication, difficulties often arise during the actual implementation of policies, which can limit their effectiveness and reduce public confidence.

A recurring point in the discussion was the increasing significance of social media as a primary information source. Many urban residents in the research area prefer online platforms because of their accessibility, speed, and interactive features. This trend suggests that the government should strengthen its presence across all media forms—traditional and digital—to improve public awareness, promote understanding, and shape informed public opinion. Overall, the analysis shows that mass media play a largely positive role in shaping residents' attitudes toward government policies. Effective and continuous media engagement can help keep citizens informed, enhance trust, and encourage support for policy initiatives. Social media has transformed communication and public engagement. It enables people to learn how online platforms shape public opinion and influence economic decisions through literature reviews and content analysis. It shows that social media significantly affects collective views, enabling users to share information, interact, and participate in discussions that guide perceptions and economic behaviour.

Television

Television serves as a powerful medium that transmits both shared and unshared information, shaping social understanding through diverse programming. As schedules draw from dominant cultural traditions, television distills these elements and redistributes

them to wide audiences, making certain ideas and viewpoints widely shared simply through exposure. Its distributive function allows viewers to access varied lifestyles, interests, and global perspectives that they might never encounter otherwise. Television's international reach gives it cultural significance due to its scale, resources, and ability to unify millions around common narratives. Although influential, television does not replace other cultural institutions; rather, it complements them by broadening collective experiences.

Radio

Radio has long played an essential role in shaping public opinion and cultural tastes. Historically, radio shifted from government control to becoming a platform for national culture, folklore, and later diverse programming. Economic and political challenges, especially in the 1980s, hindered its cultural development, yet radio continued expanding as small stations were absorbed by larger companies seeking financial stability. This consolidation led to the rise of influential metropolitan stations and professionalization within the industry. Many challenges in broadcasting stem from early neglect of radio's potential to advance social importance and technological progress. Despite fluctuations, radio remains a significant cultural and communicative medium.

New Media

The rapid expansion and diversification of mass media—intensified by technological advances like cable television—has transformed information consumption. Specialized channels now offer educational content, home instruction, and niche-interest programming, creating an overwhelming abundance for audiences. Television sets increasingly function as home communication hubs, while video technologies enable new social uses beyond traditional broadcasting. This 'paradox of plenty' raises questions about who selects content, for whom it is chosen, and how viewing behaviors vary socially. Effective research models must integrate demographic and analytical variables to determine whether media offerings adequately serve society, influence it, or merely reflect existing social structures.

Discussion of findings

Mass media is a powerful force in identifying the perception of common people in modern culture. It shapes how people think, feel, and understand the policy of the local government. Constant exposure to messages from television, advertisements, and magazines not only promotes products but also influences values and priorities. The media creates celebrities and often distorts reality while audiences grow increasingly dependent on it for information and entertainment. Its influence is debated, as news can shape perceptions more than simply report events. Sociologists argue that media content is socially constructed by interest groups, advertisers, and sources. Major events, such as constructing City Hall and Gautam Buddha Cricket Stadium, show how media can promote local and national attitudes. Despite concerns, news coverage can also inspire social awareness and change.

Mass media strongly shape public opinion by defining which issues matter and how they should be interpreted. Since people rely on news for information, the way stories are

framed influences what they think about and how they judge political figures and events. Through agenda setting, the media determines topics of public focus, especially when audiences lack background knowledge. Media framing can shape perceptions of politicians, highlight conflicts, or create a ‘bandwagon’ effect by suggesting majority opinion. Although media influence is more limited on deeply held beliefs, it significantly affects attitudes toward current events, controversies, and political actors by shaping impressions and expectations.

The analysis from the discussion shows that most residents of Bharatpur Metropolitan City have extensive access to a wide range of mass media platforms and are highly exposed to media content daily. Participants indicated that they routinely rely on radio, television, newspapers, and especially the social media extensions of these outlets to obtain information about government activities, community issues, and broader national events. This pattern of media consumption is consistent with the findings of Chi-Horng (2023), who reported that media exposure, credibility, and social influence significantly shape individuals’ perceptions of news and information. Among these factors, media exposure was identified as the strongest predictor of how people understand and interpret mass media messages. Chi-Horng further noted that positive perceptions and attitudes toward media content can encourage altruistic behavior, with attitudes functioning as a mediator between perception and civic-minded action.

Within the group discussion, most residents expressed positive views regarding local government policies as communicated through mass media. They emphasized that media platforms provide clarity on policy goals and help citizens stay informed about ongoing developments. Nevertheless, a smaller group of respondents noted that policy implementation challenges frequently hinder the intended outcomes, creating a gap between the communicated messages and real-world experiences. This highlights the need for government agencies to use media more strategically—not only to disseminate information but also to address public concerns and strengthen trust. This observation aligns with Abu (2023), who emphasized the role of social media in shaping public opinion, influencing economic decisions, and enabling widespread interaction and collective discussion among citizens.

Interestingly, respondents also recognised that mass media has a generally positive impact on shaping residents’ attitudes toward government policies, not only in Bharatpur but also in similar contexts, such as those in Bharatpur, where similar media dynamics were noted. They agreed that continuous use of diverse media channels is essential for ensuring that citizens remain well-informed, which in turn fosters trust in government actions and enhances public support for policy initiatives. This conclusion echoes the work of Happer and Philo (2020), who argued that mass media play a central role in constructing public beliefs and attitudes and can effectively guide public attention toward specific social and political issues. However, they also acknowledged limitations in the range of information that media outlets provide, suggesting that while media can shape opinion, it may not always present a fully comprehensive picture. Overall, the discussion demonstrates that both traditional and digital media remain crucial tools for disseminating public information, fostering opinion formation, and supporting societal development. For government

institutions, leveraging these platforms consistently and efficiently is vital for promoting policy awareness, building trust, and encouraging informed civic participation.

Conclusion and recommendations

Building on the earlier analysis, the conclusion reinforces the central role of mass media—especially social media—in shaping public understanding and attitudes toward government policies. As demonstrated in the discussions with residents of Bharatpur Metropolitan City, citizens actively rely on a broad spectrum of media platforms to stay informed. This mirrors the findings of Chi-Horng (2023), Abu (2023), and Happer and Philo (2020), who collectively emphasize media’s capacity to guide perception, construct meaning, and influence public engagement. Social media, in particular, has expanded this influence by enabling real-time communication, interactive participation, and wide-reaching dissemination of information. Residents in the earlier analysis highlighted social media as an increasingly preferred source, reflecting how these platforms now function as essential spaces for opinion formation and civic dialogue. However, as noted, challenges such as misinformation, algorithmic bias, and echo chambers severely undermine the quality of public discourse. These risks parallel broader scholarly concerns about the media’s dual nature—its ability to empower and educate, but also manipulate, polarize, and distort.

The study's findings underline that the media operates as a double-edged instrument. On one hand, it informs citizens, enhances transparency, amplifies marginalized voices, and supports collective understanding of government initiatives. On the other hand, poor policy implementation, sensationalism, political influence, and declining trust can weaken its democratic potential. Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, deep-fakes, and algorithmic curation intensify these dilemmas, making it harder for audiences to distinguish credible information from misleading content. To address these challenges, strengthening media literacy becomes essential. Citizens must develop the skills to critically evaluate information, identify bias, and navigate complex media environments. Complementary policy interventions—such as enforcing journalistic ethics, supporting independent media, ensuring transparent fact-checking, and incorporating civic education—are crucial for safeguarding democratic dialogue. Ultimately, the earlier findings and this conclusion converge on a key insight: media remains a powerful but ethically fraught force. Its influence can support informed citizenship and democratic engagement, provided it is used responsibly and critically.

Recommendations

In line with the results, the following recommendations are put forward.

1. Promote media literacy so citizens can critically evaluate information, recognize bias, and avoid misinformation.
2. Strengthen journalistic ethics to enhance accuracy, credibility, and responsible reporting across media platforms.
3. Support independent media outlets to reduce political influence and maintain diverse, trustworthy information sources.
4. Enhance fact-checking mechanisms to counter misinformation, deep-fakes, and misleading online content.

5. Encourage responsible use of social media to ensure constructive engagement, reduce polarization, and improve public dialogue.
6. Develop policies addressing algorithmic bias and echo chambers to improve the integrity of digital information environments.
7. Integrate civic and media education into public programs to foster informed, engaged, and democratically active citizens.

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