

# Take India as an example to explore the role of media in policy communication

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**Abstract.** This paper examines the role of media in the dissemination and implementation of public policy in India. Through an analysis of various media platforms, including television, newspapers, and social media, the study explores how the media influences public perception and understanding of government policies. The paper highlights the dual role media plays in both promoting policies and holding the government accountable by fostering public debate and scrutiny. Key case studies, such as the Digital India initiative, demonstrate how effective media engagement can lead to increased policy awareness and citizen participation. However, the study also identifies significant challenges, including media bias, the spread of misinformation, and unequal access to media in rural areas. These issues can hinder the successful communication of policies and undermine trust in government efforts. The paper concludes by stressing the need for media reform, greater media literacy, and improved infrastructure to ensure that public policy dissemination reaches all sectors of society and remains accurate and unbiased. This research underscores the critical role media plays in shaping democratic governance and public policy outcomes in India.

**Keywords:** Media and Public Policy, Policy Dissemination, India Media Influence.

## 1. Introduction

In today's era of globalization and information technology, the media play a vital role in shaping public awareness, guiding social discussion, and influencing policy formulation and implementation. Especially in a multicultural and rapidly developing country like India, the role of the media is particularly significant. India's media environment reflects not only its rich cultural heritage and social diversity, but also its complexity in the communication and practice of public policy. Therefore, it is of great significance to study the role and influence of media in public policy communication to understand how policies are accepted, understood and implemented by the public. Conventional wisdom holds that mass media work in the early stages of the policy process, that is, they can help set the agenda, which is then adopted and processed by politicians, policy makers and other actors. However, the influence of the mass media is rarely limited. In fact, mass media play a role, which not only in the early stages of policy development, but also throughout the policy process. Existing research tells us that mass media can attract and sustain public attention to specific issues. They can change the discourse of policy debate through dialogue or rhetoric that frames or defines the issue in order to persuade or dissuade the public [1]. This paper aims to explore the role of the media in the communication of public policy in India, with particular reference to the National Pension Scheme (NPS), and analyze how the media affects the popularity and public awareness of policies. By comparing pension systems in India and China, this study will reveal how the media operates in different cultural and policy contexts and its impact on policy communication. This paper will first introduce the theoretical framework of public policy communication, which provides the theoretical basis of how media affect policy communication and public cognition. In a brief introduction to the Indian media environment, this article will describe the diversity and types of media in India. This will provide the reader with a macro perspective to understand how the media operates within the specific socio-political context of India. Subsequently, this paper will explore the communication strategies and means of India's national pension plan through case studies, and the role of the media in this process. In addition, this paper will also analyze the relevant materials of China's pension system and policy communication system to provide a comparative perspective. In exploring the role

of media in public policy practice, this paper will focus on agenda setting, policy feedback, opinion guidance, oversight and accountability, as well as value shaping and the use of new media. Finally, this article will discuss the challenges and constraints facing the media in India, including issues of independence and impartiality, as well as the digital divide and information asymmetry. Finally, this paper will put forward corresponding reasonable policy suggestions for reference.

## **2. Theoretical Analysis and Background Information**

### **2.1. Introduction to theories**

#### **2.1.1. Gatekeeping Theory**

First, this paper will introduce two main theories of public policy communication, namely the gatekeeper theory and the agenda-setting theory.

Gatekeeping Theory is an important concept in communication studies, which is mainly used to describe how certain individuals or organizations control the flow of information in the process of information transmission, and decide what information can be passed to the audience and what information is filtered out [2]. The theory was first proposed by Kurt Lewin in 1947, and early models initially focused on how housewives chose their food. It was further studied in the 1950s by David Manning White, who observed how newspaper editors chose news [3]. Subsequent researchers added more factors, such as workflow and deadline pressure, to study the impact of these factors on gatekeeper selection. Gatekeepers can be editors, journalists, news organization staff, or even the media's technological algorithm [4]. In the digital age, technology platforms such as search engines, social media and mobile apps are increasingly acting as gatekeepers [4]. They filter information based on factors such as personal judgment, organizational policies, legal norms, cultural values, and economic interests. The mass media have the widest range of publicity and can convey the information to the public to the greatest extent. Therefore, combined with the gatekeeper theory, mass media plays a crucial role in the dissemination of public policies. In the digital age, the gatekeeper theory also covers the role of emerging information intermediaries such as social media platforms and search engines. This theory reveals the bias and subjectivity of information selection in mass communication. As gatekeepers of public policies, mass media, for example, need to disseminate content objectively and comprehensively. In the increasingly developed Internet environment, we-media is becoming more and more popular. People can bypass the gatekeeping of traditional media on their personal accounts and send any content they want to send. Therefore, how the media review and filter this information has become particularly important.

#### **2.1.2. Agenda-setting Theory**

The second related communication theory is agenda-setting theory, which holds that the mass media can determine the focus of public discussion and attention through the choice of reporting content. Agenda-setting theory originated in 1922 by Walter Lippmann, who emphasized the powerful influence of mass media in shaping public opinion. Lippmann did not use the term "agenda setting theory" directly, but his work laid the foundation for it. Subsequent research, notably by McCombs and Shaw in 1972, further advanced agenda-setting theory by looking at how the mass media influenced voters' views during the 1968 presidential campaign and arguing that the media, with limited resources, could not cover all events and therefore chose to cover certain topics based on newsworthy criteria [6]. This theory also holds that when the media emphasizes and repeatedly reports on certain issues, these issues become more important in the minds of the public, thus influencing the views of the audience. Agenda-setting by the media can also influence policy makers and political agendas, as politicians and decision makers often respond to issues of public concern. The development of new media has made mass media more powerful in communicating the agenda. With the development of technology, the emergence of new media continues to promote the ease of information acquisition and dissemination. New media has the characteristics of diversified agenda setting subjects and strong interaction. Agenda-setting subjects are not just traditional media, but

many individuals. Blogs, forums and other subjects join in. The interactivity of new media allows audiences to express their views with lower-cost responses, such as likes and comments, and influence the agenda. Therefore, new media is more influential in setting the agenda than old media [5]. Agenda setting theory has been widely used in the fields of political communication, public policy, news editorial decision-making, etc. It reveals the important influence of media in society. The media needs to be objective and cover news issues as fully as possible, and society or the public should also be equipped with the appropriate knowledge to properly evaluate information and form independent opinions.

## **2.2. The Media Framework in India**

The media industry in India is highly fragmented and influenced by political, administrative and business cultures. This article will introduce the media framework and related legal framework in India.

The first is the most traditional print media, including newspapers and magazines that cover national and local news, commentary and entertainment content, such as the Press Trust of India (PTI), which has a wide reach and influence. And some newspapers or bulletin boards that focus on the news and cultural content of a particular region. Such media have a large readership and circulation in India [8]. India's newspapers are mostly in English and are global. Electronic media, including television and radio, provide news, entertainment, education and information services. For example, there are All India Radio (AIR) and Doordarshan (national television), which are owned by the public sector of the Indian government. Digital media, dominated by online news platforms, social media and streaming services, has also expanded rapidly with the spread of the Internet, but access inequality remains in some regions [8]. Private companies and foreign media groups also have a place in India's media framework. Television is one of the fastest growing forms of media in India with a huge audience. Although state-owned Doordarshan used to be the only television broadcaster, the emergence of private satellite TV channels since the 1990s has broken the monopoly. Including major media conglomerates and independent media companies, private companies own television stations, radio stations, newspapers and digital platforms. Foreign media groups also play a role in India's media landscape, particularly in digital and television. Like the media in most countries in the world, the media in India is influenced by political forces and economic interests. Although the Indian media is largely independent of state control, the government indirectly influences the media through various means, such as advertising spending, content regulation and so on. For example, the digitization of national broadcaster Prasar Bharati has faced problems with underfunding and political interference, and despite its technological advances, its content and news coverage are often seen as propaganda tools for the government [7]. The main source of revenue for Indian media is commercial advertising, and some media content is increasingly driven by commercial interests, which affects the objectivity and quality of news [8]. However, the media in India is regulated by government agencies, including the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Be as objective, fair and open as possible. There are also laws in place in India, such as the Constitution, the Press Council of India Act and the Cable Television Networks Rules, which aim to regulate and monitor media practices and protect consumer rights. However, the regulatory framework and policies for the media in India remain patchy, with a lack of clear media ownership laws and regulatory frameworks that require further reforms to promote fair competition and the public interest [7].

## **3. Case study: India's National Pension Scheme (NPS)**

The pension policy is a series of measures and systems formulated by the government in order to cope with the aging population and ensure the basic living needs of the elderly. In India, the National Pension System (NPS) is a key pension policy introduced by the government to provide pension protection for all citizens, including the public, private and informal sectors. NPS is an individual account-based DC program that emphasizes personal responsibility and self-dependence, with some

financial support from the government. A comparative analysis of India's National Pension System (NPS) compared to the old Pension System (OPS), which provided that Indian employees were able to receive a fixed pension upon retirement regardless of the investment performance of the pension fund. And OPS receives a larger total pension than the new system (NPS). The new pension system (NPS) has the characteristics of wide coverage, flexibility, portability (change jobs, still enjoy benefits) and so on [10]. NPS also has some shortcomings, including lack of investment options and low tax incentives [9]. According to the survey, if the return on investment in the NPS is higher and the employee starts work earlier, the pension amount under the NPS can be comparable to the old system [10]. The problems faced by governments are low participation rates, low coverage and low choice rates [11]. The government has introduced many incentive policies, but the performance of NPS still falls short of expectations, possibly because information is not disseminated in a timely and complete manner [13].

Turning to China, also a populous country, both countries, like India, face the challenges of rapidly aging societies and growing socio-economic disparities. Both countries are also working to improve their pension systems to expand coverage and alleviate poverty among the elderly. After comparing the legal framework of social security in China and India, it can be seen that China's social security law provides more suggestions than strict requirements, giving more room for adjustment to the executive agencies (such as The State Council), and more ways and feasibility of media publicity [12]. However, India's democratic pluralism and stronger legislative provisions limit the space for action in the policy process, which makes it difficult to promote the process of policy improvement and publicity [12]. As a result, the Indian public has shown little interest in understanding the NPS policy, focusing mostly on the number of pensions rather than the various characteristics. Moreover, Indian media are more inclined to advertisement or film release for profit purposes rather than public welfare policy publicity [8]. Therefore, it is difficult to carry out the work of Indian media in the publicity and promotion of policies. Indian domestic politics is mainly composed of multi-party system and coalition government, and the Indian government will constantly change the existing plan because of the political agenda and election needs, thus limiting the long-term planning ability and affecting the accuracy and breadth of propaganda. In contrast, Chinese one-party government was able to gradually establish a unified pension system and achieve deep reforms and multi-channel propaganda in the long run [12].

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#### **4. Analysis and suggestion on the role of media**

The Indian media has played a crucial role in the dissemination of public policy. One of the most important roles is the role of influencing and shaping public opinion [14]. The gatekeeper theory and agenda setting theory mentioned above also emphasize that the media has the ability to select information and selectively disseminate information in the dissemination and implementation of public policies. Secondly, media can also promote public feedback and increase public participation, thus influencing policy formulation [15,16]. The media can not only inform and facilitate public feedback, but also promote accountability by monitoring the implementation of policies through reporting and analysis [17,18]. To sum up, this paper proposes the following suggestions for the Indian media, aiming to expand the influence of the media, so as to improve the intensity of publicity and effective implementation of public policies. First of all, increase the transparency and popularity of content, and use a combination of traditional media and new media platforms to broadcast content. Next, we should promote communication and collaboration between the government and the media. The government should encourage the media to play a bridging role in the policy drafting and public consultation process, promote and collect public feedback, and improve policy design. Last but not least, promote accountability mechanisms. For the government, the media should increase

investigative reporting on the drafting, implementation and effect of policies, expose problems in the implementation process of policies, and promote the accountability of relevant agencies through reporting. As for the media themselves, they need to ensure the objectivity and accuracy of their reporting and avoid misleading the public. In policy reporting, the media should interview as many opinions as possible, ensure comprehensiveness and transparency of information, and establish self-censorship mechanisms to ensure that their journalistic standards and ethics are enforced.

All in all, the media plays a vital role in shaping public policy in India. Through television, newspapers, and social media, the public learns about new policies, the debates around them, and the actions taken by the government. The media serves as a bridge between policymakers and citizens, making it easier for governments to share important information and for people to voice their concerns or support. One of the key findings of this paper is that the media can influence how quickly and effectively the public understands and accepts policies. When the media actively reports on policies, explains their benefits, and encourages dialogue, it helps governments implement those policies more successfully. In India, for example, large-scale projects like Digital India have been widely promoted through media channels, raising awareness and engagement. However, the media can also challenge government policies if they are deemed to be inactive or unfair. Such pressure often forces governments to rethink their practices or improve their policies. Despite the positive role played by the Indian media, it also faces some challenges. One of the main problems is bias, with the media sometimes favoring certain political parties or business views, which can distort public perception. In addition, fake news and misinformation can spread quickly, especially through social media, leading to confusion and distrust among the public. In order to increase the role of the media in the communication of public policy, it is crucial that media organizations prioritize accurate and impartial reporting. Media literacy among citizens also needs to be strengthened so that people can distinguish between credible information and disinformation. Another challenge is that not all parts of India have equal access to media, especially in rural areas where Internet and television coverage may be limited. This creates gaps in how different segments of society receive and engage with public policy messages. To address this, governments need to invest in better communications infrastructure and work with the media to ensure that policy messages reach everyone.

## 5. Summary

In conclusion, in India, the media is a powerful tool for disseminating and implementing public policy. While it has the potential to inform and mobilize the public, it also faces challenges such as bias, misinformation, and unequal access. For the media to continue to play an active role in public policy, there must be a focus on accountability, transparency and inclusion. By overcoming these obstacles, the media can help strengthen democracy and ensure that public policies truly benefit all citizens. In a multicultural country like India, the media can play a unique role as a bridge to help different groups better understand and support public policy. In the future, the media will continue to be an important force to promote social progress and make positive contributions to the smooth implementation of policies and the harmonious development of society.

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