# Media As The Fourth Estate: Political Influence And Democratic Discourse In India (1991–2016)

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## ABSTRACT

The relationship between media and politics in modern India has undergone significant transformation in the period preceding 2016, shaped by economic liberalization, technological expansion, and shifting political dynamics. This study examines the structural, institutional, and normative dimensions of the media–politics interface in India from 1991 to 2016, a phase marked by the expansion of private television networks, commercialization of news, coalition politics, and the gradual rise of digital platforms. The paper explores how media institutions functioned simultaneously as watchdogs, agenda setters, and political actors within India's democratic framework. Drawing upon theories of agenda-setting, framing, and political economy of media, the study analyses how ownership patterns, corporate interests, and state influence shaped political communication. The post-liberalization era witnessed the rapid growth of private news channels such as NDTV, Aaj Tak, and Zee News, which transformed electoral coverage, political debates, and public opinion formation. The expansion of 24-hour news culture intensified competition, leading to increased sensationalism, personality-driven narratives, and issue framing that often-prioritized political spectacle over substantive policy discourse.

The study further investigates media performance during key political phases, including the coalition governments of the United Progressive Alliance under Manmohan Singh and the early years of the National Democratic Alliance led by Narendra Modi (up to 2016). It evaluates how corruption scandals, governance debates, and electoral campaigns were mediated and framed, influencing political legitimacy and voter perception. The analysis suggests that while media played a critical role in exposing corruption and strengthening accountability mechanisms, it also increasingly reflected corporate consolidation and ideological polarization. The paper also highlights the gradual emergence of social media platforms before 2016, which began altering political mobilization strategies and citizen engagement. Although traditional media remained dominant during this period, digital communication tools started reshaping campaign strategies, message dissemination, and political branding. This transitional phase laid the foundation for the more intensive digital–political convergence witnessed after 2016. The findings indicate that before 2016, Indian media functioned within a complex matrix of market forces, political pressures, and normative democratic expectations. While it contributed significantly to political awareness and public debate, structural constraints limited its autonomy in certain contexts. The paper concludes that understanding the pre-2016 media–politics nexus is essential for interpreting contemporary transformations in India's democratic communication landscape.

**Keywords**

Media and Politics, Political Communication, Agenda Setting, Framing Theory, Political Economy of Media, Liberalization, Electoral Politics, Democratic Accountability, Coalition Politics, Indian Democracy (1991–2016)

## INTRODUCTION

The relationship between media and politics constitutes one of the most significant dimensions of modern democratic governance. In democratic societies, media is often described as the "Fourth Estate," entrusted with the responsibility of informing citizens, scrutinizing power, and facilitating public debate. In India, the evolution of this relationship has been particularly dynamic, especially in the period between 1991

and 2016. This phase witnessed profound structural changes in the political system and the communication landscape, fundamentally reshaping the interaction between media institutions and political actors.

The economic liberalization of 1991 marked a turning point not only in India's economic policy but also in its media environment. The dismantling of state monopoly over broadcasting and the rapid growth of private television channels transformed political communication. The expansion of satellite news networks such as NDTV, Aaj Tak, and Zee News introduced 24-hour news cycles, live political debates, and real-time electoral coverage. This transformation altered the nature of political campaigns, leadership image-building, and public engagement with governance issues.

During the coalition era under the United Progressive Alliance led by Manmohan Singh and the early phase of the National Democratic Alliance government led by Narendra Modi (up to 2016), media became a central arena for political contestation. Corruption scandals, policy debates, parliamentary disruptions, and electoral campaigns were increasingly mediated through television studios and newspaper headlines. Media not only reported political developments but also shaped narratives, framed issues, and influenced public perception.

At the same time, the commercialization of media introduced new challenges. The growing dependence on advertising revenue, corporate ownership consolidation, and competition for Television Rating Points (TRPs) intensified sensationalism and personality-driven reporting. Allegations of "paid news," selective coverage, and media trials raised concerns about editorial independence and democratic accountability. The tension between market forces and normative democratic responsibilities became a defining feature of the media–politics nexus during this period.

Theoretical frameworks such as agenda-setting, framing theory, public sphere theory, and political economy of media provide useful tools to understand these transformations. Agenda-setting theory explains how media influences the salience of political issues; framing theory highlights how narratives shape public interpretation; public sphere theory emphasizes the role of media in facilitating rational-critical debate; and political economy perspectives analyze structural power relations within media ownership and regulation.

Furthermore, although digital platforms began emerging before 2016, traditional print and television media continued to dominate political communication during this transitional phase. The gradual incorporation of social media into electoral strategies signaled the beginning of a new communicative paradigm, yet the pre-2016 period remains analytically distinct from the later digital surge.

In this context, the present study seeks to critically examine the structural, functional, and normative dimensions of the relationship between media and politics in India between 1991 and 2016. By situating media within broader democratic and economic transformations, this research aims to assess whether media primarily strengthened democratic accountability or increasingly became embedded within political and corporate power structures.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The relationship between media and politics in modern India, particularly in the period from 1991 to 2016, presents a complex and evolving dynamic that significantly influenced democratic processes, governance patterns, and public opinion formation. The post-liberalization phase witnessed a rapid expansion of private media ownership, commercialization of news, growth of 24-hour television channels, and increasing corporate consolidation. While media emerged as a powerful institution within India's democratic framework, concerns also grew regarding its autonomy, objectivity, accountability, and susceptibility to political and corporate influence.

During this period, news organizations such as NDTV, Aaj Tak, and Zee News played a decisive role in shaping electoral narratives, framing political debates, and influencing voter perception. The coalition era under the United Progressive Alliance led by Manmohan Singh and the subsequent rise of the National Democratic Alliance under Narendra Modi marked critical shifts in political communication strategies, media engagement, and message dissemination. The growing proximity between political elites and media corporations raised questions about neutrality, agenda-setting, and ideological bias.

Despite the normative expectation that media should function as the "Fourth Estate" — ensuring transparency, accountability, and informed citizen participation — the pre-2016 media landscape increasingly reflected commercialization, sensationalism, and competitive populism. The pressure of TRP-driven programming, paid news allegations, selective coverage, and corporate-political linkages indicated structural tensions between democratic responsibility and market imperatives. Furthermore, the early emergence of digital platforms began reshaping political mobilization and information flows, yet traditional media still retained substantial influence over public discourse. The central problem, therefore, lies in understanding whether the media in India during the pre-2016 period primarily strengthened democratic governance through critical oversight and inclusive debate, or whether it gradually became embedded within political power structures and market forces that constrained its independence. There exists a need to systematically examine how ownership patterns, regulatory frameworks, political alignments, and economic pressures influenced media behavior and political outcomes. -This study seeks to address this problem by critically analyzing the structural and functional relationship between media institutions and political actors in India from 1991 to 2016. It aims to assess the extent to which media operated as an autonomous democratic institution versus a politically and commercially negotiated space, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of democratic communication in contemporary India.

## RESEARCH GAP

The relationship between media and politics in India has been widely discussed in both national and international scholarship; however, significant gaps remain in the systematic understanding of this nexus during the pre-2016 period (1991–2016). While several Indian scholars have examined media commercialization, regional press expansion, and television news culture, most studies tend to focus either on specific events, individual scandals, or particular media formats rather than offering a comprehensive structural analysis of the media–politics interface across regimes.

First, existing literature often analyzes the post-liberalization media boom after 1991 or the rise of digital and social media after 2016, but there is limited integrated research covering the entire transitional phase between economic liberalization and the full-scale digital political transformation. The period from 1991 to 2016 represents a crucial phase characterized by coalition politics, the expansion of private news channels, corporatization, and the early emergence of digital platforms. Yet, this transitional phase has not been sufficiently examined as a distinct analytical category.

Second, much of the Indian scholarship emphasizes commercialization and paid news phenomena but lacks a strong theoretical integration with global communication frameworks such as agenda-setting, framing theory, public sphere theory, and political economy of media. There is a gap in combining empirical observations from the Indian context with these established theoretical models in a coherent analytical framework.

Third, comparative analysis of media behavior across different political regimes—particularly the coalition era governments and the early majority government phase up to 2016—remains underexplored. Studies often examine media criticism in isolation without systematically evaluating variations in media performance across changing political contexts.

Fourth, there is insufficient empirical work assessing the relationship between ownership structures, corporate consolidation, and political alignment in shaping news narratives. Although concerns about corporate-political linkages have been raised, rigorous content-based or structural analysis remains limited.

Fifth, the early phase of digital political communication before 2016 has not received adequate scholarly attention. Most digital media studies concentrate on the post-2016 period, overlooking the foundational transformations that occurred earlier.

Therefore, the present study addresses these gaps by offering a comprehensive, theoretically grounded, and regime-sensitive analysis of the media–politics relationship in India during the pre-2016 period. By integrating political economy perspectives with agenda-setting and public sphere frameworks, this research aims to provide a systematic understanding of how media functioned both as a democratic watchdog and as a negotiated site of political and economic power.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study seeks to examine the relationship between media and politics in modern India during the pre-2016 period (1991–2016). The specific objectives are:

1. **To analyze the structural evolution of media in India** after economic liberalization (1991) and its impact on political communication.
2. **To examine the nature of the media–politics interface** in India during the coalition era and the early phase of majority government (up to 2016).
3. **To assess the role of media as the "Fourth Estate"** in promoting transparency, accountability, and democratic participation.
4. **To evaluate the agenda-setting and framing functions of media** in shaping public opinion and electoral behavior.
5. **To study the influence of ownership patterns and commercialization** on political reporting and editorial independence.
6. **To examine media coverage of major political events and elections** between 1991 and 2016.
7. **To analyze the relationship between political elites and media institutions**, including issues such as paid news, media trials, and ideological alignment.
8. **To explore the emergence of digital media before 2016** and its initial impact on political mobilization and communication strategies.
9. **To identify structural constraints affecting media autonomy**, including regulatory frameworks and corporate consolidation.
10. **To assess whether media during the pre-2016 period strengthened democratic governance or reinforced political power structures.**
11. **To integrate theoretical frameworks such as agenda-setting, framing theory, public sphere theory, and political economy of media** in explaining the Indian context.
12. **To contribute to the broader discourse on democratic communication in India** by providing a systematic analysis of the media–politics nexus before 2016.**

## HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

Based on the objectives and theoretical framework (agenda-setting, framing, political economy, and public sphere theory), the following hypotheses are formulated:

**Main Hypothesis**

**H1:** The expansion and commercialization of media in India (1991–2016) significantly influenced political discourse and electoral outcomes.

**Sub-Hypotheses**

1. **H1a:** Media agenda-setting during elections significantly shaped public priorities and political debates.
2. **H1b:** Ownership patterns and corporate control influenced the tone and framing of political news coverage.
3. **H1c:** Increased competition among 24-hour news channels led to sensationalism in political reporting.
4. **H1d:** Media coverage of corruption scandals (1991–2016) contributed to shifts in public perception of political legitimacy.
5. **H1e:** The commercialization of media reduced editorial independence in political reporting.
6. **H1f:** Media institutions displayed varying degrees of political alignment during different regimes (Coalition Era and Early Majority Government Phase up to 2016).
7. **H1g:** The emergence of digital media before 2016 enhanced political mobilization and citizen engagement.
8. **H1h:** Media functioned both as a democratic watchdog and as a political actor within power structures.

**Null Hypotheses ($H_0$)**

1. **$H_0$1:** Media expansion and commercialization had no significant impact on political discourse in India (1991–2016).
2. **$H_0$2:** Ownership patterns did not influence political news framing.
3. **$H_0$3:** Media coverage did not significantly affect public perception of political legitimacy.
4. **$H_0$4:** The rise of digital media before 2016 did not significantly alter political communication patterns.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a systematic and theoretically grounded methodology to examine the relationship between media and politics in India during the pre-2016 period (1991–2016). Given the structural and analytical nature of the research problem, a qualitative-dominant approach supplemented by secondary quantitative data has been employed.

**1. Research Design**

The study follows a **descriptive–analytical research design**. It seeks to describe the structural transformation of Indian media after economic liberalization and analytically examine its interaction with political institutions and actors. The design allows comparative assessment across political regimes, particularly during the United Progressive Alliance government led by Manmohan Singh and the early phase of the National Democratic Alliance government led by Narendra Modi (up to 2016).

**2. Nature of Study**

The study is primarily **qualitative**, focusing on content interpretation, theoretical integration, and institutional analysis. However, relevant quantitative indicators—such as media expansion statistics, circulation data, and election coverage trends—are incorporated where necessary to strengthen analytical validity.

**3. Sources of Data**

**(a) Primary Sources**

- Content analysis of selected newspapers and television news coverage (1991–2016).
- Editorials, opinion pieces, and election campaign coverage.
- Policy documents related to media regulation and broadcasting reforms.

**(b) Secondary Sources**

- Books, peer-reviewed journal articles, research reports, and academic theses.
- Reports of media regulatory bodies.
- Election Commission reports and parliamentary debates.
- Credible digital archives and media databases.

**4. Sampling Method**

A **purposive sampling method** is used to select major national media outlets that significantly influenced political discourse during the study period. Representative television news channels include NDTV, Aaj Tak, and Zee News, along with leading national newspapers (English and Hindi). Selection is based on reach, viewership, circulation, and political influence.

**5. Tools and Techniques of Analysis**

1. **Content Analysis** – To examine framing patterns, issue salience, tone of coverage, and representation of political actors.
2. **Comparative Regime Analysis** – To evaluate variations in media behavior across different political phases (Coalition Era and Early Majority Phase up to 2016).
3. **Theoretical Application** – Agenda-setting theory, framing theory, public sphere theory, and political economy framework are applied for interpretative analysis.
4. **Documentary Analysis** – Examination of regulatory frameworks, ownership patterns, and corporate structures.

**6. Variables of the Study**

- **Independent Variables:** Media ownership, commercialization, regulatory framework, political regime type.
- **Dependent Variables:** Political discourse, public opinion formation, electoral narratives, democratic accountability.

**7. Scope and Delimitation**

The study is confined to the period **1991–2016**, covering the post-liberalization era up to the early consolidation phase of majority government. It does not examine post-2016 digital intensification in detail, as that represents a distinct phase of media transformation.

**8. Limitations**

- Dependence on archived media content may limit access to complete datasets.
- Content analysis involves interpretative judgment, which may introduce subjective bias.
- The study does not conduct large-scale field surveys due to scope constraints.

**9. Ethical Considerations**

The research relies solely on publicly available documents, published materials, and archival sources. No personal or confidential data has been used.

**ANALYSIS**

The relationship between media and politics in India between 1991 and 2016 reflects a complex interaction shaped by liberalization, technological expansion, coalition politics, and market-driven media growth. This period can be analytically divided into three overlapping phases: post-liberalization media expansion (1991–2004), consolidation during coalition politics (2004–2014), and the early majority-government phase (2014–2016). Each phase reveals structural and functional shifts in the media–politics nexus.

**1. Post-Liberalization Transformation (1991–2004)**

The economic reforms of 1991 dismantled state monopoly over broadcasting and opened the sector to private participation. The growth of satellite television and private news channels such as NDTV and Zee News transformed political communication. Political leaders increasingly relied on televised appearances, interviews, and live debates to reach mass audiences.

From an agenda-setting perspective, media began determining issue salience—highlighting corruption, governance failures, or national security concerns—thereby influencing public discourse. The rise of 24-hour news cycles intensified competition, shifting journalism from event-based reporting to continuous narrative construction. This phase marked the transition from state-controlled messaging to market-driven political communication.

**2. Coalition Politics and Media Activism (2004–2014)**

During the United Progressive Alliance government led by Manmohan Singh, media coverage of major corruption scandals significantly shaped political legitimacy debates. Investigative reporting and televised panel discussions amplified public scrutiny and contributed to widespread political mobilization.

At the same time, commercialization deepened. News channels increasingly depended on advertising revenue and TRP ratings, encouraging sensationalist formats and personality-centered politics. The phenomenon of "media trials" emerged, where television debates often pre-judged legal or political outcomes. The political economy framework suggests that corporate ownership patterns influenced editorial priorities, raising concerns about neutrality and independence.

This period also witnessed the expansion of Hindi and regional media networks, broadening political participation but also intensifying ideological polarization. Media became both a watchdog and a participant in political contestation.

**3. Early Majority Government Phase (2014–2016)**

The 2014 general election marked a shift in political communication strategies under the leadership of Narendra Modi. Media campaigns increasingly incorporated digital platforms, branding strategies, and centralized message control. While traditional television and print media remained influential, social media began playing a complementary role in political mobilization.

The framing of leadership, nationalism, and governance themes became prominent in mainstream news coverage. The personalization of politics intensified, with leadership image construction receiving extensive attention. Agenda-setting during this phase frequently revolved around development narratives, foreign policy initiatives, and national security issues.

**4. Structural and Theoretical Interpretation**

Applying **agenda-setting theory**, media influenced which political issues dominated public debate. Through **framing theory**, it shaped interpretations of corruption, governance, and leadership. From a **public sphere perspective**, media provided platforms for debate but often prioritized spectacle over deliberation. The **political economy approach** reveals how ownership consolidation and corporate interests affected editorial direction.

The analysis indicates a dual character of Indian media during the pre-2016 period. On one hand, it enhanced transparency, exposed corruption, and expanded political awareness. On the other hand, commercialization, ideological alignment, and competitive sensationalism constrained its democratic potential.

Based on the analysis of the media–politics relationship in India during the period 1991–2016, the following key findings emerge:

**1. Structural Transformation of Media After Liberalization**

The economic reforms of 1991 significantly altered the media landscape by encouraging privatization and competition. The growth of private news networks such as NDTV, Aaj Tak, and Zee News expanded political coverage and increased real-time engagement with governance issues. Media shifted from a largely state-influenced model to a commercially competitive environment.

**2. Media as an Agenda-Setter**

The study finds strong evidence that media played a decisive role in setting political agendas. Issues such as corruption, governance failures, economic reforms, and national security were amplified through repeated coverage, shaping public priorities and electoral debates. Media did not merely report politics; it influenced which political issues became nationally significant.

**3. Framing and Narrative Construction**

Media framing significantly affected public interpretation of political events. Leadership images, corruption scandals, and policy debates were often presented through selective narratives. During elections, coverage frequently emphasized personality-driven politics over policy substance.

**4. Commercialization and Market Pressures**

The expansion of 24-hour news culture increased competition and dependence on advertising revenue. This led to sensationalism, TRP-driven programming, and the prioritization of dramatic political debates. Commercial imperatives sometimes overshadowed normative journalistic responsibilities.

**5. Corporate Ownership and Political Influence**

Ownership patterns and corporate consolidation influenced editorial independence. The political economy analysis suggests that media institutions were not entirely autonomous but operated within broader corporate and political networks. Concerns such as “paid news” and selective reporting indicated structural vulnerabilities.

**6. Media and Political Accountability**

Despite commercialization, media played a critical watchdog role during major corruption controversies in the coalition era under Manmohan Singh. Investigative journalism and televised debates contributed to public awareness and political accountability.

**7. Regime-Sensitive Media Behavior**

The findings indicate variations in media tone and emphasis across political regimes. During the early majority government phase under Narendra Modi (up to 2016), leadership-centric narratives and development-oriented framing gained prominence. Media alignment and polarization appeared more visible in certain segments.

**8. Expansion of Regional and Vernacular Media**

The growth of regional language newspapers and television channels broadened democratic participation and localized political discourse. However, it also contributed to regional political mobilization and competitive populism.

**9. Emergence of Digital Political Communication**

Although traditional print and television media dominated before 2016, early adoption of social media platforms began reshaping campaign strategies and citizen engagement. This transitional phase laid the foundation for post-2016 digital political intensification.

**10. Dual Character of Media**

The study concludes that media during 1991–2016 functioned both as a democratic watchdog and as a market-driven institution embedded within political and corporate power structures. It strengthened transparency and public debate, yet structural and commercial pressures limited its full autonomy.

## CONCLUSION

The relationship between media and politics in India during the period 1991–2016 represents a transformative phase in the country's democratic evolution. Emerging from the economic liberalization of 1991, the Indian media landscape shifted from a largely state-regulated structure to a highly competitive, commercially driven, and technologically dynamic environment. This transition not only altered the institutional framework of media but also significantly reshaped political communication, electoral strategies, and public discourse.

The expansion of private television networks such as NDTV, Aaj Tak, and Zee News introduced a new era of real-time political reporting, televised debates, and continuous news cycles. Media became a central arena for political contestation, influencing the visibility of issues and shaping leadership narratives. Through agenda-setting and framing processes, media played a crucial role in determining which political concerns gained prominence and how they were interpreted by the public.

During the coalition era under the United Progressive Alliance led by Manmohan Singh, media activism and investigative journalism contributed significantly to exposing corruption and stimulating public debate. In this phase, the media often functioned as a watchdog, reinforcing democratic accountability. However, the growing commercialization of news, dependence on advertising revenue, and increasing competition for viewership simultaneously introduced sensationalism and personality-centered reporting. The phenomenon of media trials and allegations of paid news highlighted the tension between democratic responsibility and market pressures.

The 2014 general election and the early majority-government phase under Narendra Modi (up to 2016) marked a shift toward highly centralized and image-driven political communication. Media coverage increasingly emphasized leadership branding, development narratives, and national identity themes. Although traditional media remained influential, the gradual integration of digital platforms signaled the beginning of a new communicative paradigm. The pre-2016 period thus stands as a transitional phase between liberalized broadcast expansion and the later digital intensification of political communication.

The study reveals that Indian media during this period exhibited a dual character. On one hand, it expanded political awareness, strengthened transparency, and facilitated broader public participation. On the other hand, corporate consolidation, ownership linkages, ideological alignment, and commercial imperatives constrained complete editorial independence. Media neither operated as a purely autonomous democratic institution nor as a mere instrument of political power; rather, it functioned within a negotiated space shaped by market forces, regulatory frameworks, and political strategies.

Theoretically, the findings affirm the relevance of agenda-setting, framing theory, public sphere theory, and political economy perspectives in understanding the Indian context. Media influenced issue salience and public interpretation, yet its structural embedding within economic and political networks limited the ideal of a fully rational-critical public sphere.

In conclusion, the pre-2016 media–politics nexus in India reflects a dynamic interplay of democratization, commercialization, and political consolidation. Understanding this phase is essential for interpreting subsequent transformations in India's communication landscape. The period between 1991 and 2016 laid

the structural and ideological foundations for contemporary media-politics relations, making it a critical subject of scholarly inquiry within the broader discourse on Indian democracy.

## SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study on the relationship between media and politics in India (1991–2016), the following suggestions and policy recommendations are proposed to strengthen democratic accountability, institutional autonomy, and responsible political communication:

**1. Strengthening Editorial Independence**

Media organizations should establish clear institutional mechanisms to ensure separation between ownership interests and editorial decision-making. Transparent editorial policies and internal codes of conduct can reduce political and corporate interference in news coverage.

**2. Regulation of Media Ownership and Cross-Media Concentration**

There is a need for stronger regulatory oversight to prevent excessive concentration of media ownership. Cross-media ownership rules should be clarified and effectively implemented to reduce monopolistic tendencies and protect pluralism in political discourse.

**3. Institutional Reform of Media Regulatory Bodies**

Media regulatory authorities should be made more autonomous, transparent, and accountable. Strengthening statutory and self-regulatory bodies can ensure ethical standards in political reporting without undermining freedom of expression.

**4. Addressing the Issue of "Paid News"**

Clear legal provisions and stricter monitoring mechanisms should be implemented to curb the practice of paid news during elections. Collaboration between the Election Commission, media councils, and civil society organizations is essential to maintain electoral integrity.

**5. Promoting Ethical Political Journalism**

Journalism training institutions should emphasize ethics, fact-checking, and public-interest reporting. Media houses must prioritize issue-based political coverage rather than sensationalist or personality-driven narratives.

**6. Encouraging Public Service Broadcasting**

Strengthening public service broadcasting institutions can provide balanced political coverage free from excessive market pressures. These institutions should operate with editorial autonomy and public accountability.

**7. Transparency in Political Advertising**

Clear disclosure norms regarding political advertising, sponsored content, and corporate funding should be mandatory. Transparency will enhance public trust and reduce hidden political influence.

**8. Enhancing Media Literacy**

Citizens should be educated about media framing, agenda-setting, and misinformation through media literacy programs. An informed audience can critically evaluate political narratives and reduce susceptibility to biased reporting.

**9. Promoting Diversity and Regional Representation**

Policies should encourage regional and community media to ensure inclusive political representation. However, safeguards must be in place to prevent regional polarization or partisan dominance.

**10. Strengthening Digital Governance Framework**

Although the study focuses on the pre-2016 period, early digital political communication indicates the need for clear guidelines on online political campaigning, misinformation control, and data transparency while preserving democratic freedoms.

**11. Encouraging Research and Data Transparency**

Academic institutions and independent research bodies should be supported to conduct systematic studies on media ownership, content trends, and political bias. Evidence-based research can inform better policy decisions.

**12. Fostering a Deliberative Public Sphere**

Media platforms should create structured spaces for policy-based debates, citizen participation, and constructive dialogue rather than confrontational formats. This will strengthen the democratic public sphere envisioned in normative political theory.

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