Political theorists have considered mass communication to be part of the political system, but its role has traditionally been conceived of as secondary. The media were not thought to be part of any process which shaped political structures. At best (or worst), they merely reinforced trends of political change which were instigated by a political elite or by the leaders of important social groups. Mass media were used to elicit support for these institutions. Thus one important role of media was legitimating of political institutions and the actions of political leaders.  

Mass Society theory is an all encompassing perspective on western, industrial society that attributes an influential but often quite negative role to media. Media are viewed as having the power to profoundly shape our perceptions of the social world and to manipulate our actions in subtle by highly effective ways. Mass society theories first appeared late in the 19th century as various social elites struggled to make sense of the disruptive consequences of modernization.  

In Truman’s view, the mass media affect politics through their role as pluralistic interest groups. The various media constitute separate groups that balance the power of other groups and form alliances to political objectives. Lazarsfeld (1944) and Berelson (1954) argue that the majority of the public does not use the media in any systematic way for political purposes during a campaign. Group leaders tend to make greater use of the media for political purposes.

The empirical documentation of voting patterns that began to accumulate after the World War ‘known as classic’ voting studies makes a strong case for the impact of communication on voting behavior. The first of this evidence came from the survey of voters that considered as the landmarks in the empirical study of

They had opportunities to examine the various influences on political decision making on voters. Despite the role of newspapers which conveyed the news of politics and public affairs to the public, their anxiously anticipated endorsements and the well established place of commentators and news discussion forums or radio (Kobland, 1999), the author concluded that influence of the mass media was slight. What matters most was personal history, which had its strongest expression in party allegiance. People repeatedly voted for the candidates of the same party. (3)

Four out of five voters made up their minds before presidential campaigns began (Katz 1971). This further protected the individuals from external opinions, whether from media or associates. Maverick voters were not only rare but tended to fall into three categories. One group was made up of the politically unanchored, who were uncertain and undecided while usually uninformed and largely uninterested in politics and who often in the end would not vote.

The second group considered to be prodigals who frequently reverted during the campaign from a choice different in party from those they had voted previously. The third group was made up of those who persisted in their defection.

People usually discussed politics with those similar in outlook and passive and these experiences usually reinforced initial beliefs. Later research (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955) recorded that information from the media often was filtered through others. These opinion leaders usually shared same outlook and perspective as those with whom they conversed. The result was that most of the information reaching the individual ordinarily had a agreeable and reinforcing cast. (4)

Robinson, in his study of the 1972, U.S Presidential Election and four national elections which preceded it, found that newspaper endorsement influenced voting choice of 71% of the voters who followed the campaign of 1956, 1964 and 1972 newspapers. This study also revealed that the endorsements had a wider impact on the voting choice of the independent voters as well as party loyalists.
McClure and Patterson’s study of the 1972 presidential campaign in the United States assessed the impact of the television news programming during the election. Specifically they explored whether there was a change in viewer perception on certain issues in which there could be a reasonable expectation of attitude change as a result of exposure to television news programs.

McClure and Patterson (1973) found evidence that television news can have an impact on beliefs. They found that persons with low political interest were likely to change their beliefs about McGovern in a direction consistent with information being presented on television network evening news broadcasts. McClure and Patterson (1973) who conducted a study on television coverage and voter behavior reveal that one-third of the voters reach their voting decision before the nominating convention; one third of the voters reach their voting decision during the convention and one third during the campaign. The findings of the election studies on the 1972 conventions reveal that 50 percent of the Nixon supporters and almost 30 percent of the McGovern supporters listed as their time of decision the period immediately before, during or immediately after the conventions.

In another study they found that in specific ways, certain voters can be affected. The study centered on three one-minute ‘Democrats for Nixon’ commercials, testing recall and attitude change. Two of the three one-minute Nixon spots succeeded in changing over beliefs in the direction of the Nixon message; in one ad, 43 to 44 percent change, in the second 32 percent. Possibly even more to the point, the low-interest; frequent television viewers had a higher change in belief (37 to 48 percent) than did the high interest, frequent television viewer (18 to 35 percent). P.68

Yet another study by McClure and Patterson on the 1972 presidential campaign, in the United States stressed the considerable impact of television programming both within and between elections.

Thomas Patterson’s study on 1976 U.S. Presidential campaign coverage by media revealed that issues and qualifications of the candidate received lesser attention than the candidate’s style and image. He studied three TV networks, the
magazines, Time and Newsweek, and two newspapers each in two areas. He found that newspapers helped people in forming images of the election campaign and the candidates. People got substantiate information by reading newspapers than watching TV according to him.

Swanson’s (1973) pilot study of a small group of Southern Illinois voters reveals that 69 percent of the public received most of their political information from the mass media. Further 54 percent of the respondents found television news their most important source of information, while 23 percent listed newspapers. More than two-thirds of the respondents thought that the media they identified as their first and second most important sources of information about the campaign presented a fair picture of both Nixon and McGovern.

Hovland noted that in virtually every laboratory experiment, a persuasive stimulus has an effect, while in sociological studies in the field, the usual, finding is no effect. In Paul Lazarsfelds studies of American presidential campaigns on which tens of millions of dollars are spent, the main conclusion was that few voters are converted and most voters are predictable in June. These are plausible explanation offered by Hovland for this conflict in findings. In the field, the free citizens choose to expose him mainly to propaganda with which he already agrees. Selective attention makes the evidence in real life less amenable to persuasion.

Thus in various ways, social scientists in the west have concerned themselves with the problem of the limits of mass persuasion.

The bureaucrats, as Dr. Liu tells us, had limited faith in mass persuasion. They believed that the political consciousness of the mass could not be precipitated by agitation. They believed that a long period of education was needed to cultivate a degree of intellectual sophistication in the people. “Mao and his disciples on the other hand, believed that ‘sheer political agitation can bring forth a new world outlook in the constricted mind or the peasantry’. Maoists seem to believe that the mass media coupled with grassroot oral participation could transform one-fourth of the human race. They act on the assumption that incessant meetings, discussion
groups, little red books and blaring loud speakers can change men and society in fundamental ways.(5)

The view of the bureaucratic wing was in argument with that of the Russian Communists, whose past experience in propaganda and mass communication provided them their model.

Dr. Liu Mao relied more on propaganda to cope with the real problems when other resources were lacking. The real problem was the national integration of a backward county like China, totally lacking the pre-requisite conditions for the creation of a nation: a common language, adequate roads and rail roads to tie the land surface together, literate people capable of communicating over distance, and effectively organized bureaucracy to govern the nation, radios, newspapers, telephones and telegraph to provide normal modern communication. To an extraordinary extent, Chinese efforts surmounted these obstacles by creating a novel and innovative mass communication system at a low capital costs, though with high labour costs. During mass campaigns, discussions and meeting were attended weekly or more often by hundreds of million people which substituted for sacred newspapers, magazines and books. A highly economical wired loud speaker system that reached almost all Chinese villages substituted for radios. Movies are shown in large number by mobile projection teams who may move the equipment by bicycle. Newspapers were rented at the post office to people too poor to buy them.

In both Russia and China, the goal was to modernize a peasant population for the sake of nation building. Mao’s peasant orientation was so intense which moved millions of Chinese from the city to rural communes express a populist, rural, anti-intellectual and anti-US band doctrine.

Santiago Pogerico conducted a study on how the New York Times covered the American Presidential Elections. It was found that the New York Times favored the already legitimate groups involved in the Presidential Election. However, neglect of the legitimacy was not well established. The news coverage of Republicans far outweighed that of Democrats.
Norris Johnson in 1967 found that Kentucky high school seniors, in economically depressed rural areas obtained most of their political information from television. The classical voting studies of Lazarsfeld (1944), Berelson Potal (1954), Campbell et al. (1954, 1960) and subsequent contribution of Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955), Pool (1959), Key (1961, 1966), Krus (1962), Lang & Lang (1968), Mendelson and Crespi (1970) and Devries & Tarrance (1972) have all advanced our knowledge of how voters use mass media in choosing our leaders. (Sidney Kraus & Denis P. 50)

Katz’s classic studies on voting behaviour shows that mass media campaign convert very few people. Katz summaries: 80 percent of the voters have their minds made up before the campaign: 70 to 80 percent vote for the same party as they did in the previous election and of the remaining 20 percent are shifters and doubters. From the classical studies it became axiomatic to ‘believe that nearly all the voters make up their minds early in the election year and immoveable thereafter.’ (Sidney Kraus P. 51-52).

A study on newspaper endorsements and their influence on voting choice were carried out in 1965 by James E Greg. Analyzing eleven newspapers of California from 1948-1964, he found that local endorsements were more influential than national and state endorsements. But the study also revealed that the endorsements of newspapers were less influential when voters had other sources of information.

Since the first televised presidential debates were first held in 1960, many scholars have conducted studies on the Impact of the media on voting behavior including the impact of negative campaigning. Negative campaigning is a campaigning that attracts or is critical of an opposing candidate. Where positive campaigning dwells on the candidates own strengths and merits and talks about the beneficial policies he would adopt if elected, negative campaigning focuses on the weaknesses and faults of the opposition: the mistakes they have made, the flaws in their character or performance, the bad policies they would pursue. Negative campaigning provides voters with lot of valuable information that they definitely
need to have when deciding how to cast their ballots. Countless studies of campaign journalism have shown that the news media invariably focuses on the campaign as a contest or race. News reports on the candidates standing in public opinion polls, their advertising strategies, the size of the crowds at their appearances their fund raising efforts and their electoral prospects for surpass coverage detailing their issue positions, ideology, prior experience, or decision making style.

In 1968, Richard Nixon hired people who understood the art of television advertising and paid media became a significant force in political campaigning. Nixon’s people knew how research public taste and to create advertising without the mastery of television image devised by his advisors, Nixon might never have become president. (6)

Promotion of image rather than issues and substance is also fostered by some of the current production values of television allows candidates to shape a planned, desirable television image, no matter what their actual political history is. Television has significantly weakened the parties’ power, increased the power of paid and free media and increased the ability of a candidate to emphasize image over his political record on the issues.

Ross Perot, who ran for President in 1992 and 1996, exemplifies the use of media power rather than political party power. Pesot used money and his reputation as a successful businessman to gain media exposure. In 1992, he bought thirty minute prime time television slots to explain his view using simple visual tools, such as charts and graphs.

Perot forced mainstream politicians to take him and his ideas seriously. Basic research on relationship between media and politics and the impact of media on individuals continued. With the advent of television, critics have become increasingly concerned that in politics the image has come to outweigh consideration of the issues. The agenda – setting research contends that the media influence the importance individuals place on public issues. The agenda setting research by Mc Combs and Shaw questioned 100 undecided voters in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, during the 1968 presidential election. The researchers analyzed the media content
that the voters used and ranked the importance of issues on the basis of the amount of time and space the issue received. The voters then ranked the importance of the same issues. The ranking of coverage in the media and the ranking of issues by the voters came close to being an exact match. The conclusion from the study was that media can affect politics by influencing what the public considers important.

Audience characteristics affect individual agendas. How important an issue is to individuals or its salience, affects the placement of an issue on the public agenda. The salience reinforces the media’s agenda-setting role. Media have more power when people do not have direct experience.

Research in agenda setting shows that mass media influence the public issues people discuss, and that, in turn, affects political behaviors. However, the importance of media in setting the agenda varies from person to person and from issue to issue.

Immediately after the agenda-setting study Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann published the theory of ‘the spiral of silence’.

According to Neumann, the unified, constant and consistent picture of the world that the mass media present shapes people’s perception of dominant political ideas. The majority of people do not share the ideas expressed by the media, the spiral of silence theory argues, but media consumers think they do because of the power of media coverage.

People in the majority assume that they are in the minority, an assumption that makes them less likely to speak out about the issues. Overtime, as the ‘silent majority’ remains quiet, ideas that are held by a minority of people come to dominate the political discussion. (7)

Throughout the campaign process, polls provide the essential news pages for media discussions of which candidate may survive and which are bound to get weeded out early.
The mass media are not the most important influence on voting decision. Family background, economic status geographical location and other demographic factors are better predictors of an individual’s vote than what he or she reads in the paper or sees on television. But most election are decided by a small ‘swing vote’ which is able to overcome demographics and change its mind during the campaign. And swing voters are greatly influenced by the media. Even the average voter may be significantly affected by media context.

A study conducted by Serena Wade and Wilbur Schramm ‘The mass media as source of public affairs, science and health knowledge’, Public Opinion Quarterly, Summer, 1969, P.198 in 1969 found that 70 percent of American adults make regular use of television for information about candidates and campaigns. 50 percent of them use newspapers and 25 percent turn to magazines. Another study conducted by Dan Nimmo in 1960 revealed that four fifths of all Americans learned more about national election campaigns from newspapers and television than from interpersonal conversation.

Early mass communication researchers sought to understand the effect of propaganda during and following World War I. This research continued throughout the 1920s and 1930s and reached a high point in the Office of War Information studies conducted during World War II. In general, this research used the experimental methods of psychology or the developing techniques of content analysis to draw inferences about the effects of propaganda. Thus researchers attempted to ascertain the presence of Nazi propaganda from a careful analysis of the pro-German magazine, The Galilean.

Likewise, Hovland (1949) conducted a series of informal experiments to determine the influence of Allied propaganda in changing attitudes.

The Indian Political Science Association organized the first major study of voting behavior in India. A report consisting of 26 local reports were published in 1952(Kogekar & Park, 1968). In the same year, Ashoka Mehta conducted a study titled, ‘The Political Mind of India’, an analysis of the results of the General
Elections, 1952. These studies systematically examined the voting behaviour of Indian citizens without any earlier data.

NGS Kim conducted a panel study of 1967, general election in Nagpur. The study examined the various aspects of political awareness of the people of the city. It was found that more educated and modernized people had better images of political parties and higher and wider level of political awareness.

The 1962 general elections triggered a string of voting behavior studies in different parts of the country. Pathak and Parikh conducted a study in Gujarat (1962), Winner-Kothari in Kerala (1962) and Aloo Dastur studied the Bombay city election in the same year. All these studies were criticized for making assumption on political process which confuse a ‘town meeting’ the conception of democracy with a complex, represented democratic process that too in a developing country (studies in the fourth general election, 1972).

Dr. Yogesh Patel conducted another study in 1967 in Uttar Pradesh. The aim of the study was to test the political awareness of voters and their knowledge of international, national and regional issues and development topics. The names of the world leaders, the names of the countries considered being friendly with India, major world events, and the date of the coming general elections in India, the name of the winning candidates for the Lok Sabha and the state assembly in the three previous elections was some of the questions asked during the survey.

There is convincing evidence that the relationship between big money and political votes already angers most voters. An aroused public can make a difference. The environmental movement that transformed the legislative and natural landscape began as a grassroots movement without initiative from the standard political parties and with powerful opposition from industry. When conservatives in Congress moved to abolish public broadcasting; House of Representatives and Senators were stunned and retracted when citizens, Republican and Democrats alike rose in unison in anger against the move.
Voters are rebelling. As public complaints escalate, more of the public expresses open disgust. New parties slowly gather strength. The general public more vocal than ever about irresponsible and mass media. The two standard parties are hemorrhaging votes to a vague category entitled ‘Independent’. Many voters have stopped voting or electing candidates formerly considered unelectable. These changes reflect growing voter rejection of contemporary politics. The same kind of dismissal as implied by Ralph Nader’s proposal of a ballot time that offers ‘none of the above.’

Clark, government editor of the ‘Charlette Observer’, defends the use of civic journalism by the observer in covering election campaigns in North Carolina. It project your voice, your vote campaign, an experiment in civic journalism (sometimes called public) launched by a consortium of six newspapers and nine public and commercial television stations in the 1996 North Carolina election contests, the races for governor and for the U.S senate.

The project began with a poll of the audience, asking then to identify the issues that they cared about. They selected four of the top five issues (crime and drugs, health care, taxes and spending and education) interviewed the candidates, put together issue packages and continued to pursue information and comments from the candidates about these issues throughout the campaign.

Chuck Clarke defends the use of civic journalism in covering the election campaigns in North Carolina. He describes the approach the journalists used and their goal of providing readers with the relevant information they needed to make decisions concerning the election. He offers an analysis of what went well and what went wrong, and the reflects on some aspects of the election that were beyond anyone’s control.

Before September 11th, American journalists were not serious in their reporting, of the world affairs. But after the incident of Sept.11th, all of them became the preachers of the gospel of serious journalism. But in India even after many national tragedies, hung parliament and communal violence in Gujurat, Marad, Orissa and Karnataka; our journalists both in electronic media and print media are
not serious and professional except few newspapers like The Hindu. It is found that public journalism is a misguided effort to cast a kind of bogus rationality and efficiency over campaign coverage. Citizen oriented campaign coverage is only as good as the vitality of the information available to the voters in print as they proved to choose their representatives.

As Walter Lip Mann once believed, the job of the press is to provide, “trustworthy news, unadulterated data, fair reporting, disinterested fact, so that public can form intelligent decisions.”

Kathleen Hall Jamieson research examines the role of the mass media in young people’s disengagement from politics. The study found that media use, whether information or entertainment oriented, facilitates civic engagement, whereas news media are especially effective in promoting political awareness. Although heavy use of media interferes with both political and civic engagement, the overall effect of media use is favorable for each outcome.

The decline in Americans’ political participation has been an issue of both academic and popular concern. Voter turnout in congressional and presidential elections has dropped since 1960 (Brody, 1978, p. 223; Cassell & Luskin, 1988; Keeter, Zukin, Andolina, & Jenkins, 2002), and Americans are less involved in political activities ranging from signing petitions to attending rallies (Miller, 1992; Putnam, 2000) explain the decline in participation focus on young people. Political engagement increases during the life course, but lower starting levels among youth, have offset increases in older cohorts (Miller, 1992). Despite high hopes with the passage of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment, young people have consistently lagged behind older Americans in terms of registration, voting, and most other forms of political involvement (Keeter et al., 2002; Lopez & Kirby, 2003; Soule, 2001). Furthermore, although participation measures have been dropping for all age groups, youth political engagement has been the most precipitous (see Delli Carpini, 2000). According to Putnam, civic engagement is an important precursor to political action by virtue of its role in building social capital. Social capital provides a fundamental ingredient for democratic action by facilitating
cooperation and interpersonal trust (Coleman, 1990). In noting a steep decline in civic involvement during the past half century, Putnam (2000) contended that decreasing social capital may be an important source of political disengagement. Indeed, young people ages 18 to 29 in 1993 and 1994 were only half as likely to take part in any of a dozen different forms of civic activity as similarly aged youth 20 years earlier (Putnam, 2000, p. 252). The only measure by which young people today are doing better than prior generations is in community service (Galston, 2004). Although Putnam’s explanations have been challenged (see Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999; Winter, 2003), scholars have accepted the importance of civic involvement, and many have shared in Putnam’s alarm at the decline in organizational affiliations (Galston, 2004; Keeter et al., 2002; Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999), even if Americans might be gaining social capital from other sources (Winter, 2003). In this research, we examine the role of the mass media as a potential source of the decline in political and civic engagement. This study uses data from the 2004 National Annenberg Risk Survey of Youth, a survey conducted by the Adolescent Risk Communication Institute at the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania. The survey involved 1,501 telephone interviews with 14- to 22-year-old respondents conducted between April 27 and September 16, 2004. Within each household, a 14- to 22-year-old was requested to respond to the interview. In those households in which more than one person qualified for the interview, the one with the most recent birthday was chosen. In households where a potential respondent was away at school, we attempted to schedule an interview when the respondent was at home. For those younger than 18 years of age, parental permission was obtained.

Findings

The Internet to get information was the most popular form of media use, with 58.3% of youth reporting that they do it most days of the week. A little less than one third of young people reported that they read a book most days of the week. A majority of youth read a newspaper, watched the national nightly television news or cable news, watched the local news, listened to a radio news show, watched a movie
that was broadcast on television, watched a movie using a DVD or videocassette player, watched a television show that they were following, read a book, and read a magazine at least once a week or more. A sizable proportion (29.8%) of young people went to a movie theater at least once a week or more. The least popular activities, reported as never done, were watching the national evening television or cable news, with 25.9% saying that they never do this, and listening to a radio news show for more than 5 or 10 minutes, with 25.8% reporting that they did not do this. When it came to watching television generally, 5.3% reported watching more than 8 hours a day, 6.7% said 5 to 8 hours a day, 35.2% said 3 to 5 hours a day, 38.9% said between 1 to 2 hours a day, and 14% said they watched less than 1 hour a day.

Frederick Vincent Bales (1980) studied the role of the mass media in helping a selected group of Latin American squatter settlers become politically oriented. A special focus concerned the possible link between media news consumption and a feeling of political efficacy, i.e., a feeling that political activity on the part of individuals can make a difference.

The results showed that mass media use was positively and significantly correlated with political knowledge. The same was true of the correlation between political efficacy and political activity. The study was based upon a secondary analysis of random surveys conducted in Lima, Peru, Guayaquil and Ecuador. Media use and political correlation were significantly correlated only in the Guayaquil sample. Although significant correlations were not established between media use and political efficacy in either set of data, no evidence was produced linking mass media use to general feelings of frustration.

Mass society theorists have pointed out certain patterns of media use which are disturbing. These patterns include use of media for reassurance and guidance and use of media to replace personal relationships. For instance, the use of media for entertainment will distract individuals from reports of political events. The media were viewed as the new opiate of the masses which prevented individuals from noticing the way in which ruthless members of elite groups were exploiting them.
The use of media for guidance and reassurance will make them depend more on the media for information without verifying its truth.

Peterson et al (1980) in their study ‘The Mass Media and Modern Society’ have tried to spell out the significance of mass media as the chief agents of political socialization and mass communication. They opine that the modern society is very much dependent on the mass media.

Akin Chan (1982) in his study ‘Urban Growth and Political Socialization in India’ has tried to analyze the relationship between the process of urbanization and political socialization. He established that spread of education and the mass media in the urban centers contribute to political socialization immensely.

Classical studies were undeniably important first attempts to use survey methodology and to gain some insight into the impact of media and mass communication on the behavior of voters. Katz in a 1971 review writes of the empirical studies which constitute the ‘classics’.

Michael Robinson studied the George Wallace vote in the 1968 presidential election using Survey Research Center data, and explored the information source as a possible critical variable. He reached a startling information source as a possible critical variable and a startling conclusion that the relationship between reliance on television for political information and support for Wallace was not spacious, but was significant even when controls for education, age and socio-economic status were added.

Meadow’s (1973) study, a content analysis, cross-media comparison of presidential campaign news coverage in 1972, reveals that such was indeed the case despite its time constraints and inflexible deadline, television news and newspapers gave equal coverage to Mc Govern and Nixon.
Media as an agent of socialization

Norris Johnson, in 1967, found that Kentucky high school seniors in economically depressed rural areas obtained most of their political information from television- p.25

Neil Hollander (1971) studied the way in which adolescents in Everett, Washington, viewed the Vietnam War and concluded that the major substantive finding is the importance of mass media as a source of learning about an important political object, war. This finding casts considerable doubt on the present utility of much of the previous research on the sources of political socialization and indicates that researches have, perhaps been passing over the major sources of political learning (Kraus and Davis, 1976).

Joseph Dominick (1972) with a sample of sixth and seventh graders in New York City schools looked at the role of television in political socialization and found that the mass media are clearly the primary sources of information about the government and political information generally for youngsters in this age group (Kraus and Davis, 1976)

It is most probable that mass media are experienced differently in societies with non-western characteristics, especially those that are less individualistic and more communal in character, less secular and more religious. There are other traditions of media theory and media practice even if western media theory has become part of the hegemonic global media project. The differences are not just a matter of more or less economic development, since profound differences of culture and long historical experience are involved.

Although the aim is to provide as objective an account as possible of theory and evidence the study of mass communication cannot avoid dealing with questions of values and of political and social conflict. The media are inevitably involved in these disputed area as producers and disseminators of meaning about the events and contexts of social life, private as well as public. Therefore we cannot expect the study mass communication to provide theoretically neutral, scientifically verified
information about the effects or the significance of something that is an immensely complex as well as inter subjective set of process. For the same reasons, it is often difficult to formulate theories about mass communication in ways that are open to empirical testing. P.12

The field of mass media theory is also characterized by widely divergent perspectives. A difference of approach between left and right tendencies can sometimes be discerned. Leftist theory is critical of the power exercised by media in the hands of large global corporations while conservative theorists point to the ‘liberal bias’ of the news or the damage done by media to traditional values.

Media-centric theory sees mass media as a primary moves in social change, driven forward by irresistible developments in communication technology. It also pays much more attention to the specific content of media and the potential consequences of the different kinds of media as a reflection of political and economic forces.

The entire study of mass communication is based on the assumption that the media have significant effects, yet there is little agreement on the nature and extent of these assumed effects. The uncertainty is more surprising since everyday experience provides countless examples of influence. We dress for the weather as forecast, buy something because of an advertisement, go to a film mentioned in a newspaper, react in countless ways to media news, to films, to music in the radio and so on. Good or bad economic news clearly affects business and consumer confidence. There are many cases of negative media publicity concerning food contamination or adulteration leading to significant changes in food consumption behavior, sometimes with large economic impact. Acts of violence or suicide appear to be copied or stimulated by media portrays. (3) P.456 Certainly the media themselves seem confident of their capacity to achieve intended effects.

Hovland et al (1949) for instance reported a series of large-scale experimental studies that asserted the value of using film material to ‘indocrinate’ American military recruits into awareness of and support for the aims of the Second World War. (4) P.458
Lazaresfeld et al (1944) and Berelson (1954) initiated a long tradition of investigating the effectiveness of democratic election campaigns.

The still influential and useful summary of early research by Joseph Klapper, published in 1960, concluded that mass communication does not ordinarily serve as a necessary or sufficient cause of audience effects but rather functions through a nexus of mediating factors.

With regard to the socializing effects of television on children, Rosngren and Windahl (1989) suggest that variations in evidence about the influence of television itself may reflect the fact that television was actually different in content and as a social experience in the 1980 compared with the 1950 when the first research was undertaken. It is also different in different societies.

Another study available on the impact of political communication is on ‘the newspapers endorsement influence on the 1980 presidential election vote’, by Robert E Hurd and Michael W Singletary published in Journalism Quarterly in summer 1984. The data used in the analysis originally collected by the centre for political studies of the Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan. The study indicated that while endorsements seem to sway of a few voters, the effect is so small that it seems unlikely to influence the outcome of an election.

The suggestion that newspaper editorial endorsements might influence the votes of readers and even the outcome of elections has both intuitive appeal and empirical support. The literature indicates the nature and magnitude of endorsement influence on the voters of readers may vary greatly from election to election. As with many other mass communication effects, some newspaper endorsements appear to have some effect under some conditions some of the time specifying these conditions has proven difficult. The newspaper endorsements can and do influence the votes of readers in local non-partisan elections but such an effect in Presidential elections not have sufficient documentation.

Another study by James E Gregg on Newspaper-Editorial Endorsement and California Elections, 1948-62 published in Journalism Quarterly indicate that
candidates endorsed by 11 major California newspapers in as many surrounding countries between 1948 and 1962 received a significantly higher percentage of the votes than candidates who were not endorsed. He cautioned these findings might not be generalized to the entire nation because the state of California has a particularly weak party tradition. Gregg reported these endorsements were much more helpful to candidates seeking local non-partisan offices than to candidates in state wide or national contests.

William M Mason and Michael Hooper found endorsement were influential in an unusual 1964 partisan race in which 118 Democrats and 116 Republicans competed state wide for 177 at large Illinois legislative seats. (journal)

Nevertheless Robinson reported that readers accurately perceived where their newspapers stood during the 1968 presidential election and that newspaper endorsements were associated with the way readers voted, even when party identification and pre-election vote intention were taken into account.

Another study by Wenmouth Williams Jr. and David C Larsen on ‘Agenda Setting in an Off Election year’ during 1976 in rural central Illinois city showed that local newspaper found rest at agenda setting for both local and national issues. Radio and Cable system also had measurable effect.

Recent research concerning the agenda setting function or press, the ability to tell us what to think about rather than what to think, has no doubt which produced by the realization that virtually all we know about the events to our environment is a product of news communicated via the media. This research conducted primarily during national political campaigning suggests that the media can set agendas of national issues. Three studies are primarily responsible for this.

Conclusion: First McComb and Shaw identified the agenda setting effects of the media on eligible voters not yet fully committed to a presidential candidate. They found impressive correlation between major and minor news items presented by local and national media and voter perceptions of important campaign issues. Positive correlations were also found when the media were considered separately,
leading to the conclusion that media were able to perform an agenda-setting function.

Another study conducted by McClure and Patterson during the 1972 presidential campaign compare the agenda-setting effects of television and newspapers on personal agendas. Newspapers and personal agendas were highly correlated while television and personal agendas were not related. The authors assume that the differential agenda-setting effects of print media and electronic media can be attributed to their new format. The nature of television new casts prevents the viewer from focusing on specific issues, by contrast, newspapers allow readers to reflect on today’s events and select interesting stories based on headlines and lead paragraphs.

As Lang and Lang suggest much of what happens during political campaigns is the direct result of events.
Reference:

1. Effects of Mass Communication on Political Behaviour, P. 175

2. Mass Communication Theory P.38

3. The Psychology of media and politics by George Comstock & Eric Scharrer P. 25

4. Ibid


