

Mass Media as Educational and Political Agent: A Literature Review on its Functions, Benefits, and Challenges in Education

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ABSTRACT

Mass media plays a strategic role in shaping the direction of educational development and democracy in the digital era. Not only as a conveyor of information, mass media also functions as an educational and political agent that influences the mindset, attitudes, and participation of the community, especially the younger generation. Through various platforms such as television, radio, newspapers, online media, and social media, mass media help shape academic culture, expand access to educational information, and increase political awareness among students. This research aims to examine the role, benefits and challenges of mass media in the context of education. The study is conducted through a literature review of various scientific sources that discuss media involvement in learning, character education, political information dissemination, and public opinion formation. The results show that mass media plays an important role in increasing digital literacy, interest in learning, creativity, and creativity.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Mass media is a communication channel that conveys information widely to the public through various platforms such as television, radio, newspapers, online media, and social media. In modern society, mass media not only functions as a means of disseminating information, but also plays a strategic role in shaping public perceptions, attitudes, and behavior. Cangara defines mass media as a mechanical communication tool that conveys messages from a source to a massive audience (Alamsyah, 2021). Rakhmat added that the media also plays a role in shaping the social environment through the social learning process, thus influencing the mindset and actions of the audience (Alamsyah, 2021). The mass media not only conveys information, but also shapes public opinion through agenda-setting theory, where the media highlights certain issues and frames people's perceptions of those issues (CN & Siregar, 2024). In addition, the media also acts as a watchdog that monitors the actions of the government and other institutions. In its function as a deliverer of education and entertainment, the media simplifies complex information to make it easy to understand and presents entertainment as part of social life (Ibrahim & Samsiah, 2022). Equally important, the media also provides a public space to discuss and express aspirations, as explained in Habermas' theory of the public sphere, which emphasizes the role of the media as a deliberative arena for society.

These functions show that mass media is not only a means of conveying messages, but also an active agent of social change, including in the fields of education and politics. In the context of education, the media plays a role in expanding access to learning resources, increasing digital literacy, developing creativity, and

supporting learning processes that are adaptive to technology. The media also helps shape the character of students through the delivery of social, moral and national values. Meanwhile, in the political realm, the media functions to increase the political awareness of the younger generation, encourage participation in the democratic process, and influence public perception of policy issues (CN & Siregar, 2024). Therefore, it is important to examine more deeply how mass media functions educationally and politically in the education system, as well as understand the benefits and challenges that come with it. This article aims to examine in literature the strategic role of mass media in the context of education and politics, focusing on the functions, benefits, and obstacles that arise. This study is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the importance of integrating media literacy in education to build an ecosystem that is democratic, critical and responsive to the times.

1.1 Definition and Role of Mass Media in Educational and Political Contexts

Media is an important tool in the communication process, especially in the context of education and politics. The word “media” comes from the Latin medium which means intermediary. In education, media refers to a tool or vehicle to convey learning messages from teachers to students. Djamarah calls media a teaching aid that contributes to the effectiveness of learning communication (Triana, 2022). While Sadirman sees media as a tool to channel messages and stimulate students’ attention so that the learning process becomes more lively (Triana, 2022). Learning media are physical means that present lesson content, such as books, recordings, videos, or pictures. Thus, the media serves as a link between the source and receiver of the message, and enriches the learning experience of students.

In educational practice, media plays a role in creating an interesting and interactive learning atmosphere. In addition to visualizing the material, media helps students understand abstract information in a concrete and meaningful way. Media also facilitates the different learning styles of learners, as well as providing a wider space for participation in the learning process (Bujuri et al., 2023). The use of appropriate media can increase the effectiveness, efficiency and attractiveness of learning. In addition, the utilization of information technology, including digital media and the internet, also strengthens the function of media in facilitating access to learning resources. In this case, teachers can utilize the media as a tool for knowledge transformation and strengthening students’ digital literacy (Miftah, 2013).

The development of social media has had a significant impact on education. Apps such as WhatsApp, Telegram and Google Classroom enable more flexible two-way interaction between teachers and students. Social media supports digital learning activities, strengthens collaboration, and fosters students’ creativity and digital literacy. Social media plays a role in the formation of students’ identity and self-expression through various forms of educational content. Social media encourages the birth of alternative learning spaces that are collaborative and participatory in nature (Chairunisa et al., 2024). Thus, social media not only expands access to learning resources, but also improves the overall quality of students’ learning experience.

Apart from education, mass media also plays a strategic role in political life. The media has an educative function, social control, and as an agent of forming public opinion in a democratic context. Through news coverage and public discussions, the media contributes to public understanding of political issues, public policies, and rights and obligations as citizens (Astawa et al., 2025). The media plays a role in fostering political awareness and encouraging active participation in the democratic process (CN & Siregar, 2024). However, the media also faces serious challenges, such as the spread of hoaxes, political polarization and political-economic interests that can affect media independence. Therefore, strong media literacy is needed so that people can filter information critically and rationally. That way, the mass media can optimally perform its function in building a smart, democratic and civilized society.

1.2 Functions of Mass Media in Education and Politics

Mass media plays an important role in education, not only as a conveyor of information, but also as a learning tool that expands access to knowledge. The informative function of the media includes the systematic provision of data, facts and ideas to the public through oral and written media (Ikhsan, 2024). More than that, the media also performs an educative function, namely shaping the character and moral values of students and encouraging independence in development through media-based learning (Amaliya, 2025). In addition, as technology advances, media also performs an innovative function by creating learning experiences that are creative, inclusive, and adaptive to changing times (Amaliya, 2025). Equally important, the media has a participatory function, allowing people, especially the younger generation, to be actively involved in the digital learning process and socio-political life through the internet and social media (Arpandi, 2023).

In the political realm, the mass media functions as a disseminator of policy information, public issues, and social developments that have a direct impact on people’s lives. This function allows citizens to access information quickly and widely (CN & Siregar, 2024). In addition, the media helps build public political awareness through political education and informative content that encourages active citizen involvement in the democratic process, reduces political apathy, and fosters awareness of civic rights and obligations (Astawa et al.,

2025). The function of shaping public opinion is also a significant strength of the media, especially through agenda-setting and framing theories that influence public perception of important issues (CN & Siregar, 2024).

The function of mass media in politics also includes the role of social control, monitoring the actions of the government and other institutions to maintain accountability and transparency. Although the media faces challenges such as political pressure and economic interests, its function as a guardian of power remains vital in maintaining democracy. In addition, the media creates a digital public sphere as a means of deliberation, where people can discuss, express their aspirations, and form collective opinions. This is in line with Habermas' concept of the public sphere, which places the media as the main platform for democratic dialog and citizen participation in collective decision-making.

2. METHOD

The writing of this article uses literature review as the main method. Literature review is an approach that is carried out by collecting, reviewing, and analyzing various scientific sources that are relevant to the topic discussed. This method was chosen because it is suitable for exploring theoretical thoughts and the results of previous research on the role of mass media in education and politics.

The data sources in this study are secondary literature, such as national and international scientific journals, academic books, scientific articles, research reports, and education and communication policy documents. The literature was selected based on its relevance to the theme of the study, namely the functions, benefits and challenges of mass media in the education process and the formation of political awareness, especially in the digital era. The analyzed literature was published from 2010 to 2024 and obtained from various databases such as Google Scholar, Garuda, ResearchGate, and university digital libraries.

The analysis was done thematically and narratively, by grouping the information into several main focuses: (1) the function of mass media in education and politics, (2) the benefits of mass media as an educational and political tool, and (3) the challenges faced in the utilization of mass media in the educational environment, such as the spread of hoaxes and low media literacy. This process aims to formulate a complete theoretical understanding that is relevant to the current educational context.

3. CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS: THE DIRECTION OF MASS MEDIA UTILIZATION FOR POLITICAL EDUCATION IN INDONESIA

Critical thinking skills are urgent in the digital age, as information flows fast and is not always verified. In a learning environment, this ability helps students to organize arguments, evaluate sources, and make rational decisions. Critical thinking involves problem recognition, evidence gathering, and drawing conclusions based on logic and accurate data (Sudiarta et al., 2021). In the context of education, digital media contributes greatly to honing these skills. YouTube, blogs, educational animations and other visual media provide interactive spaces that stimulate students' analysis and creativity (Pratiwi, 2021). The use of visual media, such as images or virtual laboratory simulations, makes learning concepts more interesting and easy to understand (Hartanto et al., 2021). In addition, multimedia-based e-learning is effective in increasing students' thinking capacity and engagement. Not only that, online learning platforms also encourage the growth of critical digital literacy. With interactive and informative digital media, students are encouraged to not only receive information, but also evaluate its truth. This is part of the formation of 21st century skills, which are essential in producing a generation that is critical, technologically savvy, and aware of the political and social dynamics in their environment (Habibah et al., 2022).

Critical thinking skills also form the basis of political awareness among students. When students are able to recognize socio-political issues, evaluate information and formulate opinions logically, they become wiser in making decisions. These skills are essential for understanding the complexity of public issues and filtering opinions from various sources (Sudiarta et al., 2021). One approach that is proven to support this is Problem Based Learning (PBL), which places students in real problem-solving situations. PBL becomes more effective when combined with digital technology, such as online discussion and presentation applications (Habibah et al., 2022). Social media such as WhatsApp has also been shown to encourage critical interaction between students and teachers, especially when used in media-based assignments, such as videos and photos (Amri et al., 2021). In addition, YouTube as a learning platform opens up space for students to compare different sources of information, which trains reflective and analytical thinking skills. Through mass media, students not only learn to understand political information, but also begin to form an awareness of the importance of participation in democratic life. Therefore, the purposeful use of media can strengthen young people's political literacy and prepare them as active and responsible citizens (Amri et al., 2021).

On the other hand, digital media also has an important contribution in shaping learners' social aspects. Interactions through digital platforms have the potential to foster national values and tolerance, especially when students engage in cross-cultural discussions. Within the framework of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, digital media is included in the mesosystem that influences interpersonal relationships in environments such as family and peers (Rohmah & Aziz, 2024). However, engagement in online communication needs to be balanced with

strengthening face-to-face skills. Empathy, cooperation and social awareness can only be optimally developed when students also have direct experience in social interaction. Platforms such as Instagram and Telegram do expand the reach of communication, but the quality of relationships formed is often not as strong as real interactions. This is where the role of mentoring by teachers and parents is important. Media should be directed to be a tool for learning socio-political values, not just passive entertainment consumption. With the right guidance, the media can be a vehicle for developing social characters that are in line with democratic principles, such as openness, respect for differences, and a spirit of mutual cooperation (Rohmah & Aziz, 2024).

Besides the cognitive and social aspects, mass media also plays a role in encouraging more participatory, collaborative learning. Through project-based and technology-assisted approaches, students can learn to work in teams, develop ideas and solve problems together. This is all part of democratic education that is oriented towards cooperation and shared responsibility (Ediana et al., 2023). However, the high intensity of digital media use also poses risks, such as decreasing the quality of social interaction and the emergence of digital fatigue. Therefore, education policy must be able to balance the benefits of digital media with the need to strengthen direct social interaction (Rohmah & Aziz, 2024). In practice, platforms such as YouTube, Ruangguru, Zenius and QuipperClass are proven to increase student motivation and engagement in learning (Yuniarti et al., 2023). These media utilize engaging visual and audio approaches, making the delivery of complex material more enjoyable. Not only that, the delivery of social and political issues through interactive content, such as music or animation, has proven effective in arousing students' interest in national themes. With this approach, media is not only a learning tool, but also a bridge to participatory civic education.

Overall, mass media utilized strategically can be a catalyst in improving the quality of education while strengthening the foundations of democracy. Not only does it provide broad access to information, the media is also able to foster students' critical thinking skills, political awareness, and social skills. However, the role of the media will not be optimal without assistance from teachers, parents, and supportive education policies. The integration of media into the curriculum should consider the balance between the use of technology and the need for direct social interaction. With an integrative approach, media can shape young people who are not only academically intelligent, but also sensitive to public issues and actively participate in democratic life. Therefore, collaboration among education stakeholders is key in ensuring that the media truly functions as an agent of education and social transformation (Yuniarti et al., 2023).

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Mass media plays a very strategic role in shaping learners' mindset, attitude and engagement in education. In the midst of the digital era, the learning process has transcended the physical boundaries of the classroom and transformed into a dynamic and multidimensional experience. Students now have access to various sources of information, whether through television, news portals, social media, or online learning videos. This access enriches their understanding of various topics and encourages them to think critically, selectively and analytically in receiving and responding to information. The media also allows students to learn independently and collaboratively through discussion forums, interactive commentary, or educational content creation. However, uncontrolled exposure to information also has the potential to cause cognitive confusion, misinformation, and decreased learning focus. This requires digital literacy skills that are not only technical, but also analytical and ethical, so that students are able to distinguish between valid and biased or misleading information. Educational institutions play an important role in integrating media carefully and wisely into the curriculum, as well as being a guiding space that shapes students' characters as critical and responsible learners (Arijumiati et al., 2021).

Furthermore, mass media also contributes greatly to the formation of students' social and political awareness. Through actual news, educational content, and public narratives, students are introduced to real social issues in society, such as social inequality, human rights, gender justice, and environmental issues. This kind of exposure not only broadens their thinking horizons, but also fosters empathy and commitment to human and national values. Mass media becomes a learning space that facilitates the formation of an inclusive and democratic civic character. In this context, students are invited not only to understand public issues superficially, but also to explore the roots of the problem and formulate opinions argumentatively. However, without critical assistance, the use of media can also have negative impacts, such as the emergence of apathy, social exclusivism, or even radicalism of thought. Therefore, it is important for teachers and educational institutions to provide a reflective and dialogical space where students can discuss media content openly and constructively. Thus, education is not only a means of delivering information, but also a forum for the formation of collective consciousness based on the value of public civilization.

Despite its great potential, the effectiveness of media in supporting education depends on the extent to which students are assisted in the consumption process. There are still many students who access media freely without supervision or guidance, thus consuming more entertainment content than educational content. In the long run, this pattern can disrupt learning concentration, divert focus, and even reduce the quality of students' social interactions. This situation is exacerbated by the low level of media literacy among students, which causes them

to easily believe in inaccurate or provocative information. To overcome this, teachers and parents must play an active role not only as technical supervisors, but also as learning facilitators who are able to guide students' thinking processes. Teachers need to design teaching strategies that involve digital media in a contextual and relevant manner, while parents need to instill ethical values in the use of media in the home environment. Both must work together to create a learning atmosphere that supports the growth of critical, analytical and empathic thinking habits. Thus, digital media is not only a means of entertainment, but also a tool of educational transformation that shapes students as individuals who are intelligent, characterized, and aware of their social responsibilities (Wardani et al., 2024).

In the context of modern learning, the integration of mass media in education is not only limited to the delivery of information, but also as a means to foster students' reasoning power and sensitivity to public issues. Media such as podcasts, documentary videos, and opinion articles allow students to explore various perspectives in understanding an issue. This is important in forming an attitude of tolerance, openness to differences, and the ability to formulate arguments rationally. However, challenges arise when media is used passively and without deepening, which only results in surface understanding or mere reproduction of information. Therefore, a dialogic and participatory pedagogical approach is needed so that students are able to develop personal interpretations of the media content they access. Teachers can utilize media-based projects such as news analysis assignments, educational vlogging, or article-based debates as strategies to strengthen media literacy. This strategy can encourage students to not only be media consumers, but also reflective and responsible producers of information. Thus, the media-based learning process becomes more meaningful as it combines cognitive, affective and social aspects in a balanced way (Wardani et al., 2024).

Furthermore, political education through the media is also an important aspect that needs serious attention. Mass media, especially social media, is now the main arena for the dissemination of political information, both educational and laden with certain ideological interests. Students as part of future citizens need to be equipped with the ability to filter objective and data-based political information, not just provocative opinions. This is important so that they grow as politically aware individuals without being trapped in polarization or fanaticism. Media can be used as an introduction to the government system, the electoral process, the rights and obligations of citizens, and democratic values. However, without strong political literacy, students can be influenced by misleading narratives, such as political hoaxes or hate speech that are widespread in the digital space. Therefore, synergy between school, family and community environment is needed in shaping a healthy political understanding. Political education through the media should emphasize the values of active participation, freedom of thought, and respect for different views. In this way, the media is not only a political messenger, but also a civic learning platform that strengthens commitment to democratic life (Amala et al., 2021).

Therefore, one of the important recommendations in optimizing the role of media in education is to increase the competence of digital media literacy as a whole, both among students, teachers, and parents. This literacy includes the skills to understand the content of media messages, criticize the viewpoints presented, and the ability to produce quality content. Media literacy education should be integrated into the curriculum systematically, not just as additional or incidental material. In addition, educational institutions need to collaborate with external parties such as professional journalists, literacy activists or public broadcasting institutions to provide training and mentoring to students. This effort aims to ensure that students are not only able to access media, but are also skilled in processing, evaluating and using information ethically and responsibly. Furthermore, media literacy should also be directed at strengthening students' resistance to negative media influences, such as disinformation, a culture of violence, or the commercialization of education. If this ability is built early on, then learners will grow into individuals who are not only intellectually intelligent, but also socially and emotionally mature in interacting with the digital environment (Wardani et al., 2024).

As a follow-up to the importance of media literacy, schools must also prepare learning strategies that are adaptive to the development of information technology. A flexible curriculum that is responsive to social change will make it easier to integrate actual issues from the media into learning activities. For example, teachers can link learning topics with relevant current news, so that students not only learn theoretical concepts, but also understand their application in real life. This is in line with the contextual approach which emphasizes the importance of the link between subject matter and social reality. The use of media in the learning process must also be adjusted to the characteristics of students and learning objectives. Not all types of media are suitable for every subject or level of education. Therefore, policies are needed that support teacher training in selecting, managing and evaluating learning media effectively. In addition, evaluation of the impact of media use also needs to be carried out regularly to measure the extent to which the media contributes to improving the quality of learning and students' social skills. With these steps, the use of media is not just symbolic or ceremonial, but truly an integral part of a progressive and transformative education system (Amala et al., 2021).

Finally, in building an inclusive and democratic education system in the digital era, the mass media should be seen as a strategic partner of education, not just an information channel. The role of the media is crucial in shaping public opinion, expanding access to knowledge, and strengthening civic values and diversity.

Therefore, the government and educational institutions must work together to create regulations that ensure the sustainability of quality, independent media, and favor the interests of education. In addition, there needs to be a collective effort from the community to continue to oversee the functioning of the media as an enlightening educational and political tool. On the other hand, the main challenge that must be faced is how to minimize the negative impact of the media such as the spread of hoaxes, hate speech, and excessive commercialization that can damage the essence of education. By prioritizing the principles of literacy, participation and collaboration, mass media can become agents of change that encourage social transformation through education. This step certainly requires a joint commitment from all stakeholders, from the government, teachers, parents, to the media industry players themselves. Thus, education is not only the responsibility of formal institutions, but is a joint movement towards a smart, critical and empowered society.

To conclude this discussion, cross-sector collaboration is an important foundation in realizing a media ecosystem that supports national education goals. The government needs to play an active role in formulating policies that facilitate the integration of mass media into the learning system, both through digital infrastructure support and regulations that encourage the dissemination of educational and inclusive content. On the other hand, the media community must take its social responsibility to produce and disseminate content that is not only visually appealing, but also intellectually and morally meaningful. A joint commitment between educational institutions, media, families and communities will result in a strong synergy in preparing students to become smart, tolerant and responsible digital citizens. Moreover, in an era where the boundaries between formal and non-formal learning spaces are increasingly blurred, mass media plays a role as a bridge between the world of education and real social life. Therefore, the expansion of digital literacy that emphasizes critical, ethical and participatory aspects should be a priority in the education reform agenda. With this approach, media utilization will not only produce academically competent graduates, but also form a generation of learners who care about the values of democracy, justice, and public civility (Amala et al., 2021).

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