

**THE EVOLUTION OF PR AND COMMUNICATION  
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Received: 01st May 2026

Accepted: 04th May 2026

Online: 06th May 2026

**KEYWORDS**

*election campaign, political PR, digital PR, image building, targeted communication, agenda-setting, hybrid media system, Uzbekistan*

**ABSTRACT**

*This article explores the evolution of Public Relations (PR) and communication strategies in election campaigns. It analyzes the theoretical foundations of political PR, the transformation from traditional to digital PR tools, the role of social media, image-building techniques, and targeted communication. Particular attention is paid to the practical application of PR strategies in Uzbekistan, using the 2021 Presidential Election as a case study. The article also examines the challenges of manipulation, disinformation, and the need for ethical standards in modern political communication.*

Election processes constitute an integral part of any democratic society, serving as a vital mechanism for ensuring citizens' political participation and expressing the will of the people in state governance. In the current era of globalization, Public Relations (PR) technologies for managing public relations have gained decisive importance in election campaigns. Through PR strategies, candidates are able to promote their programs and objectives, bring issues of public concern to the center of discussion, and — most importantly — attract and mobilize public support. Modern information and communication technologies have significantly strengthened the role of PR in election processes and substantially expanded its scope.

The significance of PR technologies in contemporary election processes continues to grow, as the speed of information flow and the tools for shaping public opinion have become more critical than ever in achieving competitiveness. Today, PR is no longer merely one component of an election campaign; it has become a core strategic instrument for candidates and their teams. As Professor Brian McNair aptly noted, "Political communication is not merely about the transmission of information: it is about creating messages that resonate with the electorate and influence their perceptions."<sup>1</sup> This observation further underscores the importance of PR technologies, as they represent one of the most effective means of establishing direct engagement with voters.

In Uzbekistan, the concept of PR (Public Relations) is a relatively new phenomenon, and the general public does not yet have a full understanding of its essence and practical capabilities. For this reason, the extensive coverage by specialists in recent years of the tasks,

<sup>1</sup> [1] McNair, B. An Introduction to Political Communication. Routledge, 2011, p. 21.

methods, and significance of PR in political processes through mass media is evaluated as a positive development. The formation of a PR culture, particularly in election campaigns, serves to deepen democratic values. This process plays a significant role in strengthening public confidence in political processes, enhancing citizens' awareness, and ensuring the transparency of political parties' activities.

Today, the role of mass media in PR strategies within Uzbekistan's political communication system is undergoing fundamental transformation. Along with traditional media outlets — television, radio, and print publications — social networks and digital platforms have become an integral part of election campaigns. This new environment, characterized by high speed of information flow and a high degree of interactivity, is reshaping the nature of interaction between political actors and the public. Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells writes on this subject: "The networked nature of modern communication has turned elections into a struggle for visibility and credibility in the online space."<sup>2</sup> This idea particularly substantiates the direct influence of PR campaigns conducted on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) on public sentiment.

In modern political communication, PR (Public Relations) technologies play a crucial role in establishing effective relations with the public, forming trustworthy communication systems, and managing public opinion. They are actively used in election campaigns as a means of conveying candidates' political programs to the public, attracting voters' attention, and creating a positive image. The main objective of PR is to strengthen the reputation of a political actor, party, or candidate, to shape a positive perception of them, and to maintain that perception over the long term. As political scientist B. McNair defines it, "Public relations in an election campaign is the process of managing social perceptions in accordance with the candidate's strategic goals and exercising control over the narrative."<sup>3</sup> This definition fully expresses PR's function as a tool of strategic management within the political communication system.

In Uzbekistan, PR activities during election campaigns are strictly regulated by election legislation. In particular, processes such as pre-election agitation, information dissemination, and the formation of candidates' images are carried out in accordance with the laws "On Elections" and other normative-legal documents regulating the activities of mass media. This indicates that PR technologies do not develop with complete independence as in a free-market environment, but rather under institutional control. As a result, PR activities are primarily oriented toward the goals of official information policy, lawful campaigning, and ensuring social stability.

The function of managing information flows acquires specific characteristics in the Uzbek context. While in Western models this process is often implemented through a free media space, in national practice, information flows are regulated to a certain extent by the state and authorized bodies. Consequently, PR strategies in election campaigns are predominantly implemented through official mass media, state television channels, and licensed publications. While this contributes to the uniform interpretation and dissemination of information, it may also lead to the limitation of alternative narratives.

<sup>2</sup> Castells, M. *Communication Power*. – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. – 571 p

<sup>3</sup> Shoemaker, P. J., & Vos, T. P. *Gatekeeping theory*. Routledge. 2009. 64 p.

The process of forming a positive image also occupies an important place in Uzbekistan's electoral practice. However, it is carried out primarily in harmony with collective political values and state interests. When presenting their programs, candidates and political parties emphasize shared values such as stability, consistency, social protection, and national development. This demonstrates that PR strategies in Uzbekistan are characterized not by an individualistic, but rather by an institutional and systemic nature. At the same time, the development of digital communication tools in recent years has led to the emergence of new forms of image-building through social networks, which contributes to the diversification of PR activities.

The issue of activating communication with voters is also developing in a distinctive manner within the national context. Traditional forms such as direct meetings, public events, and face-to-face dialogue with local communities continue to hold priority importance. Alongside this, mechanisms for interactive communication through electronic platforms, online appeals, and social networks are expanding. However, these processes are implemented in compliance with relevant legal norms and information security requirements.

The relationship between PR and journalism is an integral part of the political communication system. PR specialists serve as the primary source of information for journalists, while journalists act as a channel for disseminating this information to a wide audience. The harmony of this mutual cooperation is of great importance in ensuring the transparency of election campaigns, the culture of public discussion, and the legitimacy of political processes. In modern conditions, these interactions are carried out not only through traditional media but also through digital platforms, the blogosphere, and social networks. In this regard, the development of PR technologies has elevated journalism to a new stage — that of mediacommunicative partnership.

Media and PR technologies work together to ensure the success of election campaigns. The integration of journalistic principles and PR strategies contributes to ensuring the transparency and fairness of electoral processes. As Manuel Castells emphasized, "The cooperation between mass media and PR increases the visibility and credibility of political campaigns."<sup>4</sup> This idea reflects the importance of mutual cooperation between PR and journalism.

The collaboration between journalists and PR specialists in election processes creates opportunities for broader coverage of candidates' political programs. This cooperation enhances the effectiveness of PR strategies and improves the quality of information during election campaigns. At the same time, journalists, using PR tools as an independent source of information, deliver truthful and accurate data to the public.

PR technologies serve as a strategic tool in ensuring the success of election processes. Communication theories and journalistic principles contribute to increasing the effectiveness of PR strategies. The synergy between media and PR enables the efficient management of information flows in election campaigns. The main types of PR technologies used in election campaigns also constitute an important section of our study.

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<sup>4</sup> Castells, M. *Communication Power*. Oxford University Press, 2009. p. 98.

PR strategies are a vital tool for managing election campaigns and engaging the public. They play a significant role in campaign management. PR tools serve as the main instrument for promoting election programs, attracting public attention, and mobilizing voters. It should be noted that this field is traditionally divided into two main areas: traditional and digital PR.

As traditional tools, television, radio, and print media continue to remain an integral part of election campaigns. For example, television plays a decisive role in shaping a candidate's positive image and promoting their programs. "Television remains the most effective tool for shaping public opinion during the pre-election agitation period,"<sup>5</sup> note specialists. This medium serves to strengthen visual and emotional connections with voters. Radio is an effective tool for disseminating information in remote areas and mobile environments. Print publications, in turn, are used to deliver analytical materials.

In the field of digital PR, the role of the internet and social networks in PR strategies has been steadily increasing in recent years. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X, Telegram, and TikTok enable candidates to address their audience directly. "Digital platforms have transformed political campaigns, enabling personalized engagement with voters," specialists note.<sup>6</sup> Through social networks, it is possible to conduct targeted advertising campaigns, popularize election programs, and shape public opinion with the help of opinion leaders.

The success of an election campaign largely depends on the candidate's image. PR technologies serve as the primary tool for creating a positive image of the candidate and promoting it to the public.

A candidate's image is formed through visual and verbal elements. For instance, logos, colors, advertising banners, and slogans are the main attributes of an election campaign. Visual tools emotionally influence voters and help the candidate remain memorable. At the same time, slogans serve to express the candidate's goals and values in a concise and clear manner. For example, Alisher Kodirov's initial election banner during the 2021 presidential elections can serve as an illustration of this.<sup>7</sup> The design of such simple yet powerfully motivational banners clearly demonstrates the scope of work carried out by PR specialists.

In addition, audiovisual approaches can also be highlighted. Advertising clips, videos on social networks, and other audiovisual materials significantly enhance the effectiveness of the election campaign. Videos prepared within the framework of the PR strategy demonstrate the candidate's closeness to voters and effectively communicate their political programs to a wide audience.

In the context of Uzbekistan, the 2021 Presidential Election stands as one of the most relevant empirical examples for the scholarly analysis of the application of PR technologies in election campaigns. The integration of digital PR tools was clearly observed, indicating the ongoing transformation of the national political communication system.

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<sup>5</sup> Iyengar, S., & Kinder, D. R. *News that Matters: Television and American Opinion*. University of Chicago Press, 1987. p. 45.

<sup>6</sup> Enli, G. S., & Skogerbø, E. *Personalized Campaigns in Party-Centred Politics: Twitter and Facebook as Arenas for Political Communication* // *Information, Communication & Society*, 2013, Vol. 16, pp. 757–774.

<sup>7</sup> "Prezidentlikka Alisher Qodir..." — Alisher Qodirov saylov kampaniyasini boshladi. Available at: <https://www.gazeta.uz/oz/2021/09/20/alisher-qodirov/>

One of the main directions of PR technologies in this election was the implementation of audience segmentation through digital platforms. Candidates, particularly the campaign led by Shavkat Mirziyoyev, actively communicated on social networks (Telegram, YouTube, and Instagram) and developed tailored content for various social groups — such as youth, entrepreneurs, and civil servants. This demonstrates the application of the “targeted communication” model from PR theory in national practice.

From a scientific perspective, it is noteworthy that the mechanisms of “agenda-setting” and “framing” were clearly visible during the election campaign. The state and leading media outlets shaped the election agenda primarily around topics such as economic reforms, social protection, and improving the efficiency of public services. These issues were interpreted within a positive and forward-looking discourse, which helped strengthen feelings of stability and trust among voters.

Another important aspect of digital PR tools was the increased level of interactivity. For example, official Telegram channels received citizens’ opinions, questions, and appeals, with prompt responses provided to some of them. This indicates the introduction of elements of the “two-way communication” model. Additionally, visual PR technologies were widely used through video appeals and interviews posted on YouTube, which proved particularly effective in engaging young audiences.

The role of mass media in this process was also complex. The state-owned Uzbekistan 24 TV channel served as the main platform for extensive coverage of the election process and the implementation of official information policy. At the same time, independent online publications such as Kun.uz and Daryo.uz played a significant role by publishing analytical articles, comparative reviews, and expert opinions, thereby providing the public with a more diversified information space. This situation reflects the functional convergence of PR and journalism, indicating the formation of a “hybrid media system” model.

However, scientific analysis also shows that the application of PR technologies in Uzbekistan is not yet fully based on free-market mechanisms. The partial centralization of information flows, relatively limited political competition, and the insufficient development of independent PR institutions limit the effectiveness of PR strategies to a certain extent. Therefore, in the Uzbek context, PR technologies are developing predominantly within a “regulatory-communicative model” — that is, in a form regulated by the state and oriented toward ensuring social stability.

The example of the 2021 Presidential Election demonstrates that PR technologies in Uzbekistan are gradually evolving from traditional propaganda methods toward digital and interactive communication models. This process is closely linked to the institutional development of political communication, the level of media freedom, and the expansion of digital infrastructure, creating an important scientific and practical foundation for the further improvement of PR technologies in the future.

State mass media in Uzbekistan, particularly the Uzbekistan 24 TV channel, applied PR strategies for extensive coverage of election processes. Private media outlets, such as Kun.uz and Daryo.uz, played an important role by publishing analytical articles and comparing candidates’ programs. In these processes, PR technologies and journalistic approaches were harmonized to provide the public with broader and more reliable information.

PR technologies are among the primary tools for shaping public opinion. Through these tools, targeted information is delivered to the public and their attitudes toward the election are managed. Although no specialized research center has yet conducted a scientific analysis of the impact of the technologies used in elections on public consciousness, the broad effect of these PR technologies cannot be denied. It is important to analyze how voters perceive and respond to information through PR tools. PR strategies, for example, shape candidates' positive images through visual elements (banners, advertising videos) and social networks.

The use of PR technologies in election campaigns is an integral part of democratic processes. It plays a decisive role in shaping public opinion, creating the image of political actors, and increasing voter engagement. At the same time, the practical application of these technologies gives rise to a number of challenges and opportunities. Their analysis is essential for assessing the effectiveness of the modern political communication system. It is appropriate to examine this process in three main directions: (1) the probability of bias and manipulation in PR campaigns; (2) ensuring the reliability of information and combating disinformation; (3) digital technologies and information security.

In election processes, PR technologies are used as a tool of political communication not only to convey information but also to exert a certain directional influence on public consciousness. Therefore, they face threats of bias, information manipulation, and narrative control. Although the main task of PR is to attract voters to a particular candidate's ideas, in some cases this process turns into a means of disseminating biased information, discrediting opponents, or engaging in social manipulation.

As Pamela Shoemaker and Tim Vos have noted, "The selective presentation of information in PR campaigns reduces public trust and damages the independence of journalism."<sup>8</sup> Thus, the transmission of one-sided or incomplete information through PR tools weakens public confidence in objective information, which in turn harms the legitimacy of democratic processes. As a result, voters may make political decisions not on the basis of complete information, but under emotional or manipulative influence. Therefore, the ethical norms of political PR campaigns must be aligned with journalistic principles — objectivity, accuracy, and balance.

One of the most significant problems of modern election campaigns is ensuring the reliability of information and combating disinformation. False or manipulative messages directly affect voters' decisions and reduce the credibility of democratic processes.

According to studies, social networks — especially Facebook and Twitter — have been widely used for political advertising and targeted information dissemination (microtargeting). In this process, messages tailored to users' political views were delivered based on their personal data. In particular, within the framework of Cambridge Analytica's<sup>9</sup> activities, the data of millions of users was analyzed and individual PR strategies were developed based on voters' psychological profiles. This revealed not only the communicative but also the manipulative potential of PR technologies. From a scientific point of view, this case is regarded as a negative application of "framing" and "agenda-setting" theories. Information was selectively presented, and in some cases, inaccurate or unverified data was widely

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<sup>8</sup> Shoemaker, P. J., & Vos, T. P. *Gatekeeping Theory*. Routledge, 2009. p. 82.

<sup>9</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/>

disseminated. As a result, voters found themselves under the influence of emotional and manipulative content rather than objective information. This practically confirms Pamela Shoemaker and Tim Vos's assertion that the selective presentation of information reduces public trust.

