ELECTORAL INNOVATIONS IN POLITICAL MARKETING: THE RISE OF EXTREMIST PARTIES IN THE NEW GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT

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Abstract
This study seeks to examine the significant impact that key determinants exert on contemporary voting behavior, with particular emphasis on the perceived performance of governmental institutions, the alignment of party ideologies and political platforms with current societal needs, and the strategic use of charismatic leadership. Empirical evidence from regions such as South America and Western Europe illustrates how political parties have successfully mobilized support by articulating personalized narratives and responding to specific ideological demands.
These developments highlight the importance of innovation in political marketing strategies, especially in the context of increasing voter volatility and political polarization. The personalization of politics, together with the adaptive communication of policy agendas, has become a central feature of electoral competition in both emerging and consolidated democracies.

1.Introduction

Contemporary studies highlight the importance of key elements such as the clear positioning of the candidate, the construction and maintenance of a coherent political brand, the use of data to personalize messages, and the integration of online and offline campaign strategies (Scammell, 2015; Pich & Dean, 2020). The concept of a political brand involves defining a distinctive identity, a set of values, and promises perceived as authentic by the electorate (Needham & Smith, 2015). This identity must be communicated consistently and adapted to the media channels used in order to generate quick recognition and loyalty.

Empirical research indicates that the success of campaigns largely depends on the alignment between the candidate's desired image and the public's actual perception (Marland, Giasson & Lees-Marshment J, 2012). Communication strategies that combine coherent messaging with memorable visual elements and direct or digitally mediated interactions tend to be more effective in strengthening trust capital (Baines et al. 2019). At the same time, specialists warn about the risk of electoral marketing being excessively used as a tool for image polishing without real programmatic substance, which can lead to the erosion of credibility and increased voter skepticism (Baines et al., 2025).

2.Theoretical considerations

In contemporary political communication, there is an observable shift toward the systematic integration of social media platforms, microtargeting techniques, and influencer engagement, complemented by traditional campaigning methods such as public debates, face-to-face

interactions, and outdoor advertising (Aligatunnisa H. et al. 2024). This multifaceted strategic approach is designed not merely to secure votes, but also to mobilize the electorate and foster enduring relationships between political actors and their constituencies (Vargas-Merino, 2025). Consequently, electoral marketing emerges as a multifactorial process that synthesizes the analysis of voter behavior, the application of technological innovations, and the strategic management of public perceptions within an increasingly competitive and dynamic political environment.

It appears that two overarching themes underlie the emergence of electoral innovations. The first concerns the profound transformation of the relationship between political parties and their members. In established and long-standing democracies, political parties have historically maintained traditional and organic connections with their members, relationships reinforced and sustained over time through stable and well-defined commitments. Over recent decades, these connections with specific societal groups and institutions have substantially weakened, largely due to the declining capacity of such entities to influence electoral choices.

In many democratic systems, voting has shifted from being an expression of solidarity with a social group or institution to reflecting individual preferences and opinions. Moreover, the pronounced influence of factors such as assessments of governmental performance, the adaptability of ideological positions and political platforms to contemporary demands, and the strategic use of leaders' charisma has contributed to the erosion of traditional class-based divisions and long-standing social cleavages that once characterized most political regimes. Examples can be found in Argentina, Venezuela, Italy, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and Germany, where political parties were originally founded on specific ideological perspectives and personal convictions (Swanson & Mancini, 1996).

Without the foundation of clearly delineated doctrines, the most electorally competitive parties have increasingly embraced the formation of political alliances as a core strategy, favoring ideological expansion over restrictive platforms to secure electoral victory. The creation of such alliances, combined with the adoption of media-centered campaign techniques, has reduced the visibility of party doctrine, making distinctions between party programs less apparent, except for a limited number of salient issues that parties claim to address most effectively (Coman, 2004).

The second major theme relates to the emergence of political programs that are more populist in nature than grounded in traditional political doctrines, making the shaping and cultivation of public opinion an essential determinant of electoral success. In contemporary society, the formation of public opinion is increasingly mediated by mass communication channels, particularly through the involvement of specialized consultancy firms, while the direct influence of governments and political parties over the media has markedly diminished.

Mass media has become the predominant source of both information and entertainment in almost all societies and, in many countries, has acquired a new level of independence, enabling it to assert its own voice within political debates. This independence also reflects the evolution of journalism into a professional field endowed with specific rights and an autonomous role in political processes. Such developments are evident in public information systems, as seen in countries like Germany and Italy, as well as in contexts where political parties operate their own media outlets. Nonetheless, a growing trend can be observed, particularly in the press-toward supporting a given political party at the expense of professional standards and the quality of news content.

Media independence proves more problematic in newer democracies. A recurring phenomenon is the development of distinctive media operational frameworks, sometimes referred to as "medialogy," designed to cloak electoral campaigns within ostensibly neutral news coverage and public debates intended to maintain or expand audience ratings. One of the notable consequences of this process is a reporting style that privileges personalities over substantive policy issues and oversimplifies complex matters, thereby encouraging compromises and accelerating the pace of the "electoral race." Awareness of political parties' increasing dependence on media

systems has influenced both political activity and decision-making processes. In response, many parties have adopted marketing-oriented approaches and engaged public relations specialists to ensure that their communications address the concrete concerns and needs of the electorate. Such strategies frequently center on the image and personal attributes of the political leader rather than on the ideological foundations of the party.

In the digital sphere, effects are **platform-dependent. Incidental exposure** to political news-encounters without deliberate search-has platform-specific consequences for political knowledge and participation, suggesting that each platform's affordances (algorithmic feeds, interaction norms) modulate information internalization (Shaira Michaela D., Ruby R., (2024).

A distinct mechanism, **social viewing**-consuming and discussing news in relational online spaces-can spur participation through **information acquisition, self-expression**, and **partisan identity reinforcement** (Mahmud H., Anuradha P. (2025). Regarding **agenda setting**, interactions between social media and legacy news are **bidirectional**: parties' activity on social media can sometimes **anticipate** subsequent coverage in traditional media, but overall the relationship is one of **coevolution** (Gilardi et al., 2022).

Even though social media is rapidly gaining ground, television still occupies a central position in electoral communication as the dominant source of news and entertainment, thereby reaching even audiences with low political interest. Across media systems, television newscasts and campaign programming are widely regarded as indispensable to the electoral fortunes of candidates and parties. Whether parties are allocated free airtime to present their platforms (e.g., Russia, the United Kingdom, Spain, Israel, Italy, Argentina) or obtain such exposure through purchase or negotiated access (e.g., Italy, Argentina, Russia, the United States), sustained television visibility, particularly favorable news coverage, remains a critical determinant of electoral success (Swanson & Mancini, 1996).

Despite the swift rise of social media in news use and electoral mobilization, television continues to anchor modern campaign practice. The literature shows enduring television effects, through advertising, partisan media exposure, and local TV market configurations, coexisting with distinct digital mechanisms that interact synergistically in a hybrid media ecology (Sides et al., 2022; Morris D., Morris J., (2022); Gilardi et al., 2022).

Robust quantitative evidence indicates that televised political advertising exerts **measurable persuasive effects,** particularly in "down-ballot" races where candidate name recognition is lower and marginal informational gains from spot exposure are greater (Sides et al., 2022). Beyond advertising, **cumulative exposure** to partisan TV channels is associated with longer-term shifts in political attitudes and voting behavior, underscoring television's capacity to reshape preferences at aggregate levels (Morris D., Morris J., (2022). Moreover, the **structure of local TV markets** matters: where station coverage aligns more tightly with electoral districts, visibility of representatives increases and electoral sanctioning is strengthened, enhancing political accountability (Chadwick A.(2013). At the same time, high volumes of TV campaign advertising are linked to **psychosocial costs,** notably elevated distress, highlighting externalities that should factor into evaluations of campaign impact.

In many countries, the presumed importance of the media, particularly television news, in influencing undecided voters has led to a conflict between politicians and segments of the media over the airtime allocated to electoral propaganda. This has led political parties to adapt to the media's logistical structure by participating in major televised events, giving increased attention to media objectives, and pushing charismatic leaders to the forefront. On the other hand, journalists have attempted to manipulate electoral campaigns themselves by focusing more on the competition than on candidates, adopting a dismissive tone when reporting on the political manipulation strategies underlying campaign events (Blumler, 2018). In response, politicians have adopted sophisticated behavior to manipulate journalists, as exemplified in the 1992 US presidential campaign, where journalists were given high importance, and candidates reached the public

through "breaking news," high-audience shows, or unconventional methods such as appearances on music channels (Shanto I., 2007). This confrontation between journalists and politicians has led to an increase in airtime allocated to campaigns, which carries negative connotations, reflecting politicians' weaknesses and disregard for public opinion.

According to Giddens (1990), Murdock (1993), and Tomlinson (1994), society's leadership is experiencing a decrease in functional differentiation and a proliferation of subsystems of all kinds, developed to meet the specialized demands of particular groups and social sectors. The emergence of these subsystems creates problems for traditional aggregative structures, authorities, and communities, resulting in social fragmentation. In political processes, more and more specialized groups are competing for public resources and social capital, acting as intermediaries between the community and political institutions. At the same time, political parties are becoming increasingly fragmented, forming more alliances and relying on weak or inconsistent ideological bases, which results in fragile and unstable voter connections. In this context, individual political figures who can attract voters are gaining more importance than the authority of traditional political parties.

Electoral innovations also emerge as anticipated outcomes of political reforms, without necessarily being linked to modernization. One of the reasons for the emergence of modern electoral campaign methods in Romania was the reform of the electoral system through the introduction of a minimum threshold that restricted access to Parliament, as well as the new Law on the Establishment and Functioning of Political Parties, which reduced electoral fragmentation. If presidential elections are decoupled from parliamentary elections, campaigns may shift from candidate-centered to party-centered.

The new style of electoral campaigning seems to have been adopted as part of a broader effort to stimulate and accelerate modernization processes. Democracy was not seen as an end in itself, but as a means of achieving change in terms of improving living standards, economic development, the growth of the market economy, and European integration. Electoral campaigns began before democratic political structures were well established and before the electorate was fully acknowledged as the central element. Romania offers examples of media-centered campaigns that are just as intense as those in countries with longer traditions.

Modernization leads to weaker political parties and a stronger role for the media. This appears to be the immediate cause of changing electoral practices and the shift to the modern campaign model. Three additional aspects complement this causal complex (weaker parties and a stronger, more autonomous media): sometimes, an intermediate condition can be identified in pragmatic political reforms, which may occur independently of modernization objectives (such as the desire for more efficient administration), political consultants strive to persuade candidates and parties to adopt innovative campaign techniques even before favorable conditions emerge. In such cases, new techniques are used only once the political and media environments have matured sufficiently to support their application, in new democracies (such as Romania), the modern model of electoral practices is adopted as a tool for stimulating broader modernization processes (Coman, 2004).

3. Research methodology

The present research has as its main objective the investigation of the relationship between the level of exposure to televised content (news and advertisements) and the perception of television credibility, as well as the analysis of perception differences according to respondents' gender.

The study is quantitative in nature and adopts a cross-sectional design, based on the administration of a standardized questionnaire. The quantitative approach was chosen in order to

ensure a rigorous measurement of the variables and to enable the use of inferential statistical analyses for testing the formulated hypotheses.

Based on the objectives of the study and the specialized literature regarding the role of television in electoral campaigns, the following working hypotheses were formulated:

- **H1:** Participants exhibit a high level of exposure to television news and advertisements.
- **H2:** The perception of television credibility differs according to the respondents' gender.
- **H3:** The perceived level of television credibility is positively correlated with the frequency of exposure to television news and advertisements.

The instrument employed was a structured questionnaire consisting of closed-ended questions with predefined answers, measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 - very low level; 5 - very high level). Three key items focused on:

- the frequency of watching TV news (*Q1_TV_news_freq*),
- the degree of exposure to TV advertisements (*Q3_TV_ads_exposure*),
- the perceived credibility of television (*Q5_TV_credibility*).

The questionnaire also included socio-demographic questions regarding respondents' age, gender, and occupation, which were used for sample segmentation. The sample consisted of 150 respondents, selected through convenience sampling. The gender distribution was relatively balanced (81 female and 69 male), and all participants fully completed the research instrument.

Data were collected through an online form distributed via digital platforms. This method enabled the rapid attainment of a sufficient number of participants and ensured uniformity in the conditions under which the questionnaire was administered.

The descriptive analysis focused on calculating means, standard deviations, and minimum and maximum values, in order to provide a general overview of the levels of exposure and perception.

The independent samples *t*-test was employed to compare the perceived credibility of television between male and female groups. The threshold for statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to assess the relationship between exposure frequency and the perceived level of credibility.

Effect size was estimated through Cohen's *d*, in order to evaluate the practical relevance of the identified differences.

4. Results

To evaluate the overall level of exposure and respondents' perceptions of televised content, a descriptive analysis of the variables included in the study was conducted. The analysis focused on the frequency of watching television news (*Q1_TV_news_freq*), the degree of exposure to television advertisements (*Q3_TV_ads_exposure*), and the credibility attributed to television as a source of information (*Q5_TV_credibility*). This stage allowed the identification of central tendencies and response variation, providing an overview of the data prior to the application of inferential tests.

The results highlight different levels of exposure and perception. For *Q1_TV_news_freq*, the mean score is 3.653 (SD = 0.990), indicating a moderate to high consumption of TV news on a 1–5 scale. The range of 2–5 shows that no participant reported a complete absence of news viewing. In the case of exposure to TV advertisements (*Q3_TV_ads_exposure*), the mean of 4.013 (SD = 0.912) reflects frequent contact with this type of content, while the minimum value of 2 confirms the absence of total avoidance of advertising.

With regard to the credibility of television (*Q5_TV_credibility*), the mean of 3.440 (SD = 1.065) indicates a moderate level of trust, with greater variation compared to the other variables

(range 1–5). This suggests divergent opinions among participants regarding the reliability of television as an information source.

Overall, the data indicate that although exposure to news and TV advertising is consistently high, perceptions of television credibility are more heterogeneous, pointing to a possible dissociation between content consumption and the level of trust placed in it.

Descriptive Statistics

|	Q1_TV_news_freq	Q3_TV_ads_exposure	Q5_TV_credibility
Valid	150	150	150
Missing	0	0	0
Mean	3.653	4.013	3.440
Std. Deviation	0.990	0.912	1.065
Minimum	2.000	2.000	1.000
Maximum	5.000	5.000	5.000

Distribution Plots

Q1_TV_news_freq
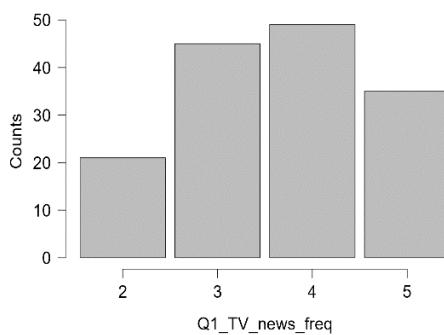
Q3_TV_ads_exposure
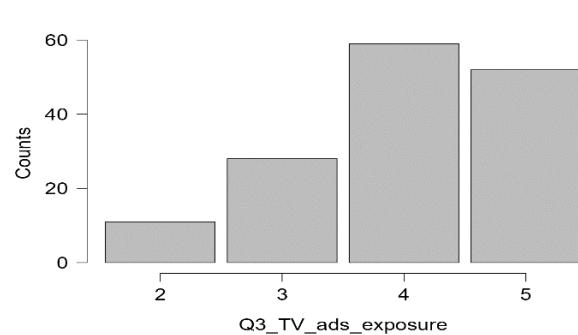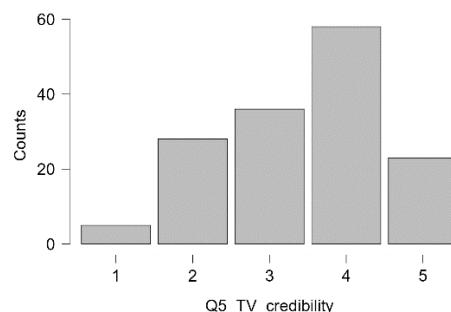
Q5_TV_credibility

The results of the independent samples *t*-test indicate that there is no statistically significant difference between women and men regarding the credibility attributed to television (*Q5_TV_credibility*), $t(148) = 0.516$, $p = 0.607$. The mean scores are very close between the two groups: women reported a mean of 3.481 (SD = 1.085), while men reported a mean of 3.391 (SD = 1.046).

The low value of Cohen's *d* (0.084) indicates a negligible effect size, confirming that the differences between groups are minimal and lack practical significance. The coefficient of variation is also similar for both groups (0.312 for women and 0.309 for men), suggesting a comparable variability of responses within each group.

Overall, these results reject the hypothesis that gender influences the perception of television credibility in the analyzed sample, highlighting a high degree of homogeneity of opinions between women and men.

Independent Samples T-Test

	t	df	p	Cohen's d	SE Cohen's d
Q5_TV_credibility	0.516	148	0.607	0.084	0.164

Note. Student's t-test.

Descriptives

Group Descriptives

	Group	N	Mean	SD	SE	Coefficient of variation
Q5_TV_credibility	Female	81	3.481	1.085	0.121	0.312
	Male	69	3.391	1.046	0.126	0.309

Bar Plots
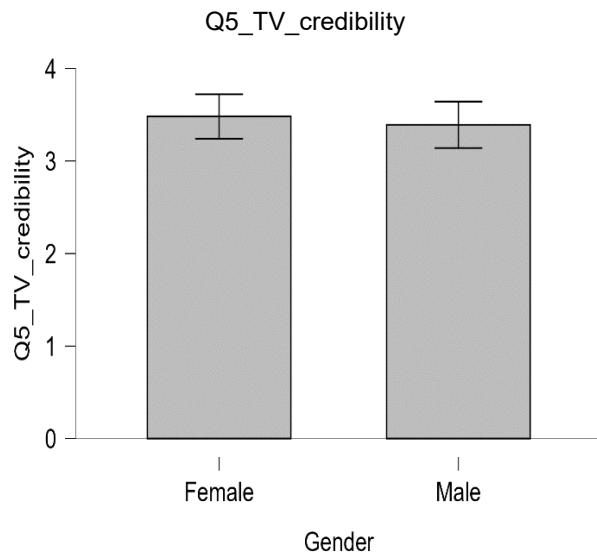
The Pearson correlation analysis did not reveal any statistically significant relationships among the variables under investigation. The correlation between the frequency of watching television news (*Q1_TV_news_freq*) and the degree of exposure to television advertisements (*Q3_TV_ads_exposure*) is very weak and negative ($r = -0.047$), indicating an almost complete independence between these variables.

Similarly, the relationship between the frequency of watching television news and the perceived credibility of television (*Q5_TV_credibility*) is weakly negative ($r = -0.103$), suggesting that an increase in news viewing frequency is not associated with a more favorable perception of television credibility. In contrast, the link between exposure to television advertisements and television credibility is slightly positive ($r = 0.042$), but also statistically nonsignificant.

All *p*-values exceed the 0.05 threshold, confirming the absence of significant associations between the level of exposure to television content and the perception of its credibility. Therefore, the hypothesis that news and advertising consumption influences the perceived credibility of television is not supported by the data obtained.

Pearson's Correlations

Variable		Q1_TV_news_freq	Q3_TV_ads_exposure	Q5_TV_credibility
1. Q1_TV_news_freq	Pearson's r	—		
2. Q3_TV_ads_exposure	Pearson's r	-0.047	—	
3. Q5_TV_credibility	Pearson's r	-0.103	0.042	—

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

The analysis provided a detailed perspective on the relationship between exposure to televised content and the perception of television credibility. The results showed that although the average level of exposure to television news and advertisements is high, this consumption is not associated with a proportional increase in the credibility attributed to television. Thus:

- **Hypothesis H1** ("The level of exposure to television news and advertisements is high") is partially supported, confirming frequent consumption but with significant variability regarding the perception of credibility.
- **Hypothesis H2** ("Gender significantly influences the perception of television credibility") is rejected, as the *t*-test indicated negligible differences between women and men.
- **Hypothesis H3** ("There is a significant positive correlation between exposure to television content and the perceived credibility of television") is rejected, as the Pearson correlation coefficient was not significant.

These results suggest that the perception of television credibility is determined more by contextual factors such as general trust in mass media, previous experiences, or alternative sources of information than by the mere frequency of content consumption.

5. Conclusions

The research highlighted that exposure to televised content, both news and advertisements, remains a constant and significant phenomenon among respondents. The high mean values of these variables confirm that television continues to be a central channel for information and influence, despite the rise of social media and the digital environment.

The descriptive analysis revealed a moderate to high level of consumption of TV news and advertisements; however, the perception of television credibility proved to be much more heterogeneous. This discrepancy suggests a possible dissociation between the high level of consumption and the level of trust granted, aligning with recent trends in the literature regarding the decline of credibility in traditional mass media.

The results of the independent samples *t*-test showed no significant differences between women and men with respect to the perceived credibility of television. This finding rejects Hypothesis H2 and suggests that credibility perception is not determined by gender but by other contextual factors, such as education level, personal experience with mass media, or political orientation.

The Pearson correlation analysis did not identify significant relationships between exposure to TV news and advertisements and the perception of credibility. Hypothesis H3 was therefore rejected, supporting the idea that the mere frequency of televised content consumption does not directly influence public trust. Credibility appears to be conditioned by deeper factors, such as the degree of media polarization or general attitudes toward mass media.

Overall, Hypothesis H1 was only partially confirmed, demonstrating a high level of exposure but notable variations in credibility perception. Hypotheses H2 and H3 were rejected, indicating that the influence of television is complex and cannot be reduced to simple linear relationships between consumption and perception.

These results carry important theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical standpoint, they confirm the shift toward a hybrid media ecology, in which television remains relevant but its credibility is contested. From a practical perspective, the study suggests that electoral communication strategies should not rely solely on the intensity of television exposure but should also consider mechanisms for building trust through transparency, consistency, and the integration of digital channels.

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