The Impact of PR and Mass Media on Political Party Membership Number in Uzbekistan

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Abstract: Various studies in the world show that mass media plays a great role in shaping public opinion by paying great attention to certain issues in the eye of people. That is why public relation services of different organizations and governmental structures try to cooperate with mass media. It is one of the main channels of communicating with audience. This research intends to test mass media and PR's influence in Uzbekistan in the example of political parties. The article gives univariate, bivariate and multivariate analysis of the impact of mass media and PR on political party membership number. In this cross-sectional research ten Uzbek nationwide newspapers such as O'zbekiston Ovozi, XXI asr, Milliy Tiklanish, Adolat, Xalq So'zi, Narodnoe Slovo, Pravda Vostoka, Hurriyat, Mohiyat and Jamiyat published in 2014 were studied by its amount of stories, prominence (length and placement of stories) and valence (depiction of a political party in stories). Altogether, 2260 stories with strong and direct connections with the political parties were picked up from the newspapers. In total there were proposed 4 hypotheses that examine some other more factors which have impact on the party membership number along with PR and mass media.

Keywords: Public relations, Mass media, Newspaper coverage, Political party, Political party membership number.

Mass media and journalists play a big role in forming public opinion by connecting events happening in the world with the images of these events in people's minds (Lippmann, 1922). Since most people lack direct experiences with an event their opinions on some subjects are mainly based on the information they received from the mass media. Since McCombs and Shaw published their research on agenda setting in 1972, lots of studies have tested the idea that there is a strong interdependence between the amount of coverage certain issues receive and the importance given to these issues by mass audiences. That is why public relation services of different organizations and governmental structures pay a great attention to partnership with mass media. For PR services mass media is one of the main channels of communicating with audience.

With so much importance attached to PR and mass media's influence in a society, this research intends to test PR and mass media's influence on political party membership.

So, what factors do have impact on the party membership number along with PR and mass media? What is understood by PR in the research paper? Isn't mass media one of communication channels for PR? Which practices of PR taken for the research as well? To provide a theoretical base for the study, literature on various factors that influence political parties' members increase or decrease was reviewed as well.

Mass media is not only channel of public relations. PR is wide by its practice; it uses a lot of channels to achieve its aim. PR has media (TV, radio, newspaper, magazine, web-sites, direct mailing, media pamphlets, booklets, posters) and non-media channels (meetings, briefings, conference, seminar-trainings, exhibitions) of communicating with public. Media channels are divided to earned media (coverage generated through editorial), owned media (own publication, broadcast or website) and bought media (advertisement). Achieving effective communication with public depends on selecting effective methods of

communication. Every channel has its advantages and disadvantages. PR-man should choose right method of delivery messages to address various audiences.

In many foreign works on political parties there were talked not about the factors that influence political parties' increase, but about decrease, because in many countries from the last quarter of XX century party membership number started to decline and this tendency is still continuing (Katz, 1990; Webb, 1995; Ignazi, 1996; Mair and Beizen, 2001; Scarrow and Gezgor, 2010; Whiteley, 2011; Kolln 2014; Beizen and Boguntke, 2014;).

Different scholars give different reasons for the decline. For example, Danish scientist Lise Togeby researching the reasons of party membership decline in Denmark, came to conclusion that the causes of the decline primarily demographic and socio-economic. He shows three reasons: (1) the declining number of farmers, (2) the weakening of the organization of the workers, and (3) the political mobilization of the new middle class and women (Togeby, 1991).

According to British scholar Paul F. Whiteley, decline is due to 'state capture', or excessive state regulation brought about by an ever-closer relationship between parties and the state: "As parties become increasingly closer to the state, the growing regulation and control which accompanies this threatens to turn party volunteers, in effect, into unpaid state bureaucrats. This has the effect of undermining their incentives to participate. The other aspect of the same process is that if parties can rely on the state for funding their activities, then they have little incentive to recruit or retain members for financial reasons" (Whiteley, 2011, p.2).

Menachem Hofnung, a scholar from The Hebrew University of Jurasalem argues that public funding does not necessarily lead to membership decline. "Significantly, the one country which experienced a dramatic fall in party membership, the United Kingdom, does not have a system of public financing" he writes (Hofnung, 1996, p.78). "It does

not matter whether the money is allocated by the state or raised independently. What is important is not the source of funding, but on what the money is spent" says the author (Hofnung, 1996, p.82).

Angelo Panebianco suggests three levels of studying the decrease reasons (or increase) of party membership: - the system level (country), the organizational level (party) and the individual level (member) (as cited in Heidar, 1994). But Knut Heidar admits that the decline process was mostly studied from the quantitative aspect, not qualitive. "We should also be concerned with qualitive aspects of membership" he says in his work named "The polymorphic nature of party membership" (Heidar, 1994, p.63).

Basing on above reviewed literature, along with mass media we researched governmental subsidy as a factor effecting party membership number. The mass media is researched from the angle of PR.

So, which practices of PR-institution taken for the research?

In this research, there are taken the following PR channels as factors:

I.   All 3 kinds of newspaper media channels:
     a) Number of publications in earned media (Xalq So'zi, Narodnoe Slovo, Pravda Vostoka, Hurriyat, Mohiyat, Jamiyat).
     b) Number of publications in owned media (Uzbekiston Ovozi, XXI Asr, Milliy Tiklanish and Adolat).
     c) Number of publications in bought media (advertisement posters in all above mentioned newspapers);
II. Non-media channels: number of meetings, briefings, conference, seminar-trainings, exhibitions and other events organized by political parties;

Two more factors were added to non-media channel factor: people participated in these meetings; and local party branches; because these factors are also very important in communication with broader audience. The more audience, the more people know about a political party and the more local party branches, the more people from different parts of the country know about a political party.

The non-media channel of PR of political parties corresponds to the factor which was talked about in above mentioned literature-to organizational level of political parties' factor. But we named it not as organizational level, but as a level of PR practice, i.e. PR in non-media level, because the indicators which it consists of can be considered as one of practices of PR (the number of local primary party branches, number of party events that were organized and number of people who visited them).

And one more important factor is taken as a PR level factor: PR in financial level-total money devoted for PR effort by political parties. Every sum of money that was used for spreading a political party's name among people was taken into account (for organizing different party events; printing flyers, posters, advertisements and so on).

In total 4 hypotheses are proposed.

The hypotheses are for the cross-sectional study that looks at the effect of governmental subsidy, PR in financial level, PR in non-media (or organizational) level and PR in media coverage level of 4 political parties in one year (2014) on the party membership.

H1: Governmental subsidy influence the amount of money devoted for PR effort by political parties.

H2: Governmental subsidies, PR effort in financial level will influence non-media (or organizational) level of political parties in Uzbekistan.

H3: Governmental subsidies, PR effort in financial level and PR in non-media (or organizational) level will influence the media coverage factors such as amount-prominence and valence of political parties in Uzbekistan.

H4: Governmental subsidies, PR effort in financial level, PR in non-media (or organizational) level and media coverage will influence the political party members' number in Uzbekistan.

To test the hypotheses, the data about governmental subsidy, money devoted for PR effort, non-media PR and media coverage of 4 political parties and party membership are collected from political parties and their press editions. In addition, the media's coverage is analyzed in terms of the amount, prominence and valence of the coverage.

Dependent Variable.

Political party is the unit of analysis in this study. The dependent variable is political parties' membership. On the contrary to the world tendency of decreasing party membership, in Uzbekistan it is increasing year by year, though slightly. Party membership variable was calculated in per cent, i.e. the increase of members from the previous year in per cent from the point of whole population of the country.

Independent Variables.

Governmental subsidy and amount of money dedicated for PR activities are the independent variables. They are measured in sums. Non-media level of PR and media coverage of parties are taken both as independent and dependent variables to test the hypothesis. All the data values were from January 1st, 2015.

Non-media level of PR factor of parties was measured by three indicators: the number of local party branches, number of party events that were organized and number of people who visited them.

Mass media coverage includes such variables as the amount, prominence and valence. Amount and prominence were taken as one variable (AP) and valence another to see which media coverage factor influences more on party membership increase, thus public opinion. Ten major Uzbek newspapers were taken as object of the research. Six of them are central nationwide newspapers: Xalq So'zi, Narodnoe Slovo, Pravda Vostoka, Hurriyat, Mohiyat, Jamiyat; and four of them are political parties' owned newspapers: Uzbekiston Ovozi, XXI Asr, Milliy Tiklanish and Adolat (nationwide as well). Only stories with strong and direct connections with the political parties in those newspapers were included in the dataset. The articles were browsed from the newspapers' web-sites, and the ones which missed from the web-sites were taken from editorial offices' electronic database (PDF or PageMaker versions). And it should be noted that not all articles with strong and direct connections with the political parties were taken for the research due to the problem of getting their electronic versions from newspapers' web-sites and editorial offices. Some articles and editions of the newspapers missed both in the newspapers' web-sites and in the editorial offices' database. Altogether, 2260 stories about political parties were picked up from the 10 newspapers. But some of them were about just one political party, some of them about two or three parties, and some of them about all four political parties in Uzbekistan. That's why the stories which are about several parties were attributed for each of the political party. Overall, UzLiDeP were written about in 482 stories, MTDP in 654 stories, PDP in704 and Adolat SDP in 714 stories.

Since political parties are the unit of analysis, each political party was coded for the amount, prominence and valence of coverage it receives in the media.

The amount and prominence of coverage were measured in two steps. First, each news story about a given political party was coded for amount and prominence; second, the amount and prominence scores of all stories about each party were averaged to represent the coverage amount and prominence of the political party.

The amount of coverage was measured by counting the total number of news articles about a given party in the ten newspapers.

Prominence of each story was calculated by multiplying the length of the article (total number of words an article contains) with its placement, which is defined as the page on which an article appears, with front page coded as 2, and any other page as 1.

Valence was measured on how the depiction of a party appears to common people. Positive is coded as 3, neutral as 2 and negative as 1. Positive news associates a party with progress. For example, an event organized by any branch of a party, any activity or speech of a party member or a fraction's member on some issues, praise or support of a party's policy is regarded as positive. When a story associates the party with weakness, inefficiency, it is coded as negative. For example, weak organization, a person's opinion against a party's policy was coded as negative. Stories those are balanced between positive and negative sides, or hard to determine its valence fall into the neutral category. The coverage of both strong and weak local branches of a party in the same story was usually coded as neutral.

Besides the researcher, an experienced journalist devotes did all the coding. About 10 percent of the articles were first coded by both coders to assure the intercoder reliability, to check the researcher's fairness and the rest done by the researcher. Calculated by the software Stata the intercoder reliability for valence is .89 according to the Pearson correlation coefficient.

Univariate Analysis

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for all variables.

Descriptive statistics for all variables		
2014	MEAN	ST DEV
	UZS	UZS
Governmental subsidy	7,588,183,625.00	2,862,817,493.78
Amount of money devoted for PR (%)	UZS 8.65	UZS 5.17
Local party organizations	6983.25	3197.63
Party events organized by parties	22835.25	15637.77
Participants	690661.5	354385.81
Media coverage-amount	638.5	107.58
Media coverage-prominence	5091725.25	1177413.68
Media coverage-valence	1850.5	315.58
The increase of party membership (%)	0.18	0.19

Table 1 lists the descriptive statistics for all variables.

The average level of governmental subsidy for political parties in 2014 was UZS 7,588,183,625.00.

Each political party spent in average UZS 8.65 per cent of its total budget for PR. Each party had in average 6983.25 local party organizations in the country. There were organized in average 22835.25 events by every political party and in average 690661.5 people participated in the events organized by each party.

The ten newspapers cover an average of 638.5 stories about each political party. Stories about political parties have an average length of 3 299 788 signs total in one year (ST DEV = 824318.6), and average length of each article is 5116.97 signs (ST DEV=646.85). Most articles are placed in any other page rather than front. An average for 47.33 percent of all articles about political parties' was placed in the front page (ST

DEV=49.23). The overall tone of media's coverage of political parties is leaned to the positive side. In average only 0.50 percent of all articles about political parties is negative (ST DEV=0.22) and 9.28 percent of all articles is neutral (ST DEV=1.23). Out of 714 articles about Adolat SDP only 3 are negative (0.42 %), 61 are neutral (8.54 %). Out of 482 articles about UzLiDeP only 4 are negative (0.82 %), 43 are neutral (8.92). Out of 654 articles about MTDP party only 2 are negative (0.30 %), 73 are neutral (11.16 %). Out of 704 articles about PDP party only 4 are negative (0.56 %), 61 are neutral (8.66 %).

The party membership (independent variable) increased in average 0.18 percent from the previous year.

Bivariate Analysis

Table 2. Pearson correlation for the all variables.

	Govern subsidy	Money devoted for PR (%)	Local party branches	Party events	Particip.	MC - amount	MC – prom.	MC - valence	Party memb. incr. (%)
Govern subsidy	1								
Money dev. for PR (%)	-0.58	1							
Local party branches	0.82	-0.76	1						
Party events	0.75	-0.69	0.98	1					
Participants	0.41	-0.17	-0.08	-0.24	1				
Med. cov. –amount	-0.85	0.11	-0.46	-0.37	-0.57	1			
Med. cov. –prominence	-0.85	0.11	-0.45	-0.36	-0.59	0.99	1		
Med. cov. –valence	-0.83	0.04	-0.5	-0.45	-0.39	0.97	0.97	1	
Party memb. incr (%)	0.78	0.04	0.46	0.43	0.31	-0.95	-0.94	-0.99	1

Table 2 lists the correlation coefficients between the all variables.

Among independent variables only governmental subsidy is strongly positively correlated with party membership. Local party branches and events organized by parties are moderately positively correlated. The number of participants is weakly positively correlated with party membership increase.

Money devoted for PR by political parties is not correlated with party membership increase. Media coverage is strongly negative correlated with party membership increase.

If we correlate governmental subsidy variable with money devoted for PR, local party branches, party events, participants and media coverage (amount, prominence and valence), the results show that only local party branches and party events are very strongly and strongly positively correlated with governmental subsidy. The participants factor is moderately positive and money devoted for PR by parties and media coverage (amount, prominence and valence) is strongly negative correlated with governmental subsidy.

If we correlate money devoted for PR with local party branches, party events, participants and media coverage (amount, prominence and valence), the result shows that local party branches and party events are strongly negative correlated and other variables almost doesn't have correlation.

If we correlate local party branches with party events, participants and media coverage (amount, prominence and valence), the results show that only party events very strongly positive correlated. The more local party branches have parties, the more party events are organized. Media coverage-amount and prominence moderately negative correlated with party branches and participants and media coverage-valence factors almost don't have any correlation.

If correlate party events variable with participants and media coverage, the results show that all of them weak and moderately negative correlated with each other.

If we correlate participants with media coverage, the results show that they moderate and weakly negative correlated with each other.

Multivariate Analysis

Since variables were measured in different units and scales, they were all standardized and saved as new variables for the convenience of multivariate data analysis. To avoid multicollinearity, a composite non-media level of PR index was constructed by adding the standardized values of local party branches, party events, participants factors together. Similarly, to avoid multicollinearity and considering high correlation among three media factors, the index of media coverage was constructed by adding the standardized values of amount and prominence factors together. The reliability analysis showed that Cronbach's alpha for the two indices were 0.50 and 0.92. Then, multiple regression analyses were used to test the proposed hypotheses.

Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analyses were used to test the proposed hypotheses with governmental subsidy, PR effort in financial level, non-media level of PR and PR in media coverage level.

H1: Governmental subsidy influence the amount of money devoted for PR by political parties.
Hypothesis 1 was supported moderately.

Table 3. Regression analysis of governmental subsidy on money devoted for PR by political parties.

Money devoted for PR effort	Coeff.	St Err	t	P> ltl	Beta
Governmental subsidy	7.79	7.41	1.05	0.40	0.59
_cons	-11.04	11.13	-0.99	0.42	.

Table 3 shows that the more money for political parties is devoted by governmental budget, the more political parties devote money for PR.

H2: Governmental subsidies, money devoted for PR will influence party non-media level of PR in Uzbekistan.

Table 4 shows that hypothesis 2 was supported only in the regard of amount of money devoted for PR factor's influence on non-media level.

Table 4. Regression analysis of governmental subsidy and money devoted for PR on parties' non-media level increase.

Non-media level of PR	Coef.	St. Err	t	P> ltl	Beta
	-				
governmental subsidy	15.94	9.36	-1.70	0.33	-1.04
amount of money devoted for PR effort	1.01	0.71	1.41	0.39	0.86
_cons	26.73	13.77	1.94	0.30	.

Amount of money devoted for PR by political parties is significant in predicting the non-media level increase of parties. The more money devoted for PR, the more increases parties non-media level. But governmental subsidy factor has a negative effect on the non-media

level increase of parties. Party non-media level of PR decreases as governmental subsidy increases.

H3: Governmental subsidies, money devoted for PR effort and non-media level will influence the media coverage factors such as amount-prominence and valence of political parties in Uzbekistan.

The test results show that the hypothesis 3 is supported only partly.

Table 5. Regression analysis of governmental subsidy, money devoted for PR and non-media level factors on AP-media coverage.

AP-media level of PR	Coeff.	St Err	t	P> ltl	Beta
governmental subsidy	-25.06	.	.	.	-0.77
amount of money devotes for PR effort	3.6	.	.	.	1.45
Non-media level of PR	-2.56	.	.	.	-1.25

As is shown in Table 5, only money devoted for PR effort factor highly positive predicts the amount-prominence of coverage of the political parties in Uzbek media. The more money devoted for PR effort by political parties, the more articles are printed in Uzbek media about political parties (amount). The length and placement of articles are highly predicted by the money devoted for PR effort as well (prominence). Governmental subsidy and non-media level factors have a strong and very strong negative effect on the amount-prominence of coverage the political parties.

Table 6. Regression analysis of governmental subsidy, money devoted for PR effort by political parties and organizational level on valence-media coverage.

Valence-media level of PR	Coeff.	St Err	t	P> ltl	Beta
	-				
governmental subsidy	48.82	.	.	.	-1.99
amount of money devotes for PR effort	2.16	.	.	.	1.15
non-media level of PR	-2.84	.	.	.	-1.78
_cons	81.92	.	.	.	.

Table 6 shows that only money devoted for PR effort factor highly positive predicts the valence of coverage of the political parties in Uzbek media. The governmental subsidy and non-media level of PR factors have very strong negative effect on coverage valence. The more money devoted for PR by political parties, the more positively are covered political parties.

The result says that only amount of money devoted for PR be political parties is significant in predicting media coverage (both AP and valence media coverage) of political parties in Uzbek media.

H4: Governmental subsidies, money devoted for PR effort, non-media level of PR and media coverage will influence the political party members' number in Uzbekistan.

The computer omitted the governmental subsidy and amount of devoted for PR effort factors. It regressed only non-media level, and two media coverage factors only.

The hypothesis 4 was supported partly.

Table 7. Regression analysis of governmental subsidy, money devoted for PR effort, party non-media level, media coverage-AP and media coverage-valence on party membership increase.

Party membership increase	Coeff.	St Err	t	P> ltl	Beta
governmental subsidy	(omitted)				
amount of money devoted for PR effort	(omitted)				
Non-media level of PR	0.68	.	.	.	1.09
AP-media level of PR	0.26	.	.	.	0.90
Valence-media level of PR	0.1	.	.	.	0.25
_cons	-1.9	.	.	.	.

Table 7 shows that among those three factors only non-media level of PR and AP-media level of PR are highly significant predictors of party membership number. The more increases non-media level and AP-media level of PR, the more increases party members.

But the valence of media coverage fails to show any significant effect on party membership, that means is coverage positive or negative, doesn't matter. The factors of amount, length and placement of articles (is it on the front page or not) are much stronger than valence factor in predicting a party membership.

Summary of Hypotheses Test

Governmental subsidy has moderate positive effect on money devoted for PR effort, but highly negative effect on non-media level of PR, amount-prominence of media coverage and valence media coverage. Money devoted for PR effort by political parties has very strong direct effect on non-media level and media coverage. Party non-media level highly negatively influences on media coverage, but highly positively influences on party membership. Amount and prominence of media

coverage has very strong impact on party membership increase, but valence of media coverage almost doesn't have (weak).

So, going back to the main purpose, we should admit that the results of the tests say that PR and mass media has a strong impact on political party membership number, that means PR and mass media has influence on life of the society in Uzbekistan.

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