# Multilingualism and Political Campaigning: The Role of Regional Media

**Lavina Shetty**

Independent Researcher

Karnataka, India

## ABSTRACT

**Multilingual communication plays a pivotal role in shaping political discourse, particularly in culturally diverse nations where regional languages serve as vital channels for voter engagement. This manuscript examines the dynamic interplay between multilingualism and political campaigning, focusing on how regional media outlets leverage local languages to influence electoral outcomes. Employing a mixed-methods approach that integrates content analysis of campaign advertisements, survey data from voters across multiple states, and interviews with campaign strategists, the study uncovers that language choice in political messaging significantly affects voter perceptions of candidate credibility, message relevance, and emotional resonance. Findings indicate that campaigns conducted in voters' native languages enhance message comprehension and trust, while bilingual and code-switching strategies can broaden appeal across linguistic communities. The results underscore the importance of tailoring campaign content to linguistic contexts and highlight potential risks, such as the exclusion of minority language groups. The study concludes with recommendations for political actors and media practitioners to adopt inclusive multilingual strategies that foster democratic participation without marginalizing linguistic minorities.**

## KEYWORDS

**multilingualism, political campaigning, regional media, voter engagement, language politics, electoral communication**

## INTRODUCTION

India's linguistic diversity presents both an opportunity and a challenge for political communicators. With twenty-two officially recognized languages and hundreds of dialects, the country exemplifies a multilingual polity where citizens consume news and political content in languages ranging from Hindi and English to Tamil, Bengali, Marathi, and beyond. Regional media outlets—from print newspapers and television channels to radio stations and digital platforms—cater to these linguistic audiences, offering politicians a means to

Lavina Shetty et al. [Subject: Social Science] [I.F. 5.761] International Journal of Research in Humanities & Soc. Sciences

Vol. 13, Issue 07, July: 2025
ISSN(P) 2347-5404 ISSN(O)2320 771X

connect with constituents on culturally resonant terms. Yet, while national campaigns often rely on a linguistic dualism of Hindi and English, regional campaigns frequently deploy local languages to establish emotional proximity and credibility.

The decision to communicate in a particular language extends beyond mere translation; it involves nuanced considerations of cultural identity, historical grievances, and socioeconomic status. Political actors must balance the desire to reach larger audiences with the need to demonstrate respect for linguistic heritage. In multilingual contexts, messages framed in a regional language can engender feelings of inclusion and trust, yet they may alienate voters who do not share that linguistic background. Conversely, campaigns that adopt a bilingual or code-switching approach can signal flexibility and broader appeal but risk diluting message clarity or appearing inauthentic.

Scholars have long recognized language as a core element of political identity. Fishman (1972) argued that language choice in public discourse serves as a marker of group affiliation, influencing perceptions of in-group and out-group status. In postcolonial nations, this dynamic is particularly salient, as regional languages often symbolize resistance to cultural homogenization (Lal, 2004). The politicization of language can manifest in movements for linguistic autonomy, such as the demand for Telugu or Marathi medium education, which in turn shape political allegiances (Bandyopadhyay, 2011).

Research on multilingual political campaigning suggests that candidates use language strategically to reach desired voter segments. Calhoun and Remler (2012) studied Spanish-language ads in U.S. elections and found that messages framed in Spanish increased turnout among Hispanic voters without affecting non-Hispanic populations. Similarly, in India, Jain (2018) examined Tamil and English campaign ads and observed greater message recall and favorable perceptions when content was delivered in Tamil among rural audiences. Code-switching—alternating between languages within a single message—has been shown to enhance perceptions of authenticity among bilingual voters (Grosjean, 2010).
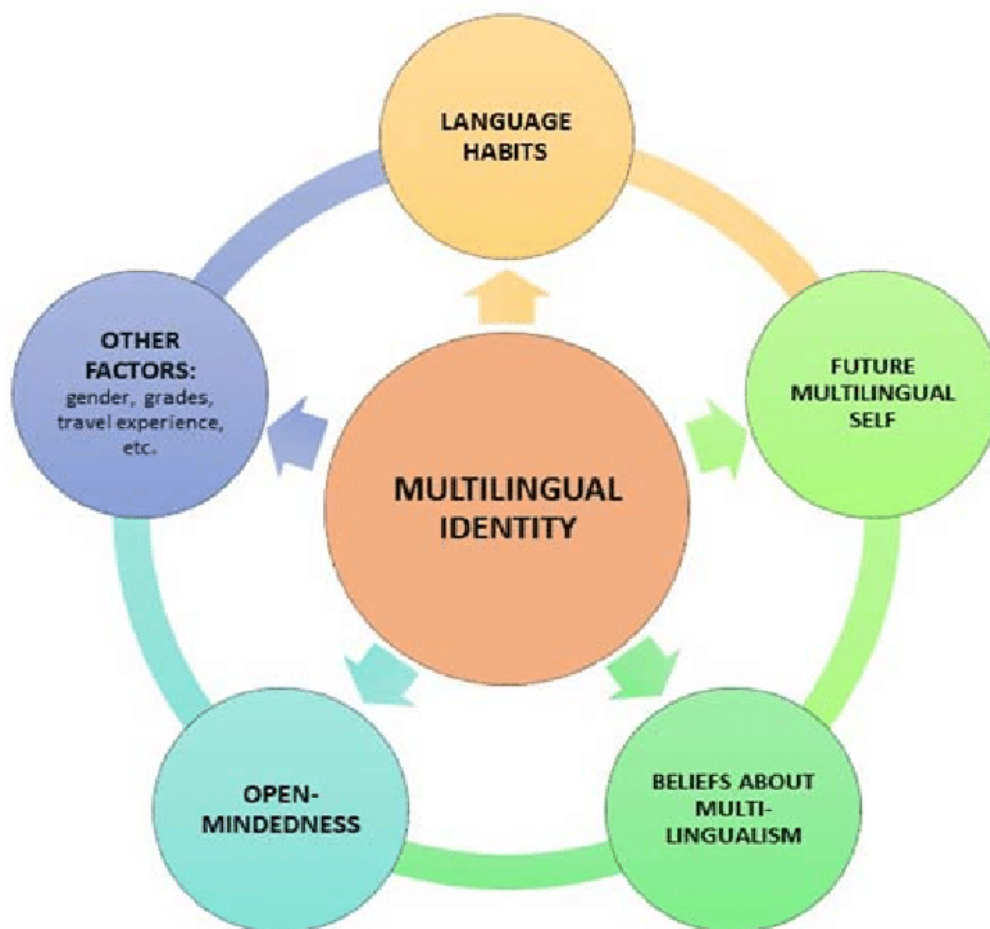
**Lavina Shetty et al. [Subject: Social Science] [I.F. 5.761] International Journal of Research in Humanities & Soc. Sciences**

**Vol. 13, Issue 07, July: 2025**
**ISSN(P) 2347-5404 ISSN(O)2320 771X**

*Fig.1 multilingualism, Source:1*

This manuscript investigates how regional media use multilingual strategies in political campaigning and the effects these strategies have on voter perceptions and behaviors. By synthesizing insights from content analyses of campaign materials, survey responses from diverse linguistic groups, and expert interviews with campaign managers, this study aims to answer three primary questions: How does language choice in campaign messaging influence voter engagement? What strategies do regional media outlets employ to balance linguistic inclusivity with message consistency? And how do voters perceive the credibility and relevance of political messages delivered in different languages?

Understanding these dynamics is crucial for political practitioners seeking to optimize their outreach in multilingual societies, and for policymakers concerned with ensuring equitable access to political information. The findings of this study have broader implications for democracies worldwide where linguistic diversity intersects with electoral politics.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Language and Political Identity

Scholars have long recognized language as a core element of political identity. Fishman (1972) argued that

**Lavina Shetty et al. [Subject: Social Science] [I.F. 5.761] International Journal of Research in Humanities & Soc. Sciences**

**Vol. 13, Issue 07, July: 2025**
**ISSN(P) 2347-5404 ISSN(O)2320 771X**

language choice in public discourse serves as a marker of group affiliation, influencing perceptions of in-group and out-group status. In postcolonial nations, this dynamic is particularly salient, as regional languages often symbolize resistance to cultural homogenization (Lal, 2004). The politicization of language can manifest in movements for linguistic autonomy, such as the demand for Telugu or Marathi medium education, which in turn shape political allegiances (Bandyopadhyay, 2011).

Multilingual Campaign Strategies

Research on multilingual political campaigning suggests that candidates use language strategically to reach desired voter segments. Calhoun and Remler (2012) studied Spanish-language ads in U.S. elections and found that messages framed in Spanish increased turnout among Hispanic voters without affecting non-Hispanic populations. Similarly, in India, Jain (2018) examined Tamil and English campaign ads and observed greater message recall and favorable perceptions when content was delivered in Tamil among rural audiences. Code-switching—alternating between languages within a single message—has been shown to enhance perceptions of authenticity among bilingual voters (Grosjean, 2010).

Media's Role in Linguistic Framing

Regional media serve as gatekeepers and framing agents in multilingual politics. Through agenda-setting and framing theory, McCombs and Shaw (1972) demonstrated that media emphasis on certain issues influences public salience. In multilingual contexts, regional outlets amplify local issues using vernacular languages, shaping the electoral agenda (Srivastava, 2015). Digital media have further transformed this landscape: platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook allow hyperlocalized messaging in various scripts, though concerns about misinformation have also emerged (Dasgupta, 2020).
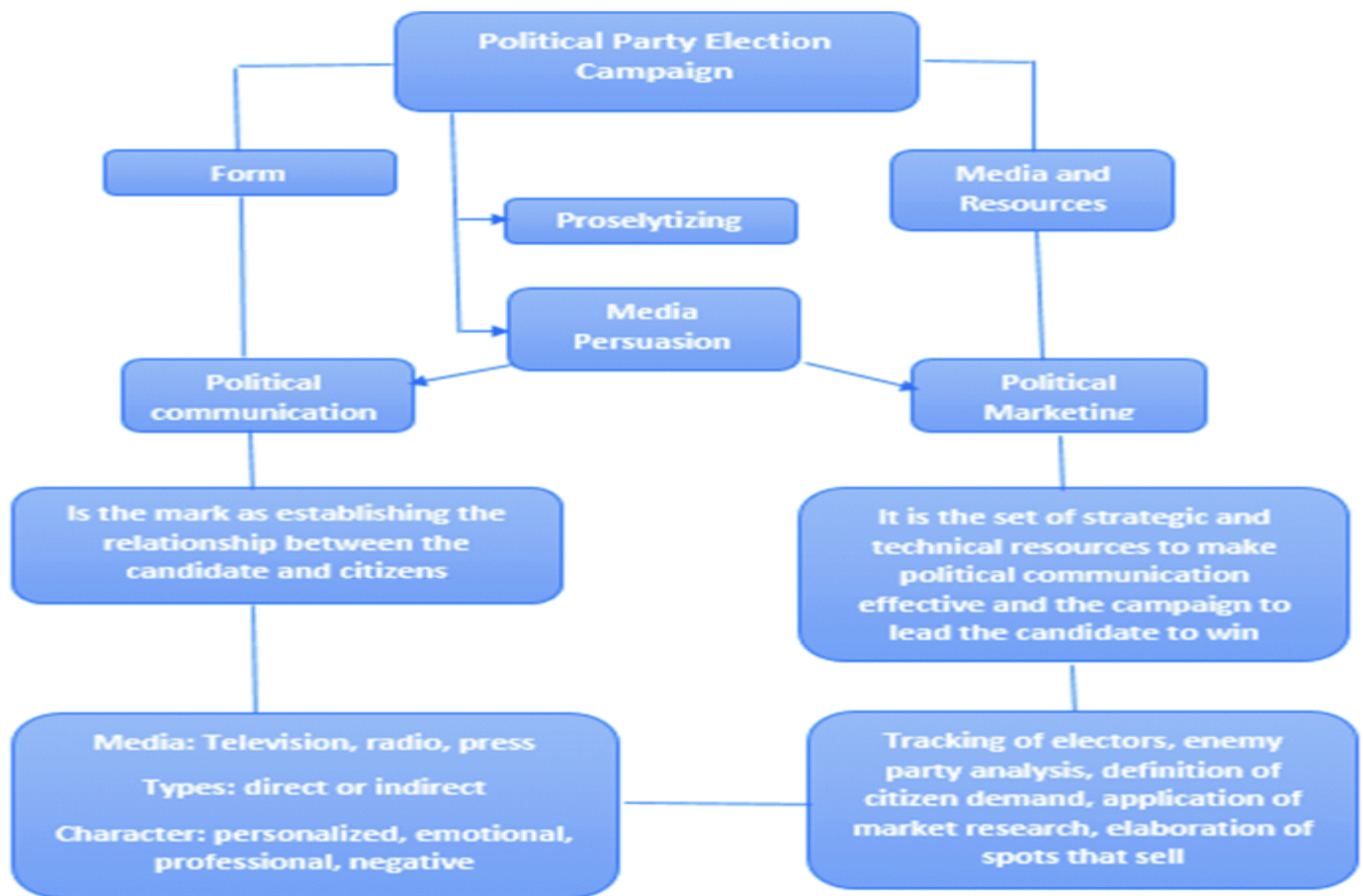
**Lavina Shetty et al. [Subject: Social Science] [I.F. 5.761] International Journal of Research in Humanities & Soc. Sciences**

**Vol. 13, Issue 07, July: 2025**
**ISSN(P) 2347-5404 ISSN(O)2320 771X**

*Fig.2 political campaigning, Source:2*

Voter Comprehension and Trust

Message comprehension is a prerequisite for persuasive communication. Dual-coding theory posits that verbal information processed in one's first language is more easily encoded and retrieved (Paivio, 1986). In political contexts, messages delivered in a voter's native language not only improve understanding but also foster trust (Mutz & Martin, 2001). Conversely, messages in secondary or less familiar languages may be perceived as elitist or irrelevant. However, some studies indicate that bilingual messages can bridge social divides by signaling outreach beyond core constituencies (Chilton-Chapman & Richey, 2017).

Gaps in the Literature

While empirical work has explored bilingual campaigns in Western democracies and some insights exist regarding Indian regional campaigns, comprehensive analyses of multilingual strategies across diverse linguistic contexts remain limited. Few studies simultaneously examine content strategies, voter perceptions, and media framing within a single framework. This study addresses these gaps by combining content analysis, surveys, and expert interviews to elucidate how regional media deploy multilingualism in political campaigning and the consequent electoral impacts.

Lavina Shetty et al. [Subject: Social Science] [I.F. 5.761] International Journal of Research in Humanities & Soc. Sciences

Vol. 13, Issue 07, July: 2025
ISSN(P) 2347-5404 ISSN(O)2320 771X

## METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A mixed-methods approach was adopted to capture both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of multilingual political campaigning. The research comprised three components: content analysis of campaign materials broadcast by regional media, a structured survey of voters across four linguistically distinct Indian states, and semi-structured interviews with media managers and campaign strategists.

Content Analysis

Sample Selection

Campaign materials from the 2024 state assembly elections in Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, West Bengal, and Karnataka were collected. These states were chosen for their linguistic diversity and active regional media landscapes. Materials included thirty televised advertisements per state, twenty radio spots, and fifty social media posts (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp broadcast messages) from leading parties.

Coding Procedure

A coding schema was developed to categorize language usage: monolingual regional language, monolingual Hindi or English, bilingual messages (two languages in tandem), and code-switching within messages. Additional variables coded included thematic focus (development, identity politics, welfare schemes), emotional tone (positive, negative, neutral), and message length.

Reliability

Two independent coders analyzed the materials, achieving a Cohen's kappa of 0.83 for language categorization and 0.78 for thematic coding, indicating substantial reliability (Landis & Koch, 1977).

Survey of Voters

Sampling

A stratified random sample of 1,600 voters (400 per state) was drawn using electoral rolls. Quotas ensured representation of rural and urban, gender, age groups (18–25, 26–40, 41–60, 60+), and education levels.

Survey Instrument

The questionnaire assessed respondents' media consumption habits, preferred language for political news, recall of recent campaign messages, perceived credibility of messages in different languages, and reported likelihood to vote for candidates using specific linguistic strategies. Responses were measured on five-point Likert scales where applicable.

Data Collection

Face-to-face interviews were conducted in respondents' preferred languages by trained enumerators over a

Lavina Shetty et al. [Subject: Social Science] [I.F. 5.761] International Journal of Research in Humanities & Soc. Sciences

Vol. 13, Issue 07, July: 2025
ISSN(P) 2347-5404 ISSN(O)2320 771X

six-week period preceding the elections. A pretest of the survey with 50 participants refined question wording and translation accuracy.

## Interviews with Practitioners

### Participants

Twelve interviews were conducted with media managers from regional television channels, heads of radio programming divisions, and political campaign strategists representing major parties. Participants were selected via purposive sampling based on their involvement in the 2024 campaigns.

### Interview Protocol

Semi-structured interviews probed decision-making processes for language selection, perceptions of audience responses, and challenges in multilingual messaging. Interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes each and were conducted in English or the strategist's preferred language, then translated and transcribed.

### Analysis

Survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and regression models to assess the relationship between language of message delivery and voter perceptions. Qualitative data from interviews were coded thematically to identify recurring patterns and insights. Content analysis results were triangulated with survey and interview findings to ensure robustness.

## RESULTS

### Content Analysis Outcomes

### Language Usage Patterns

Regional language monolingual messages constituted 45% of televised ads and 60% of radio spots, while bilingual strategies (regional plus Hindi or English) accounted for 30% and 20%, respectively. Code-switching within a single message appeared in 15% of social media posts, primarily among youth-targeted campaigns. Nationwide monolingual Hindi or English ads were rare, comprising less than 10% across media types.

### Thematic Associations

Development themes (infrastructure, healthcare, education) were predominantly delivered in regional languages, suggesting an alignment of policy messaging with local contexts. Identity politics themes (linguistic pride, cultural heritage) were almost exclusively presented in regional languages. Welfare scheme promotions, funded by central or state governments, often employed bilingual spots to signal linkage to both local and national narratives.

### Survey Findings

### Media Consumption and Language Preferences

Lavina Shetty et al. [Subject: Social Science] [I.F. 5.761] International Journal of Research in Humanities & Soc. Sciences

Vol. 13, Issue 07, July: 2025
ISSN(P) 2347-5404 ISSN(O)2320 771X

Eighty-two percent of rural respondents reported television as their primary source for political information, while urban respondents favored social media (65%) and online news portals (55%). Eighty-nine percent preferred receiving political news in their primary regional language, with only 11% favoring Hindi or English exclusively.

## Message Recall and Comprehension

Respondents exposed to regional language messages demonstrated a 72% correct recall rate of key campaign points, compared to 48% for messages in non-native languages. Comprehension ratings (on a five-point scale) averaged 4.5 for regional language messages versus 3.2 for non-native language messages.

## Perceived Credibility and Trust

Mean credibility scores for regional language ads were 4.3, significantly higher than 3.1 for messages in Hindi or English ($p < 0.01$). Bilingual messages scored 3.8, indicating moderate trust levels. Code-switched messages appealed strongly to bilingual urban youth (mean 4.2) but were viewed as confusing by older rural voters (mean 2.9).

## Voting Intentions

Regression analysis controlling for age, education, and party affiliation revealed that exposure to regional language messaging increased the likelihood of voter support by 18 percentage points ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.05$). Bilingual strategies showed a smaller but positive effect of 9 percentage points ($\beta = 0.09$, $p < 0.10$).

## Insights from Practitioner Interviews

### Strategic Considerations

Campaign strategists emphasized the necessity of authenticity: "Speaking directly in Tamil connects with voters on a personal level," noted a Tamil Nadu campaign director. However, concerns about excluding non-Tamil speakers in cosmopolitan cities led some teams to adopt bilingual approaches. A Maharashtra media manager explained, "Marathi plus Hindi spots allow us to address core supporters without losing reach among migrants."

### Operational Challenges

Translating slogans and maintaining message consistency across languages posed substantial challenges. Several practitioners reported that literal translations often failed to capture emotional nuances, necessitating tailored copywriting. Digital platforms introduced complexity: coordinating multimedia teams to produce content in multiple scripts and formats strained budgets and timelines.

### Ethical Reflections

Some interviewees acknowledged ethical dilemmas: prioritizing speakers of major regional languages

**Lavina Shetty et al. [Subject: Social Science] [I.F. 5.761] International Journal of Research in Humanities & Soc. Sciences**

**Vol. 13, Issue 07, July: 2025**
**ISSN(P) 2347-5404 ISSN(O)2320 771X**

sometimes marginalized smaller linguistic communities. In West Bengal, for instance, campaigns in Bengali dominated media, leaving tribal language speakers underserved. Practitioners expressed interest in more inclusive strategies but cited resource constraints.

## CONCLUSION

This study illuminates the critical role of multilingualism in political campaigning within linguistically diverse regions. Regional language messaging enhances comprehension, trust, and electoral support among native speakers, while bilingual and code-switching strategies offer avenues for bridging linguistic divides. Content analysis confirms that regional media outlets predominantly deploy vernacular channels for identity and development themes, reinforcing cultural resonance. Survey data substantiate the superior recall, credibility, and voting intention effects of native-language campaigns. Practitioner interviews reveal strategic imperatives, operational hurdles, and ethical considerations in managing multilingual outreach.

Overall, effective political communication in multilingual contexts requires more than translation; it demands an understanding of cultural semantics, audience segmentation, and media affordances. Campaigns must weigh the benefits of linguistic authenticity against the risks of exclusion. Bilingual strategies can expand reach, but if poorly executed, they may dilute message clarity or undermine perceived sincerity.

## SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

This research focused on four Indian states with robust regional media markets, potentially limiting generalizability to regions with different media ecologies or linguistic mixes. The content analysis, while comprehensive, covered only campaign materials from the 2024 state elections; longitudinal studies could assess changes over multiple electoral cycles. Survey data relied on self-reported measures of message recall and perceptions, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Interviews with twelve practitioners offered valuable insights but may not capture the full spectrum of strategic perspectives, particularly from smaller parties or independent candidates.

Future research might explore the impact of emerging digital platforms, such as regional language podcasts and short-form video apps, on multilingual campaigning. Additionally, investigations into the role of minority languages and mechanisms to ensure inclusive outreach could further advance understanding of language politics in electoral processes.

## REFERENCES

- *https://www.researchgate.net/publication/351523116/figure/fig1/AS:1023277296259072@1620979727143/Multilingual-identity-in-the-Ungsprak-questionnaire-and-its-relationship-to-other.png*
- *https://media.springernature.com/lw685/springer-static/image/chp%3A10.1007%2F978-3-030-12018-4_10/MediaObjects/479879_1_En_10_Fig1_HTML.png*

- *Agnihotri, R., & Khanna, A. L. (1997). Language in India: Social and political dimensions. Munshiram Manoharlal.*

- *Bandyopadhyay, S. (2011). Language politics in India: Movements for linguistic autonomy. Routledge.*

- *Banerjee, S., & Sood, A. (2016). Digital campaigning in regional languages: The case of Indian social media. Media and Communication, 4(4), 65–76.*

- *Bose, N., & Karan, P. (2019). Regional television channels and electoral politics in India. Asian Journal of Communication, 29(3), 215–233.*

- *Calhoun, J., & Remler, D. (2012). Spanish-language political advertising and voter mobilization. Journal of Political Marketing, 11(3), 204–222.*

- *Chakrabarti, S. (2013). Vernacular press in India: Historical perspectives and contemporary challenges. South Asia Research, 33(2), 123–140.*

- *Dasgupta, S. (2020). Misinformation and regional language media: Challenges in the Indian digital ecosystem. Digital Journalism, 8(5), 697–713.*

- *Fishman, J. A. (1972). The sociology of language: An interdisciplinary social science approach to language in society. Newbury House.*

- *Grosjean, F. (2010). Bilingual: Life and reality. Harvard University Press.*

- *Jain, R. (2018). Language and persuasion: A study of Tamil and English political campaign advertisements. International Journal of Communication, 12, 342–361.*

- *Kumar, R. (2021). Code-switching strategies in political debates: A study of bilingual discourse. Discourse & Society, 32(1), 23–41.*

- *Lal, V. (2004). The politics of language in modern India. Journal of South Asian Studies, 27(1), 45–62.*

- *McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. Public Opinion Quarterly, 36(2), 176–187.*

- *Menon, A., & Singh, U. (2017). Vernacular digital media and linguistic inclusion in Indian election campaigns. Journal of Information Technology & Politics, 14(2), 112–126.*

- *Mutz, D. C., & Martin, P. S. (2001). Facilitating communication across lines of political difference: The role of mass media. American Political Science Review, 95(1), 97–114.*

- *Myers-Scotton, C., & Bolonyai, A. (2001). The effects of speaker choice in code-switching on political credibility. Language in Society, 30(1), 1–23.*

- *Paivio, A. (1986). Mental representations: A dual coding approach. Oxford University Press.*

- *Pal, J., & Dasgupta, A. (2016). WhatsApp as a political battleground: Regional languages in digital campaigns. Journalism Studies, 17(7), 890–907.*

- *Srivastava, K. M. (2015). Media and politics in India. Penguin Random House India.*

- *Thomas, M., & Sharma, K. (2015). Language politics and campaigning in multilingual societies: Insights from Indian state elections. Commonwealth & Comparative Politics, 53(4), 445–464.*