

Visual Persuasion: Assessing The Influence of Political Posters on Voter Behavior

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Abstract

Political posters play a significant role in shaping voter perceptions and behaviors in Bangladesh, employing visual elements such as color, design, and symbolism to effectively communicate messages and resonate emotionally with diverse electorate groups. This study investigates the influence of these posters on voter behavior toward political candidates and parties, drawing on established theoretical frameworks like the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). Through a survey-based approach, our findings reveal that posters exert substantial influence, with a majority of respondents acknowledging their role in shaping political opinions. Emotional appeals embedded in posters are shown to sway voter decisions, emphasizing the posters' effectiveness in engaging voters through both central and peripheral routes of persuasion. Moreover, the study highlights posters' enduring impact beyond elections, contributing to sustained political attitudes and fostering democratic engagement in Bangladesh's socio-political landscape. By aligning with existing literature on visual persuasion and political communication, this research underscores the critical role of posters as powerful tools in influencing public opinion and promoting civic participation.

Keywords: Bangladesh, civic participation, political poster, persuasion, voter behavior.

INTRODUCTION

In modern representative democratic systems, elections are considered the best means of producing democracy. To make elections successful, political parties run various campaigns. Among them, political posters are the oldest and most effective means accepted in modern times. During World War II, political posters became a major communication tool. In World War I, the French and British produced posters to encourage the purchase of war bonds and the enlistment of civilians. Posters played a role in the rise of Hitler and the temporary success of the German forces in World War II (Bosmajian 1966). Again, it has contributed to the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Communist Party's seizure of power (Gary Yanker 2015). Historically, political posters have been used since the beginning of time as an important

advertising medium (Norris 2002. Farrell & Webb 200. Van den Bulck 1993) as political leaders use a variety of strategies to communicate with voters to make their election campaigns successful (Farinell & Wortmann 1987). Although political posters are allowed in certain areas of rivals. Yet it remains an important part of every campaign (Bergman & Wikert 1999).

Political posters serve as an important medium for disseminating information to the electorate and for persuasive analysis among political leaders (Dumitrescu 2011, pp. 20-21). As a historical propaganda tool, political posters are still widely used in communist countries. (Seidman 2008).

Even in third-world countries, political posters are still very popular as a campaign tool. Political posters hold a prominent position within the urban scenery of Bangladesh, serving as pervasive symbols of political expression and engagement (Julian, 2020). The evolution of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has brought about significant transformations in political campaigning, prompting political parties in Bangladesh to adopt internet-based strategies through dedicated websites for communication and mobilization of public opinion (Mahiuddin et al, 2012). The advent of online activism and the widespread use of social media platforms have further enhanced political participation in Bangladesh, highlighting the interconnected relationship between politics and the internet within the nation (Roy, 2019). Despite its status as a relatively young country, Bangladesh boasts a deep-seated historical and cultural heritage often overshadowed by global media narratives focused on political unrest and economic challenges (Guhathakurta & Van, 2013). Consequently, alongside the emergence of digital platforms, traditional political posters continue to wield influence over the political landscape and public discourse in Bangladesh.

Considering the context, the study aims to find out if there is any influence of political posters on people. It is primarily focused on public opinion on the influence political posters have on voters at the field level.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study seeks to unravel the ways political posters sway voter decisions in today's complex electoral landscape. With a focus on the emotional and cognitive reactions prompted by political posters and their influence on voter attitudes and decision-making processes, this study aims to disentangle the intricate dynamics of visual persuasion. Three key areas are:

1. Assessing the influence of political posters on voter opinion
2. Exploring the influence of design and layout of political posters
3. Investigating the role of emotional appeals in political posters

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do political posters shape voter perceptions of political candidates and parties in Bangladesh, and what factors contribute most significantly to these opinions?
2. Do the posters have any influence through design and layout on the voters' behavior in decision-making processes during election periods?
3. What are the enduring perceptions of political posters on voter attitudes and behaviors beyond the election period, and how do these posters compare in influence with other forms of political communication?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Visual Elements in Political Posters and Their Persuasive Influence on Voter Behavior:

The visual components of political posters, which act as vital agents for messaging and influence voter attitudes give them their persuasive power. According to the findings of Deželan, T. and Maksuti, A (2012), different mechanics of visual persuasion provide information on the particular components that have the greatest impact on human behavior. According to Hill (2004), visual communication hugely depends on designing attractive elements such as imagery, color, typography and layout to create persuasive messages that resonate with audience.

Sulistiyowati, R. (2023) found that when it comes to political posters, deep intellectual processing of the visual components such as iconography of the candidate and policy symbols are referred as central route processing. This

finding is supported by another study of Eagly and Chaiken(2023), which reveals that visually appealing elements that fit with preexisting attitudes can foster central processing and result in more permanency in building trust.

Yusuf, M.L. (2021) linked the Semiotic Theory and reveals that it advances the knowledge of how political symbols and signals of different political posters convey meaning. The concept of "signified" and "signifier" draws consideration to how symbols and images are. Political posters use engaging logos and cultural symbols to deliver complex themes, stated by Yusuf.

Talking about Bangladesh, political posters in Bangladesh frequently integrate local symbols, traditional motifs, and images of party leaders to create a sense of trust and familiarity among voters (Khan, 2018). The use of dynamic layouts, vibrant and bold colors helps to capture attention in crowded urban settings, where posters have to compete with other forms of visual media (Rahman, 2019).

Emotional Responses to Political Posters and Their Impact on Voter Attitudes and Decision-Making:

Emotional reactions are crucial in how political communication effectively engages people. Brader (2006) illustrates those emotional appeals in political ads, including posters, can significantly influence how voters perceive and act, by triggering emotions such as enthusiasm, fear, or anger. These emotional responses can deepen engagement, enhance information retention, and stimulate political participation. The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) supports this idea, suggesting emotional appeals often lead to peripheral processing, where individuals rely more on emotional cues than detailed analysis to form opinions and decisions (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

Political posters often leverage bold colors, striking images, and compelling slogans to evoke emotional responses. Hill (2004) underscores the importance of these design tactics in crafting persuasive messages that resonate emotionally with viewers. Schill (2012) adds that emotional appeals in political posters can enhance a candidate's likability and visibility, potentially translating into increased voter support.

In Bangladesh, political posters are pervasive and serve as a fundamental tool during elections. Hasan (2021) highlights how Bangladeshi posters frequently use emotionally charged imagery and traditional symbols to appeal to voters' emotions and reinforce party loyalty. This approach proves effective in a political landscape marked by strong party affiliations and emotional engagement (Chowdhury, 2020).

Experimental studies further validate these insights. Brader (2005) shows that emotional appeals can boost voter turnout and enthusiasm. Similarly, Valentino et al. (2011) find that 'fear appeals' in political messaging can spur voters to seek more information and participate actively in elections.

In Bangladesh, emotional reactions to political posters are amplified by the country's unique socio-political context. Ahmed (2017) observes that political engagement in Bangladesh is heavily influenced by social and emotional factors, with voters often swayed by emotional connections to candidates and parties. Khan (2018) notes that emotional appeals in posters can sway undecided voters and energize supporters, potentially contributing to electoral successes.

Comparative Analysis of the Persuasive Impact of Political Posters in Traditional Physical Spaces vs. Digital Platforms:

Political posters have long been a cornerstone of electoral campaigns, whether they adorn billboards, walls, or public transport. These visual tools play a crucial role in increasing visibility and reinforcing campaign messages through repeated exposure. According to Doob (1935), traditional posters are effective in maintaining a continuous presence, while Kenez (1985) highlights their ability to mobilize widespread support through visual propaganda.

The design strategies of physical posters such as large fonts, bold colors, and striking images are modified to attract attention and convey messages effectively. According to Hill (2004), these visual cues are significant for grabbing attention of passersby and ensuring message retention.

The digital media era has transformed the topography of political campaigning. Digital platforms now, offer brand new opportunities for targeting and employing voters through online with digital posters and social media advertisements. Brader (2006) argues that digital posters have more interactive elements to increase their persuasive impact.

Digital platforms are easier to use for targeted advertising, enabling campaigns to reach target audiences/demographics with adapted messages. According to Schill (2012), the use of data analytics that easily gives mapping of target audience can significantly increase the precision and increase effectiveness of political messages.

There are contradictions in studies also. According to Steffan, D. and Venema, N. (2020), political posters

might have lesser impact than physical/ in-person because of the shorter attention spans associated with online encounters. According to Barry Schwartz, the Paradox of Choice, having too many alternatives can cause confusion and lead to indecision in choosing electoral candidates. Thus, in the digital world, political posters might lose their persuasive power due to plenty of stimuli contending for attention.

Moreover, based on the nature of the medium, people may receive and process information differently. According to Steffan, D. and Venema, N. (2020), the ease of scrolling and quick information consumption could lead to a superficial reading of political posters and messages than more impactful interaction that comes with traditional media.

There are significant differences between the persuasive power of political posters on digital media and in conventional ones. Traditional posters have the benefit of being very visible and probability to viewed frequently in public places, ensuring a continuous presence that strengthens the campaign's message (Doob, 1935). In contrast, digital posters, for their static nature and restricted interactions, might have lower engagement if not boosted.

Then again, Digital posters offer greater interactivity and flexibility. They can be crafted for target audiences and can get easily updated based on real-time comments (Brader, 2006). Also, the scope to surveil engagement metrics and alter strategies accordingly makes digital posters a more active tool in political campaigns.

In Bangladesh, digital platforms play the most important role, particularly among younger adults and urban voters (Rahman, 2019). The increasing internet penetration and utilization of social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter provide new opportunities for political persuasion and engagement (Khan, 2018). Digital posters can combine multimedia strategies such as animations and other interactive features, making contents more engaging and shareable than conventional posters. The efficiency of these mediums varies depending on the specific audience. Conventional posters work for digital and semi urban areas where digital posters works best on urban young adult population (Hasan, 2021).

Due to information overload and short attention span political poster and its strategies changed over time. Political posters can be effective both online and offline, depending on the target population, geography, and context (Nikolskaya, T.E., Pavlina, S.Y., and Yu Pavlina, S., 2021). Despite the fact that little is known about the intricate mechanics of how political posters influence voters' attitudes and behaviors through their visual cues and persuasive power. The purpose of this study is to close this research gap and comprehend the complex mechanisms of how political posters influence Bangladeshi citizens' perceptions visually. An all-encompassing analysis of how the visual impact of political posters influences voters' attitudes, behavior, and perceptions is required in the context of Bangladesh.

Theoretical Framework

This research tries to align Elaboration Likelihood Model with expected outcomes. Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) gives a framework to understand how political posters affect both cognitive and emotional responses and thus can play vital role in decision making for electoral candidates. The model is developed by Richard E. Petty and John T. Cacioppo in 1986 where they tried to find connection between people and their persuasive materials through two different pathways- the center and the periphery (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). *The elaboration likelihood model of persuasion* (pp. 1-24). Springer New York.

Voters are able to critically assess the claims and conduct in-depth content analysis thanks to the center method. For those who are deeply engaged in politics, this is especially important since they carefully consider the discourses that politicians attempt to disseminate and the arguments that they win. However, the superficial attraction of the peripheral method is based on psychological, artistic, or other non-elemental factors (p. 65). These indications prompt voters who are less politically inclined or influenced to carefully consider the posters' real content.

Essentially, the style, symbolism, and context of political posters determine which arguments are central and which are secondary. Center processing might be facilitated by posters and other comprehensive materials that make use of reliable sources or logical reasoning (Ahmed, 2012). Posters with eye-catching color, art, or symbols, however, can activate peripheral pathways in voters, both active and passive. Simple slogans or taglines increase a poster's ability to persuade. Simple slogans and phrases can serve as supplementary cues to strengthen the poster's argument (p. 52).

Additionally, posters featuring leaders, celebrities, and other popular figures are probably going to function in ancillary ways as well, emphasizing attraction, legitimacy, and trustworthiness over the main points of the message. In order to determine which appeal—central or peripheral—works best, researchers should analyze the various design elements, emotional and cognitive appeals, and persuasive techniques used in these posters to sway voters' opinions,

attitudes, and actions. It so functions in the electoral decision-making process. As a result, this ELM model provides a thorough comprehension of Bangladeshi political communication.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research follows quantitative analysis.

The quantitative methodology places a heavy emphasis on objective measurements and statistical, numerical or mathematical analysis of information collected through surveys, polls, and questionnaires (Gray, 2017). In this study, a quantitative methodology was used to find out voters' perceptions of the influence of political posters in Bangladesh.

To investigate the perceptions and influences of the voters' behavior on political posters, an online survey was conducted where 200 participants from different demographics participated. The age group was between 18-45. The sample size consisted of 104 male and 96 female respondents. In the selection process of respondents, there was a cluster of urban and rural. All the respondents represented different genders, age groups, and places.

For data collection, a survey questionnaire was developed based on a theoretical framework to find out the influence of political posters on voters' behavior even after the election period.

Data Findings & Analysis

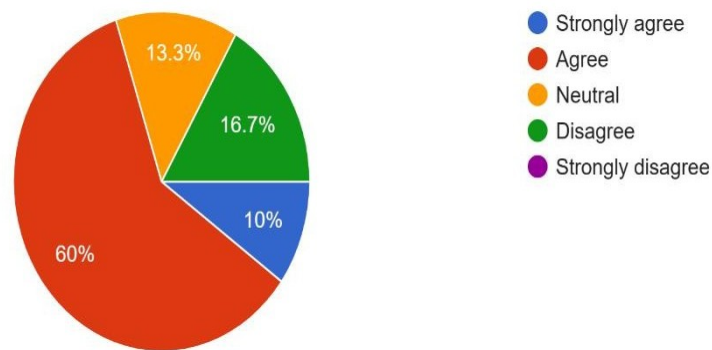


Figure 1. *Role of political posters in shaping voters' opinion*

The Figure 1 presents the numerical representation of whether political posters shape or change voter opinion. The results show that 60% of people are influenced by it. 10% think it is more effective. According to the semiotic theory, symbols and images in political posters play an effective role in communicating and realizing feelings (Maksuti, A., 2012). 16% disagreed on this. 13% of people are seen to be neutral on this matter. According to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), the peripheral route indicates striking colors, attractive images, and emotionally charged symbols to influence voters.

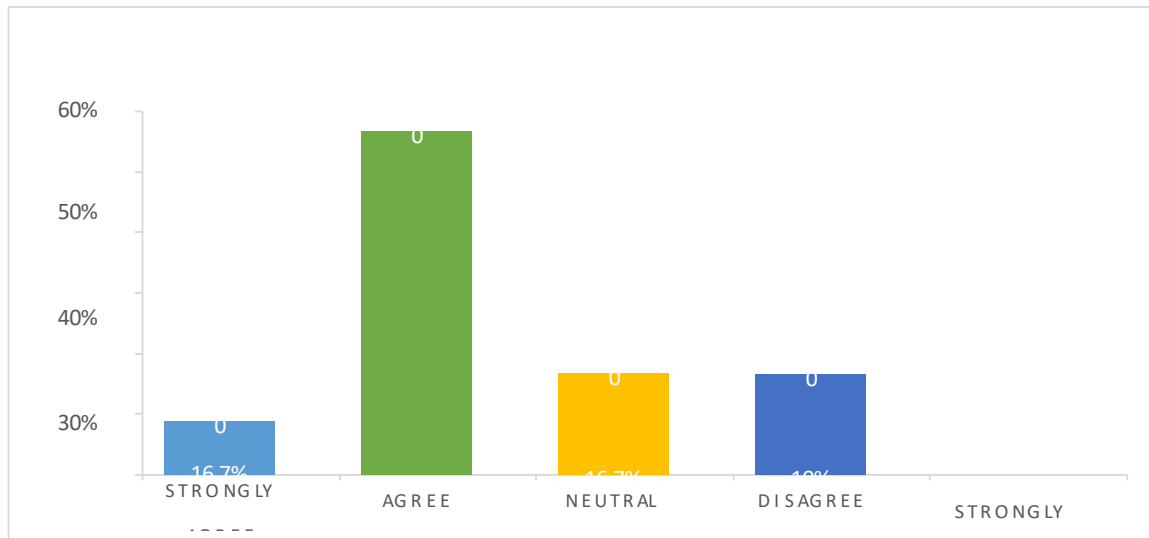


Figure 2. *Influence of design and Layout on voters' behavior*

Figure 2 shows the numerical representation of how likely the design and layout of the political poster is to influence the voters. 73.4% of people agree (57% agree, strongly agree 16.7%) give their opinion in favor of it. Which supports the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). The core of this theory is that people think about political posters in two ways: thinking deeply about information and the other is picture and color (Eagly and Chaiken 1993).

Political posters contain various information that are designed to target the general voters. They use different images and colors, mainly the lakhs of voters. 16.7% were neutral. 10% denied that political posters influence voters.

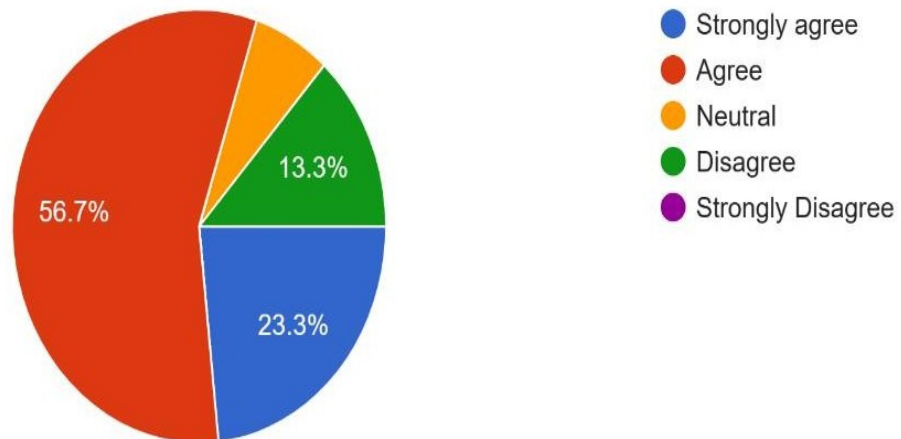


Figure 3. *Political posters act as a key message*

The figure 3 shows whether the political poster serves as a key message of the political party or candidate. The graph shows that 56.7% support their opinion. 23.3% strongly agree. Political parties traditionally design their posters with ideals in mind. Voters use posters as their party message because they support a particular party (Huddy, L. 2001).

The statistics show audience opinion regarding the key messages political posters serve as political parties.

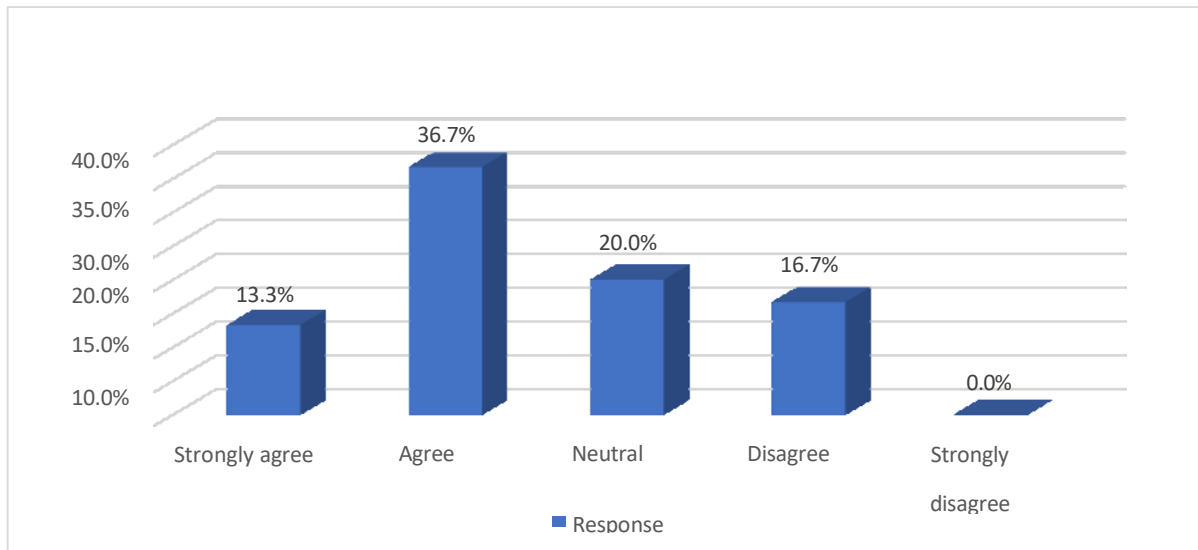


Figure 4. *Influence of the visual elements (colors, images, symbols) used in political posters during an election campaign*

During the election campaign, various visual elements are seen in the posters such as colors, images, and symbols. Graph 4 shows the numerical picture of whether these visual elements influence the voters. Where 50% (strongly agree 13.3%, 36.7 agree) people think Visible factors influence voters. Political posters are made using different materials which correspond to the information in the graphs.

Those who are aware of various issues happening in the world and those who are aware of modern propaganda avoid the influence of these issues. 20% of people expressed to be neutral on this topic.

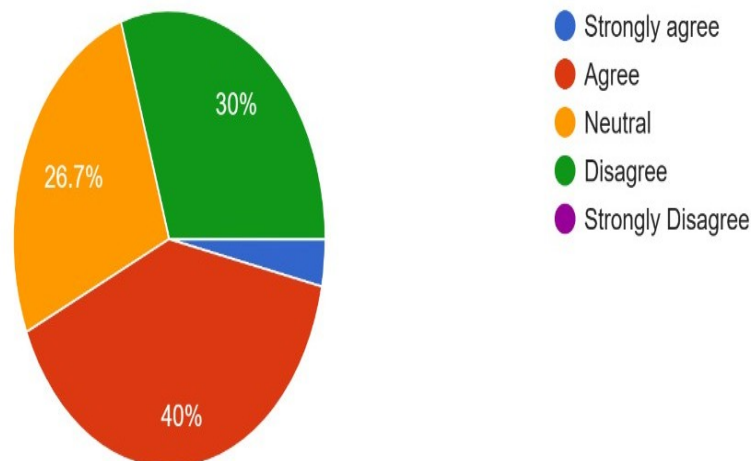


Figure 5. *Influence of visual elements to evoke voters' emotions*

Figure 5 above shows a numerical representation of how various elements used in political posters can influence voters' emotions by using their emotions. Where 3.3% and 40% of opinions go in favor of it, where the effect of the peripheral route to persuasion is reflected.

Emotional issues prevent people from thinking deeply and influence decisions. Especially the monotonous use of symbols and images does not influence people's emotions by arousing them.

30% disagreed and 26.7% were neutral. Especially those who are already influenced by a certain party or who are aware of it, are not influenced by it.

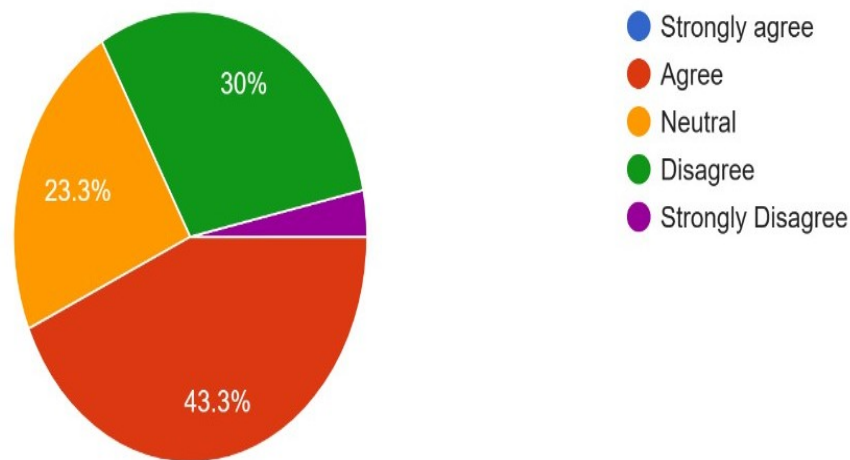


Figure 6. Public's perception on candidate's personality and values through political posters

Figure 6 above provides a numerical representation of whether political posters convey an idea of a politician's personality. Graph 6 shows that 43.3% were in favor, 30% were against and 23.3 abstained. In the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) theory, people consider an object in two ways. Political posters give the voters an idea about the personality of the person through pictures and colors and different symbols. Posters use different colors or cartoons to highlight the character of the candidate.

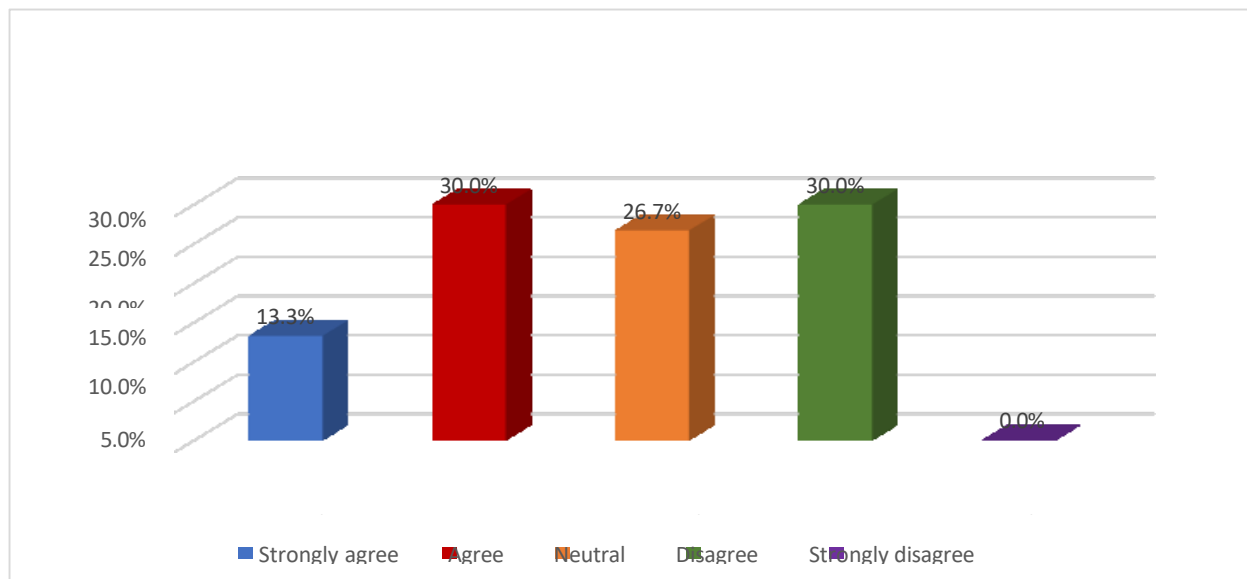


Figure 7. Influence of political posters on undecided voters' behavior

Figure no 7 shows numerically whether political posters influence undecided voters during elections.

The figure 7 shows that 43.3% of people are in favor of influencing (agree 30%, 13.3% strongly agree). Posters target undecided voters (Philipps, A., 2015), their thinking adds information to posters on their behalf. 30% of people disagree on this issue. During the election, political posters become a medium of campaigning, thereby helping to form public opinion for/against the candidate. Especially in post-election periods political parties use various visual elements in posters to influence public support for them. 26% were neutral on the matter.

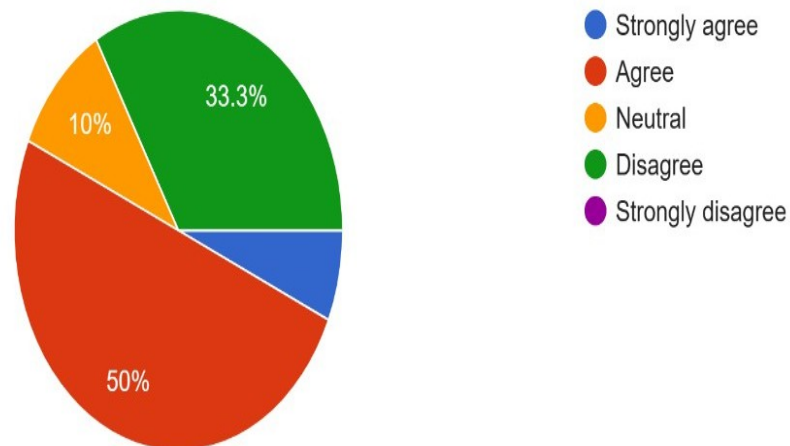


Figure 8. *Rules on showing visual contents and design to ensure ethical communication*

In political posters, opposition parties often use various negative elements against their opponents (Yusuf, M.L., 2021). The graph presents a numerical method on whether these negative elements influence voters. Figure 8 shows that 56.7% (agree 50%, disagree 6.7%) people agree and 33.3% disagree. According to the EML theory, it is possible to influence people through various emotions, whether it is a negative image. Political posters influence voters by portraying a candidate negatively through the use of wordplay and images.

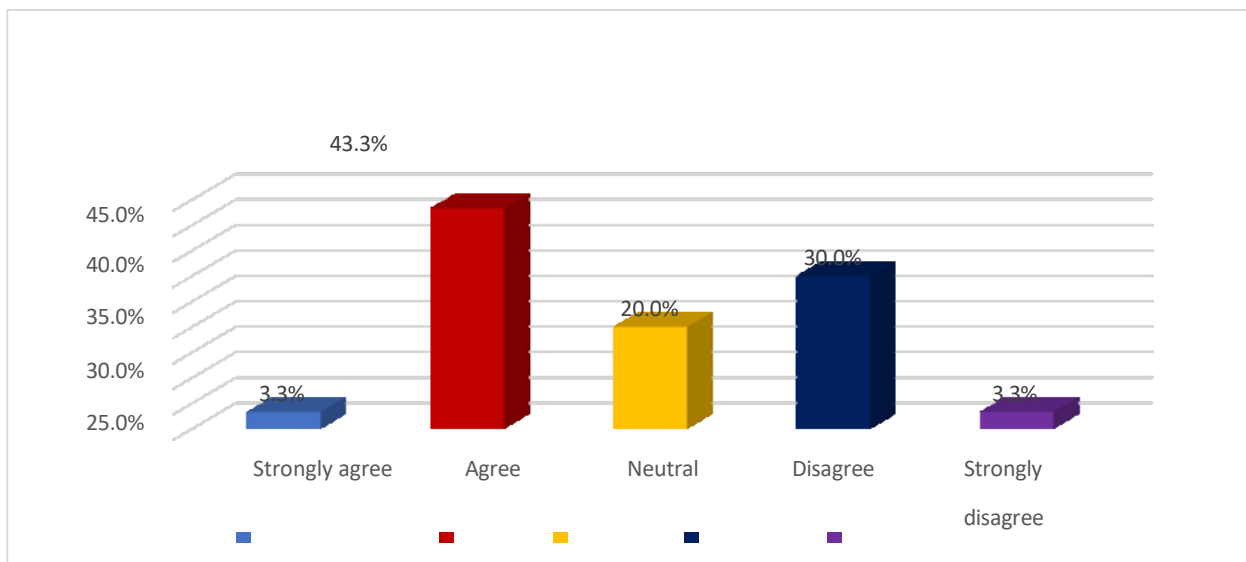


Figure 9. *Trust in the information presented in political posters compared to other forms of political communication*

Figure 9 provides a numerical representation of how much political posters are trusted compared to other political communications. The graph shows that 43.3% of people do not find the information used in political posters to be credible. Again, a combined 33.3% of people believe that political posters are more credible than other media, and 20% of people were neutral.

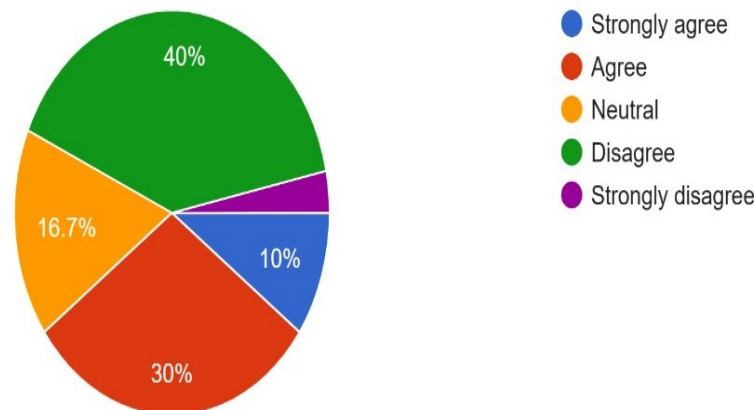


Figure 10. *Voters' behavioral change in the past elections*

Figure 10 presents numbers on whether political posters have any influence on voting in personal lives. 40% of the people feel that political posters have not influenced them in any past election. On the other hand, jointly 40% (agree 30%, strongly agree 10%) of people feel that they have been influenced by political posters in previous elections.

In many cases, it is seen that those who do not belong to any particular caste or group or who have an understanding of modern propaganda are not affected by these issues.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study highlight the significant effect of political posters on voter views and behaviors in Bangladesh, which is consistent with established theoretical viewpoints. Voter attitudes are significantly impacted by the visual elements found in these posters, such as design and color. The expressive impact of symbols and images is consistent with our results. Posters are particularly effective at influencing the opinions of voters about political candidates and parties, as evidenced by the significant acceptance (60%) of their influence among respondents.

In response to the initial research question on how voter perceptions are shaped, this study validates the vital significance of layout techniques and design components as indicated by the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). The research reveals an excellent level of agreement (73.4%) on the persuasive effectiveness of poster design, which is consistent with ELM's theory that visual and cognitive cues play a crucial role in political persuasion.

Furthermore, emotional appeals incorporated into posters reinforce these results by showing how emotional resonance may influence voter decisions, especially when used in relation to ELM's peripheral route of persuasion.

Our analysis reveals that political posters seem to have an impact on voter opinions and behaviors even after elections. The observed differences in trust (43.3% participants finding candidates more trustworthy in term of personality and values) demonstrate the dual role of posters in influencing long-term political views and short-term voting decisions. Strong findings have also been made about the poster's 56.7% contribution to the negative marketing done against a candidate. This feature emphasizes the posters' relevance as effective weapons for influencing public perceptions and encouraging involvement in politics, as well as as their ability to contribute to Bangladesh's socio-political narrative.

With reference to the literature review, our study is consistent with earlier studies that highlight the crucial role that visual components play in political communication, especially when it comes to influencing how voters behave through symbolic and emotive appeals. Persuasive statements in political posters are crafted through the use of visual elements including design, color and imagery, similarly found by Deželan & Maksuti (2012) and Hill (2004). These results, as our research has also discovered, are crucial since they efficiently attract viewers in and convey messages.

Our findings highlight the intrinsic worth of political posters in complex sociopolitical environments where trust is cultivated through seeing the quantity of posters that can be circulated and how engaging the information are (43.3%). Similarly, some studies found local symbols and traditional motifs are included into the posters to promote voter familiarity and trust (Khan, 2018; Rahman, 2019). Ahmed (2017) emphasizes the importance of posters in remote locations where access of digital media is limited, suggesting that visual images, contextual and engaging information play a crucial role in earning voter trust and shaping their perceptions.

Our findings closely align with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). Two persuasive strategies—central and peripheral—are used in posters to sway voters' attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions through emotional and visual appeals. Political posters are an excellent tool for political communication since they are a potent tool for bolstering the democratic process. The study reveals how effectively political posters convey messages, and how voters are able to engage with the color, design, and symbolism of these posters on an intellectual and emotional level. This has the consequence of encouraging their engagement and participation, which raises political participation.

CONCLUSION

This study ends with evidence that it has a major impact on voters' perceptions and actions. According to research, voters' perceptions and behaviors can be affected by color, patterns, and symbols because they can emotionally connect with them. Our research demonstrates that posters can significantly influence voters' decision-making and alter their perceptions on an emotional and cognitive level, which is in line with the EML model. These images' emotional appeal has the power to either directly or indirectly affect viewers.

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