

ROLE OF ELECTRONIC MEDIA IN CHANGING VALUE SYSTEM IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract: *There are various medium of communication like electronic media, print media, internet and mobile communications. Present study focuses on electronic media and its impact on society-changing value system in Pakistan. It also tries to explore different roles and objective of electronic media in changing the society. The study measures diverse aspect of media which influence the society. Pakistan is an Islamic democratic country where media has faced numeral restriction in past eras. From last decade electronic media has got freedom in Pakistan and a large number of electronic channels are established in Pakistan. At the present time media has a powerful affect on individual's lives. Especially electronic media reshape the masses lifestyle and promote a global culture.*

Keywords: Electronic Media, Media Influence, Value System, Cultural Change, Media Impact.

I. WHAT IS ELECTRONIC MEDIA?

Electronic Media” are those communication mediums which are based on electronic or electromechanical means of production and most often distinguished from print media. The primary electronic media sources familiar to the general public worldwide include radio, sound recordings, television, video recording and streaming internet content”. It denotes, “the main means of communicating with large number of people, especially television, radio, internet and satellite”.^[1] The electronic media have four basic functions; to inform, entertain, educate and influence the public opinion.

The 20th century can be termed as the century of communication. The main mean of mass communication grew in succession as the century unfolded. Motion pictures arrived on scene in the first decade of this century. Regular radio broadcasts

started in 1920s. Television entered the arena in 1940s, followed by cable television in 1950s, and satellite television in 1970s. Lastly the personal computer gave access to Internet in 1980s. It transformed the interconnected computer networks through World Wide Web by the 1990s.^[2]

II. WHAT IS VALUE SYSTEM AND CULTURE?

Media messages have a deep impact on the society and are instrumental in creating the popularly accepted norms. Culture can be defined as the way of life which includes beliefs, aesthetics and institutions of a civilization. Considering today's way of life, we would be lying if we didn't admit that media is not an influential entity in our culture. In order to understand the concept of national cultural identity, it must be clear what is meant by “Culture”. Culture can be

defined as, "a complete way of life of people, the shared attitude, values, goals and practices that characterize a group, their customs, art, language, literature, religion, philosophy, etc, the pattern of learned and shared behavior among the members of a group"(Ali, 2010).^[3] In short culture is a way of life shared by the members of a society. This includes their ideas, beliefs, language, values, knowledge, customs and the things they make.

III. MEDIA ELEMENTS AFFECTING OUR CULTURE

Lately the media theories that regard the audience as a passive entity have been discarded and advanced media theories that take into account the audience response have been formulated. It is still a fact that despite cognitive abilities of the audience, the media has been successfully ingraining several values and elements into a large section of our society.

First of all let me tell you that this is no media-bashing agenda. There is no doubt about the fact that there are certain media elements affecting our culture and values for better because, had it not been for media, quick and easy flow of useful information and education would not have been possible. The media has played a major role in positive developments like fight against racism, fight against gender bias, world poverty and spreading awareness about the world peace.

This being said, there is no denying to the fact that certain media messages are detrimental to our society. We need to realize that although media is a reflection of the society we live in but at times, the media needs to do much more than reflect the surroundings - it has to exaggerate, sensationalize and at times even trivialize the matters of utmost importance to make way for entertainment. "The media creates celebrities; it creates idols - celebrities who thrive on fans, followers, and groupies! When we say a certain type of music or a certain genre of movies is popular, it means a large number of people are following an ideology or a concept, which lies at the heart of that song or the movie. One of the most striking examples in this case would have to be the popularity of violent and abusive rap songs amongst teenagers."^[4] The glorification of violence, drug abuse and other unhealthy habits has a major role in

the outburst of unfortunate incidents where children have gotten extremely violent and out of control.

Influence of Electronic Media

In the last 50 years the media influence has grown significantly with the advance of technology, first there was the telegraph, then the radio, the newspaper, magazines, television and now the internet. We live in a society that depends on information and communication to keep moving in the right direction and do our daily activities like work, entertainment, health care, education, personal relationships, travelling and anything else that we have to do. "What we need to be aware is that most of our decisions, beliefs and values are based on what we know for a fact, our assumptions and our own experience. In our work we usually know what we have to do base on our experience and studies, however on our daily lives we rely on the media to get the current news and facts about what is important and what we should be aware of. We have put our trust on the media as an authority to give us news, entertainment and education. However, the influence of mass media on our kids, teenagers and society is so big that we should know how it really works."^[5]

The electronic media has touched every sphere of the human aspect. In the present times, information and technology are interwoven with the society's economic progress. The evolution of electronic media has had an overwhelming impact on the society. The Opportunities of communication have broken all barriers across national boundaries and have led to the germination of new ideas through the cross pollination of cultures. Electronic information has had a positive impact in the promotion of various social regimes.

IV. GROWTH OF ELECTRONIC MEDIA IN PAKISTAN

The electronic media in Pakistan has made rapid progress. Only three or four decades ago, radio and state owned TV was considered to be the main sources of information. Today, we have more than 77 Satellite TV Channels, 2346 cable operators, 28 landing TV Channels from abroad like BBC, CNN, Sky, Star etc. and more than 129 FM Stations(on air and in some cases licences issued) including 46 Radio Channels. The investment this year is expected US\$

1.5 billion. Total investment in this sector is US\$ 2.5 billion. The new jobs likely to be created are 150000. The indirect employment is 7 million. The advertisement market in 2008 was US\$ 431 Million and in 2009 it was estimated as US\$ 691 million. This growth has made available more knowledge and up to date information in all spheres of life to the general public.^[6]

TV started its test transmissions in 1964. Pakistan Television Corporation was incorporated as a joint stock company in 1967 and in 1984 it was converted into a corporation under the Companies Ordinance. PTV has been a great source of entertainment. TV has also effectively disseminated information on a variety of subjects to its viewers. However, the objectives set out for PTV at the time of its inception were:-

- Instruction and enlightenment.
- Enrichment of knowledge and information.
- Wholesome entertainment.
- Promotion of national outlook and integration.
- Presentation of news in a fair, objective, factual manner free from deception by implication and omission.

V. MAJOR TYPES OF ELECTRONIC MEDIA

Radio: In Pakistan like other developing countries, radio is the major source of information and entertainment due to its reach to the far flung areas and being relatively economical. Broadcasts carry news, analyses, commentaries and advertisements. This medium, however, is losing attraction in the public.

Television: TV due to its potentials to offer a greater variety than other elements of electronic media has become the strongest form of media to perform all four functions, i.e. information, education, influence and entertainment.

Internet: Internet is the latest addition into the elements of medium of electronic communication. It is swiftly bringing a historic shift in the dynamics and profile of the global information sector. The medium also provides instant access to the largest data bases and archives of information around the world.^[7]

VI. THE MEDIA AND THE GROUND REALITIES

The most critical obligation of electronic media is to act as the custodian of the facts. There are certain realities and electronic media's mindset and peculiarities, which to some extent are universal. The electronic media is a business, a billion dollar industry and thus its primary motive remains to earn money and not harmonize the society. Due to intense competition in the field of electronic media industry, media has to be competitive; to be "Exclusive and First". The electronic media often looks for controversy, sensationalism and negative news to make headlines. In some cases the electronic media feels that it has the right to interpret what is good or bad for society using its own standards.

The electronic Media was primarily and popularly used by our previous regimes as tool of self propaganda, the quality of news poor, unreliable and un-imaginative presentation of events and stories, ultimately losing the confidence of general public. Introduction of Satellite TV, Cable and Private Channels and Dish widened the scope of awareness of people. The Government of Pakistan realized the sensitivity and potential of private electronic media which could not be avoided through State controlled TV only. The governmental policies regarding electronic media took a different direction, to regulate this sector.

Socio-Political Factors

Intolerance and near absence of civic responsibility, now manifested in our society is indeed the outcome of a hierarchical structure and social barriers, further and enforced by policy approaches in the 80s. Politicizing of religion and language is one major source of fractionalization. "Presently, the culture and society of Pakistan are in the grip of an unprecedented upheaval. In the post 9/11 world, the political, religious, and the social dynamics in Pakistan have been under major internal transformation and intense international scrutiny. Ethnic and sectarian violence which ravaged the country for the last two decades has sharply polarized the society. Various Islamic religious groups jostle violently for power. Religious faith, usually a matter of personal redemption, is flagrantly flaunted and a stunning lack

of tolerance for difference increasingly defines Pakistani society.”^[8]

VII. ELECTRONIC MEDIA’S IMPACT ON PAKISTANI SOCIETY

In Pakistan the electronic media is providing information at a very large scale. It is being recognized as contributing significantly in important national issues. It has a role in accountability process. The PTV is pursuing an agenda of social responsibility there are two main challenges of sustainability of democracy and good governance face by the country. In such a scenario, role of media is to facilitate the democracy. “The social impact of communication and media has seeped deep into social and cultural institutions, paradoxically reviving traditions as well as introducing new practices. Like other processes, communication and information media are bound up with other socio-economic forces, thus making them a strong current of social change.”^[9] The electronic media has created markets resulting in the employment of greater work force in gathering, processing and disseminating information. The electronic media have a vital role to play in the present day world in Pakistan.

The independent electronic media can demonstrate better performance to provide good quality information with its wider reach. “Private channels highlight causes of miss-governance and bring them to the attention of those who are responsible. They can raise public awareness about what the public itself should also do to ensure good governance whether it is correct payment of taxes and bills or issues such as tax avoidance. Such practices should be discouraged and the media has a duty to learn from other countries how this is being done. Private sector media have an enormous educative and mobilizing role to play when it comes to what society do and certainly with respect to highlighting the social responsibility of the media and the citizens.”^[10]

- How does Pakistani society hold together despite its ethnic divisions, segmented classes, and fragmented institutions?
- What are the processes that maintain its social cohesion?

This two-part question raises a critical issue about some semblance of functional equilibrium of society. The electronic media role give new direction to social behaviour, “by changing the boundaries of

social situations, electronic media do not simply give us quicker or more thorough access to events and behaviours. They give us instead, new events and new behaviour.”^[11] Following are some of the roles, both Negative and positive being played by electronic media in Pakistan.

A. Positive Impact of Electronic Media

The electronic media direct social change and values. The electronic media may be successful in stimulating the change in the tightly held ideas and rigid attitudes to bring desired change. The media can give direction to social change, and positively guide the society towards the desired goals.

i. The electronic media and Policy Dialogue

The electronic media can greatly facilitate this exercise and help the people and government to discuss the issues concerning society, to fulfil their desires and achieve their respective objectives. In Pakistan, the people frequently need to be taken into confidence for the initiation of new policies and initiatives. The objective discussion on political and policy issues media can generate support of people for policies of the government.

ii. Social problems and media

The social problems of our society revolve around ignorance, traditionalism and backwardness. The Pakistani society is in transition, social and ethnic issues have become hard, it happens in many societies, but need to be averted in tolerance. It is an established fact that blaming circumstances, whether disorders or external factors, for what is happening for Pakistan is not going to do any good for Pakistan’s survival as a dignified an honorable nation. The electronic media can partly address the challenge of societal transformation.

iii. The effect of media on national issues:

The electronic media has also been highlighting financial irregularities, corrupt practices and inefficiencies of the government functionaries and negative fallouts on the society of the acts of the extremist elements to adopt an appropriate strategy for their eradication. “The media have a measurable effect on public affairs. In the matter of local, national, economic and social issues, they help to create an informed citizenry by clarifying the complex matters of public affairs which exist at the local and national levels. The formation of public opinion towards the civic problems is generated.”^[12] As such the media

give the public a better understanding of these issues with which it must deal and influence those who have to resolve these issues.

iv. Electronic Media Communication and Information

Identification of social problems has always been a difficult job as they fall into a grey area and consequently hard to be known. “Advances in communication and information dissemination, such as television, videos, Internet, and CDs, have increased the circulation of ideas, symbols, and images across national and regional borders. People have access to new sources of news, facts, and entertainment. These media help rationalize, redirect, or impede changes that are underway through economic and social development.”

B. Negative Impact of Electronic Media

i. Objectivity and Electronic Media

The objectivity of media is becoming increasingly questionable, the coverage of issues of national interest demand care and restraint. The media in Pakistan is devoid of objectivity, and just telecast such incidents that sometime are not factual. “The very nature of media is subjective and selective, and therefore suppressive. The general electronic media content do cover non-event-centric aspects of life in Pakistan. There is an imbalanced fixation with events, incidents, accidents and statements.” In order to improve their ratings and enhance viewersship, the tool of sensationalism is used. What is important is to think as to what is being done to own sensibilities and social and moral values.

ii. Causing Desperation among Nation

In these days no news is good news on the Pakistani media. Media has taken away the sense of hope from the masses and has made them over sensitive to their surroundings.

iii. Commercialism and Electronic Media

In today’s world, there is a cross commercialization of the electronic media. Commercially driven, ultra-powerful media primarily serves their sponsors rather than the public. Pakistani media is following the saying, ‘We have no obligation to make history. We have no obligation to make art; we have no obligation to make a positive statement, to make money is our only objective.

iv. Electronic Media and Talk Shows

Generally the talk shows do not meet basic tests of responsible journalism; fairness, objectivity, balance and differentiation between fact and speculation. Honest discussion must be ruled by reason, not emotion alone. Most anchors try to impose their own perspective, instead of objectivity. “However, unfortunately, this role has moved from delineation to distortion. In essence, distortion is in-built into the very nature of media as it is unable to represent totality of given situation. Therefore, media managers in any ongoing situation in a society should strive to minimize that inherent tendency to distort.”^[13]

v. Polarization of the Society

In some instances, the electronic media is accessed by a small segment of society; due to vested interests this group projects its identity disproportionately. The media coverage of such groups is likely to create a polarized society.

vi. Negative Projection of the Country

All events and happenings in Pakistan are not bad. On the contrary sometime nothing positive is discussed in the electronic media. The projection of crimes and anti- social elements all the time is eroding and diminishing the contours of our true identity across the globe.

vii. Pursuance of Foreign Agenda

It is believed that some of Pakistani media has reportedly links with shady foreign characters, are being funded by different foreign elements and their anchors are on their pay rolls and thus are furthering their anti- state agendas.

VIII. DIFFERENT ROLES OF ELECTRONIC MEDIA IN SOCIETY

a) The role of electronic media to create values of nationalism

It is imperative to define the term “Nation” and “Nationalism”. We know that we are a nation; because we are part of a geographical entity. There is a general consensus that the term nationalism denotes sentiment and consciousness, which bind people together. It reflects a state of mind and a realization nurtured over time. “There is no set pattern or sequence in which the process of National Integration should be attempted. Karl W Deutsch is of the view that just as a house can be built from different construction materials in varying sequences, National

Integration too can be attempted in a similar manner”.^[14] It may generally involve following five tasks, “the creation of a sense of territorial integrity; the establishment of a national central authority; the bridging the elite-mass gap; the creation of a “minimum “value consensus; and the devising of integrative institutions and behaviour, ensuring adequate representation of all groups in institutions and decision-making processes”.^[15] The electronic media can play an important role in this regard to highlight the values of nationalism, in Pakistan.

b) The role of electronic media to enhance national cohesion and integration

Internal Security and Electronic Media:-

The Pakistani electronic media can play its role to enhance national cohesion and integration, can give the right direction and can still play a vital role to create awareness in all the spheres of its reach. During the autocratic regimes government tried to curb the media but it showed great resilience and resolve by putting up the resolute battle not only for its own survival but also for the cause of restoration of various democratic institutions.

External Security and Electronic Media:- The electronic media can play an important role in mobilizing the masses on sensitive matters, concerning issues of external security. The public opinion support is a significant tool to defend against the external threats. This will sensitize the public at large to the dictates of national security, cohesion and stability. The Pakistani electronic media may achieve this goal without dramatizing and blowing up the issues.

c) Role of Electronic Media in Democratic Process

The electronic media can play a very important role to strengthen the democratic process and democratic institutions in Pakistan. The media can assist in promoting a culture of tolerance, mutual co-existence and may help in evolving national character to strengthen democratic process.

d) Good Governance and Media

Good governance can be best achieved by strengthening the institutions of the country along with internal and external accountability mechanism. The electronic media as a watch dog can play significant role in scrutinizing the public policies through analysis

and also with the feedback of public at large. It is observed that the media reporters are extremely useful sources in providing initial leads to probe into the scandals, mismanagement, nepotism and various corrupt practices causing loss to public exchequer.

e) Role of Electronic Media in Economic Stability

The new currency for internal security is economics. The most significant factor contributing to the growth and progress of a nation is its economic strength. The electronic media can project the government economic policies and their impact on the people. The media may also provide analysis of international best practises for economic development. The media role in projecting economic well being of the people can generate cohesiveness in the society.

f) Role of Electronic Media in Political Stability

The domestic environment especially the political instability directly affects the national security. Pakistan can project any national policy globally to get support of international community if the internal political environment is peaceful. The electronic media can play an important role in voicing public opinion to generate support for the government policies. The media can also peruse the politicians to a national political agenda, for institutional stability.

g) Role of Electronic Media in Resolution of Sectarian Crisis

The track record of electronic media on ethnic and sectarian clashes between Mohajir – Pathan, Mohajir – Sindhi and Shia – Sunni is extremely encouraging. The media has always followed the neutral line and supported the efforts of government in fighting these internal security issues. The electronic media in this area can play a decisive role as a continuous effort to keep the situation defused by creating harmony between various sects.

h) Role of Electronic Media against Social Evils

The electronic media can play a very vital role in educating the masses about ill effects of social evils like ignorance and backwardness including gun culture and drugs in the society. The awareness can make the society robust and well informed to fulfill their obligations.

IX. CONCLUSION

The forgoing analysis provides answers to; the question is whether the electronic media has the role of changing value system in Pakistan? It can be concluded that the electronic media to some extent has a role in enhancing national integration and cohesion. The electronic media because of its very fast growth in Pakistan significantly influenced the public opinion on national issues. However for an effective role of electronic media towards these national objectives, media has its inherent strengths and limitations.

The electronic media in Pakistan has recorded tremendous growth in a limited time period. In terms of audience both television and radio has significant reach. It can be termed as fourth pillar of the state. The electronic media has impact on value system (both positive and negative) by generating public opinion on national issues. The media, besides the society, has a direct linkage with the politics as well. The electronic media is an agent of change but the direction of change depends upon the reported information. The media has constraints and limitations, like vested interests, corruption, political motives and monetary gains. Because of lack of objectivity in its activities the creditability of media is sometime questioned. The media reporting is also scandalous and unrealistic to define an issue, this aspect of media needs improvement.

The education and training of media people may be arranged at appropriate level to equip them with knowledge and skills to improve quality of reporting. The electronic media may identify societal conditions that resist change and cause disintegration, to bridge the gap in national development. The information sharing in the development of human resources, economic growth, modernization of the society; and shaping of a policy to redirect national affairs is possible with a cooperative approach between the government and electronic media.

Pakistani media is a business like other businesses, a billion dollar industry and thus its primary motive remains to earn money. The media often looks for controversy, sensational and negative news to make it breaking news. The Media feels it has the right to interpret what is good or bad for society using its own standards. It, however, has its own agenda of exploitation and money making, and it has also power of projection of its cause directly to the public.

The relationship between electronic media exposure and behaviour is very complex and many other factors do intervene. It is not possible to prove that the media has direct “effects”, to cause disintegration in the society however it has impact on public value system and culture.

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