

Analysis of mass media: Influences on Socio-political perceptions and stability in Pakistan

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Abstract

In today's global world responsibility of Pakistani media is far more than any other media in the world as Pakistan needs a change for his national solvency. Media reshapes Public opinions, influence cultural, social and political perceptions of people in Pakistan in greater extent. Mass media brings awareness among public about the national issues highlighting certain attributes of national issues. Electronic media make a huge contribution in developing public knowledge but could not produce such behavior that may alter public's attitude towards solving political and national issues. Throughout the history, Pakistani media has been controlled by the state. The electronic media of Pakistan records tremendous growth in short period of time but Reputation of Pakistani media has violated due to its failure in comprehensively understanding the affairs, as media contributes toward crispy issues and crisis rather than addressing the real facts and causes of societal and developmental issues. As media is consider thereal agent of change but the nature and degree of change depends upon the information given coverage . The media content is also disgraceful and not realist to describe an issue. This behavior of media requires change. Media plays a vital role in promoting national cohesion and unity thus there is need of liberal media policy as a driving force for national unity and homogeneity. The need of time is to launch a sustain media campaign. Pakistani media must understand now that it represents the Islamic country in the whole word, the country which holds great importance which is not only Islamic but also recognize as the hallmark of piece in whole world. Now media should change their behavior towards mobilizing the people of Pakistan in order to bring out the country from the deep trench of issues and become highly sensitive towards fulfilling its responsibilities.

Key Words: Integration , Cohesion , Values of Nationalism, Fault Lines

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“Mass media is typically defined as a form of all technologies, especially radio, newspapers, and television, but also encompassing, magazines, and book publishing, as well as advertising, marketing, and public relations or institutional organization” (Imtiaz, 2006: 1). “Beyond these narrow definitions, mass media also encompasses shifting cultural forms shaping human perception and possibilities for social change. Mass media therefore simultaneously includes technical, institutional, and cultural dimensions. This broad conception is required to understand how media shape contemporary human/environment conditions, including representations of nature, popular perceptions of social political and cultural issues” (Logan, 2008: 23).

Mass media is the important strength in the contemporary culture and several sociologists referred mass media as the mediated culture by which media is playing a vital role to reflect and create the culture within different nations. However, the electronic media are those interaction mediums that are based on the electromechanical ways of the production and the main sources of the electronic media sources well known to the individuals around the globe is comprised of radio, television, sound and video recordings as well as inundating internet content (Wells & Hakanen, 1997: 21).

The mass media has a significant political and influential control over the individuals around the globe, the television, radio and the press media could influence different societies. Moreover, mass media by utilizing political propaganda, advertising, and the professed mind bending power cause a long standing reasons of concerns in the form of influencing the individuals of the country. Furthermore, the most controversial problems that are the significant consequences of the mass media on the social behaviors of the individuals within the country is specifically violence and criminal behaviors. The mass media have frequently been accused of causing the epidemics of turbulence within the society (Talbot, 1998: 32).

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“Media of any country is reflection of that country. It shows that how person behave and live in their country. The way of expressing news, way of talking of politicians in political debates and discussion programs shows the behavior of people of that country. Although media’s responsibility is to spread true stories but media should be careful in this regard” (Bhabha, 1994: 43). “They have to adopt such a way in which they could aware public without impacting negatively their mind sets and make them able to protest in a true manner which could result oriented”. McCombs and Shaw (1972: 34) “assumed that the mass media sets the agenda for political campaigns, influencing public attitudes toward desired issues. Hence it can be said that, in Pakistan the responsibility of media is much more than any media in the world, because

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Pakistan needs a big change and only media is now, as much powerful. At present media is the only source which is easily accessible by all walks of people through various electronic appliances i.e. TV, Radio, Internet, News Papers and now mobile phones also used by people to aware of events every time. Media affects people's perceptions and priorities their thinking about the political contents" (Potter, 2010: 32). "Media shapes the public's behavior about the issues and plays vital role in highlighting certain attributes of issues. Gatekeepers of the media i.e. (editors, news editors, and other journalists) they all play central role in shaping the media agenda which becomes public agenda after sometime" (Banton, 2000: 44).

"In Pakistan media are now independent with the emergence of new century. There are numbered of news channels that have maximum coverage throughout the country. Media contribute a lot to develop public knowledge but even after years of success, media could not alter public's attitude towards issues" (Hechter, 2000: 43). "Media promulgate issues in a way that it raise public immediately just after the news bulletin whereas public mostly do not know that what should be their role and reaction in that particular issue. Media should discourage smoothly such attitude of public. Demonstrations and protests are good to increase pressure towards solution of any problem but there should be a proper way to express which should result oriented" (Lawrence, 2005: 23).

"With the passage of time reputation of Pakistan's media have sullied due to its failure in thoroughly comprehending affairs. It seems that media contributes to multiply wording over issues and crisis instead of spreading true root causes and facts of the issues" (Tomlinson, 1999: 43). "Media coverage of political issues is heavily episodic instead of thematic. There are numbered of political talk shows and debates on all news channels of Pakistan. Any issue discussed in those programs has no ending and determining words that could help people to understand that either there is solution to these issues or not? Every political program discusses same issue under different names of the program. There is no difference in the information displayed by each program even the views of politicians from different political parties give no hope and track towards the solution of issues. If these programs demonstrate issues successfully then it could help people to pressurize government in a right way to solve the issue" (Banton, 2000: 22).

"Media and Judiciary are two independent pillars to save the country from sudden slippage. Judiciary put down number of good decisions in her little age of independence which is only one year. Whereas media is older then judiciary and it shows no positive alterations in people's attitude towards the ridiculous change" (Niazi, 1994: 22). "Pakistan's media should understand that it presents the country which is of high importance not only for Islamic

world but also for peace in whole world. Media should become highly sensitive towards its responsibilities while presenting this country to the world and guiding the people of Pakistan to bring out the country from the sea of issues” (Amir, 2008: 45).

“The society and culture are threatened in Pakistan. The patterns of life are changing because of impact of education and electronic media, which have to be facilitated in a positive manner. With regards to media’s role in promoting national cohesion and unity, Media can shape public perceptions on these issues but does not create or solve these problems” (Amir, 2008, 54). “What matter the most are government policies and their impact. Media can be a force for national unity only if it adheres to an agreed code of ethics. Finally, a liberal media policy is a prerequisite to play its due role as a vehicle for national unity and cohesion. We are a highly polarized society, segmented along ethnic, sectarian, ideological and gender issues. Faltering economic growth and stagnant social development have only reinforced these tensions. Without achieving economic solvency and the promise of a better future, our national cohesion will remain under stress” (Yusuf, 1997:12). Our “biggest fault line is the rising demographic pressure on our resources. We need to launch a sustained media campaign to bring this pressure down. This is one area in which media can play a pivotal and non-partisan role.

The strengths of electronic media include the viewer ship which has reached to eighty six million according to 2009 Gallup survey. Since more than 2000, TV cable operators have emerged as audio-video platforms promoting and influencing the society” (Gallup, 2009: 1). Meanwhile, “increasing influence of internet and TV channels are raising power potential of these audio and video platforms. It is not making values but just making the people aware of events and happenings. The media is often blamed for social ills to the determinant of identifying the real causes of the problems. We have to see the impact of the dynamics of the society, the governmental culture of power and governance, and various policies and actions, instead of putting blame on media” (Sharma, 2007: 54). The correlation between of electronic media exposure and behaviour is quite complex. It is difficult to prove that the media has direct “effects”; however, its impact on formation of public opinion is quite stronger.

The electronic media in Pakistan is incessantly shaping and reshaping the opinions, attitudes, and perceptions of individuals. Moreover, the electronic media in Pakistan has turned out to be the prevailing medium of the moment by dispersing the education, information, as well as entertainment and at the same time, it helps to bring the current news of the events and the developments around the globe (Amir, 2008: 65). Furthermore, in Pakistan,

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television is productively playing a three dimensional role of educating, informing and entertaining the public and besides government owned PTV, there are also several other private channels functioning in the country. However, the outreach of these channels to the viewership and listenership is sternly controlled by means of the laws and instrument that hampers the progress of the enabling surroundings within the country (Lawrence, 2005: 65).

Moreover, it is identified that the ministry of the information in Pakistan has played a greater role to this unfortunate state of affairs by discouraging the private media from reporting on the problems in the form of politics, current affairs, and specifically terrorism (Wells & Hakanen, 1997: 33).

The role of electronic media to create values of nationalism

“In this section the role of electronic media in national cohesiveness and integration shall be discussed. It is imperative to define the term “Nation” and” Nationalism” (Alter, 1989). “There is a general consensus that the term nationalism denotes sentiment and consciousness, which bind people together” (Alter, 1989: 34). “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” (Sharma, 2007: 32). 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 (Tomlinson, 1999: 66). The electronic media can play a vital role to highlight the nationalism, in Pakistan.

In the report of the post seminar by the name of “Role of Media: promoting the culture of mutual tolerance, civic responsibility and the rule of law, it is demonstrated that the major role of the electronic media is to enhance nationalism within the country” (Imtiaz, 2006: 33). However, it also demonstrated that the modern societal dilemmas in the ways of the development of the nation and in what best possible way the influential media could be harnessed for the curative route and the communal revitalization of the country (Lawrence, 2005: 22).

What is National Integration?

“The concept of National Integration is subject to a wide range of interpretations. However, two definitions which catch the essential spirit of the concept include, the creation of a National Political System which supersedes or incorporates all the regional sub-cultures, and the creation of a common national consciousness, a common national consensus and a common national identity” (Bhabha, 1994: 65). These “two definitions appear adequate for working purposes as they underline both the political as well as the socio-cultural ingredients of the process of integration. National cohesion refers to the bonds or “glue” that binds members of society, community or other groups together” (Zaidi & Ray, 2000: 54). The “most obvious bonds are ideological, ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural and historic. However, the homogeneity of a nation is no guarantee of successfully bonding together as a cohesive whole. The extent of the threat posed to the integrity of a state by the multiplicity of languages, races, religions etc., depends on a variety of factors but there are basically two requisites (conflict of ideology and economic decline) which must be present before a country may be deemed to be faced with a problem of national disunity” (Hechter, 2000: 67). The “Pakistani society is in transition, and it faces challenges but still the national interest is to make Pakistan as a unity-in-diversity and there is an ever-growing need to develop a harmonious society. The balance sheet of social changes in Pakistani society over the past half century has both cost and benefits. Pakistani society has split into class-cum-lifestyle segments. Its social institutions do not dovetail into each other; instead fissures of institutional lag run through them. Its cohesiveness has given way to the fragmentation and the erosion of value and moral consensus” (Imtiaz, 2006: 43).

In Pakistan, the national integration does not signify making ethnic or national homogeneity all over the country, somewhat it means that creating the bond that are utilized to combine the population in the usual “political and social structures, statehood , a sense of identity and of belonging together” (Imtiaz, 2006: 76).

Fault Lines in National Cohesion and Integration in Pakistan

Basically, Pakistan is multi-ethnic state as each of its provinces is associated with specific linguistic groups such as Punjab is associated with Punjabis, Sindh is associated with Sindhis, Balochistan is associated with Balochs, and NWFP is associated with Pashtuns (Zaidi & Ray, 2000: 54). There are, however, various divisions of ethnic and linguistic within every unit. Sindh is the most diverse province of Pakistan in terms of ethnicity as Mohajirs form the majority in urban Sindh, and Sindhis dominate the rural Sindh and moreover, Punjabis, Pashtuns and Balochs also resides in Sindh. Siraikis and Sindhis are in a considerable amount residing in Balochistan as this province

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is home based province for Balochs and Pashtuns. Moreover, Punjab and NWFP are also not homogenous provinces any more (Mushtaq, 2009).

“Integration or cohesion is an ideal, it is not a thing but a process. It is dynamism ruled by an inner necessity, being guided in a direction chosen by itself as a goal or rather a series of goals leading to a certain direction. National integration and social cohesion is the capacity of a society to ensure the welfare of its all members, minimize disparities and avoid polarization” (Yusuf, 1997: 64). A “cohesive society is mutually supportive community of free individuals, pursuing these common goals by democratic means. National integration and social cohesion is at risk in Pakistan because of many impeding factors, which originate within the country or influenced by external reasons. It may also be a complex outcome of interaction between the country forces and stresses and influences of global scenario” (Zaidi & Zaidi, 1997: 64).

Pakistani society has some draw backs in national cohesion and integration. The “uncertainty about peace, security, bad-governance and system of justice has generated a sense of deprivation in the society” (Pakistan, 1997: 1). The “stake holders in maintenance of national cohesion and integration are State Institutions, Judiciary, Defence Forces, Law and Order Machinery, Political Parties, Civil Society, Public Opinion Groups, and electronic media” (Yusuf, 1997: 65). The “electronic media in Pakistan as a source of immense influence and change has also come and has to stay as fourth pillar of the State. The state policies against the aspirations of people and pressure groups are being exposed in the electronic media. The electronic media has also occupied globally a significant and very central position. Media has to play an important role in alleviation of the socio-political problems of Pakistani society” (Tomlinson, 1999: 34).

The “electronic media has emerged as an effective tool, globally, and at home for building favourable/unfavourable opinions and attitudes of the masses for the preferred themes, to achieve the desired objectives. If applied positively, its contribution in achieving national integration, socio-economic uplift and in building a cohesive, tolerant and forward looking society cannot be over emphasized” (Retallick & Farah, 2005: 3).

In Pakistan, the division of society based on sects, tribes, colors and belief have given rise to the intolerance towards others sects. Moreover, it is identified that the violence within the country based on the sectarianism is on the mount and hence electronic media is required to play a significant role to reduce the discrimination among citizens of the country (Sharma, 2007: 55). Furthermore, it has also been identified that the religious fanaticism and extremism is focused on the religious identities since the Pakistani society has

faced continuous challenges of terrorism in the name of religion and faith (Ahmed, 1990: 3).

The role of media to enhance nationalism and integration

It has been observed that the electronic media has a significant role to play for the pledge of issues being faced by the Pakistan in the form of political unsteadiness, bad domination, fragile financial system, ethnic divisions, and religious activism. Moreover, electronic media also plays vital role to control the birth rate, disharmony between the provinces and interior aggression and prejudice within the Pakistani society as well as lack of national integration and harmony (Banton, 2000: 481). The development of media in Pakistan particularly in the domain of electronics represented the appearance of the media in the country as the innovative powerhouse together with the inherent restrictions (Bhabha, 1994: 22).

The role of electronic media to enhance the nationalism and integration is demonstrated as follows:

Role of Media for Employment sustainability. The electronic media has made markets ensuing in the employment of a big number of persons in congregating, and circulating the useful information that has influenced the huge amount of people in Pakistan (Diamond, 1997: 54).

Role of Media against Mis-governance. The sovereign electronic media within the country has demonstrated better performance to provide the high-quality information concerning the political situation of the country and has reached the large amount of people. In Pakistan, the private channels has played a significant role in highlighting the major causes of poor governance and convey them to the awareness of those who are responsible of this poor governance within the country (Lawrence, 2005: 76). The private channels has raised public responsiveness regarding what the public itself is required to do in order to make sure effective governance within the country by highlighting the issues concerning the payment of taxes and bills in the form of tax evasion. Moreover, these practices are required to be disheartened and the Pakistani media should learn from other countries that in what way this is being done in other countries (Tomlinson, 1999: 77).

“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” (Niazi, 1994: 13). “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

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also for the cause of restoration of various democratic institutions” (Potter, 2010: 43).

The “electronic media can play an important role in mobilizing the masses on sensitive matters, concerning issues of external security” (Bourdieu, 1998: 43). 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” (McCombs & Shaw, 1972: 180).

“Role of Media in Democratic Process and Good Governance: The electronic media can play a very important role to strengthen the democratic process and democratic institutions in Pakistan” (Diamond, 1997: 12). The “media can assist in promoting a culture of tolerance, mutual co-existence and may help in evolving national character to strengthen democratic process” (Mann, 2005: 25). Moreover, the electronic media through its round the clock transmission has turned out to be powerful enough to manipulate the public opinions and behaviors concerning the democratic process and after the induction of the private channels that are free from the control of the government has transformed and liberalized the public opinions within the country (Sabir, 2011: 70).

“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” (Mann, 2005: 50).

“Role of Media in Economic and Political 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 practices for economic development. The media role in projecting economic well being of the people can generate cohesiveness in the society” (Lawrence, 2005: 43).

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” (Gallup, 2009: 1). Moreover, the electronic media can facilitate the Pakistani citizens to learn, know and understand many multiple visions and conflicting views concerning politics through the eyes of non national media and this can cause the era of tolerance and effective democracy in the government of Pakistan (Sabir, 2010: 110).

“Role of Electronic Media in Resolution societal 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” (Hechter, 2000: 23).

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” (Amir, 2008: 23).

Conclusion

Throughout its history Pakistan media has been controlled by state. Although it has been able to influence the cultural, social and political perceptions of people of Pakistan. The government controlled media has brought to fore the visions of one's own self, the national Islamic identity of Pakistan. Nevertheless, over a period of time it has also brought unfamiliar enemy visions into the familiar national culture.

The media has paradigmatic impact on formulationg public opinion on all issues especially national issues. Fault lines have been created in Pakistan due to socio-politico and economic issues . The media has a direct strong link with the politics and political affairs as well. Media is a strong agent of change but this change depends on the broadcast content. The major constraints and limitations, ofm media are personal interests, corruption, political affiliations and monetary benefits. Main point to be articulated is that media due to its constraints is more like agenda following than agenda setting. So media is yet to be the real fourth pillar though it is making strong efforts and in many cases it has won success .It is strongly hoped that in coming episodes of its history

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media will create better and authentic homogeneity and nationalism the in society. Moreover, electronic media has played a significant role in identifying the societal conditions that restrict the transformation and cause dissolution in order to bridge the gap for the national growth.

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