

ELECTRONIC MEDIA: A SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF ITS IMPACT IN PAKISTANI SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT:

Media particularly, electronic media is a powerful instrument for bringing visible changes in the views, out look, attitude and interest of people.

The media is not only providing entertainment, information but also highlighting what is actually going on in the society, in the country and around the world. Media focuses on socio-economic, political and ideological issues and pinpoints the ills and evils prevailing in the society. Media plays significant role in the war against terrorism in the country and in bringing about the integration in the country. This article intends to highlight the role of media and its impact on minds and hearts of people, the environment in which it functions, the margin which has been left for further improvement and change in future.

Keywords: *Mass media, TV, Radio, Mobile, Internet, Radicalization, Extremism, Talibanization*

Introduction.

a. Multiple Dimensions of Modern Media

Television, movies and the Internet are having an effect on mankind that would have been unimaginable even a century ago. The media both print and electronic shape our lives and our minds in ways that most fail to realize, and with sobering effects! Electronic media plays an indispensable role in the modern world. Television, radio, movies, the Internet and print extend their influence upon our culture, our behavior and our brain¹⁸.

Since the media plays an important role in shaping public opinion, they have great potential to facilitate the dialogue among civilizations by expanding the public's knowledge about the belief systems and the practices of other cultural, religious, ethnic, and social groups. This potential, however, is not automatically realized, as the media operate under various constraints, such as

financial limitations and strong competition, commercial marketing considerations, ideological biases on the part of individual media, a public demand for sensational and “exotic” news, or a growing demand for visual material. These constraints, more often than not, lead to a shortsighted, one-dimensional, stereotypical, and biased coverage of events in other cultures.

Media professionals may become more aware of the vital role that the media play in informing the public and its potential to foster justice, peace and mutual respect among different cultural, religious, ethnic and social groups, nationally and internationally. Individual newsmakers may constantly reflect upon their own level of objectivity and tolerance in choosing a subject to report and the style and words in which to do so.

Similar to conventional media, the so-called new media and new information and communication technologies embody a huge potential to facilitate dialogue among civilizations. The internet, in particular, offers individuals the opportunity to easily communicate with members of other cultural and social groups irrespective of national or other borders. These new forms of media contribute greatly to increased, diversified and decentralized information flows. New technological developments have made it possible to establish connections among mobile telephones, televisions, personal computers, and other electronic devices. The wireless and satellite technology can be used to partly substitute for – but not fully replace - conventional communication infrastructure, allowing developing countries to “leapfrog” technological developments¹⁹.

b. Society and civilization transformation through media

Examples from various parts of the world show that the media can both facilitate and obstruct intercultural dialogue in multicultural societies. In some cases, the media have played an important role in enabling a better understanding among local groups belonging to different identities, ideological frames of reference and value systems by giving them room to report on specific ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious matters while simultaneously disclosing what they share in common. In other cases, however, media catering to specific ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious

¹⁸ Douglas. S. Winnail (volume 1, Issue 1). September 18. 2009

¹⁹ www.mfa.gov taken on 18, September, 2009

groups have created or reinforced an “image of categorization”, according to which individuals develop a strong identification with their own ethnicity, culture, language religion and an antagonism towards the "other". This process can lead, as it has done in the recent past and continues to do, to violent clashes between members belonging to different ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious groups²⁰.

More conducive to the dialogue among civilizations are media which through their coverage of news events involving members of other cultural groups try to emphasize the existence of some common ground, of basic ideas shared by members of all civilizations within the cultural diversity and pluralism which characterize humanity today. This type of news coverage and feature articles or programs would encourage readers and audience to comprehend, respect and appreciate the particularities of different cultures in their locality, country, region and the world, by presenting such cultures with close reference to the respective “native” value systems and cultural parameters. At the same time, they would give room to showing the commonalities, shared values, customs, ways of life that exist across cultural boundaries, thereby eventually enabling the establishment of some common frames of reference in some areas – as opposed to universal values – among the members of different civilizations²¹.

Objectives of the study:

1. The type of facilities of electronic media available to people.
2. The reasons for the choice of TV channels and radio stations.
3. Identifying individuals, organizations and countries, sponsoring, and cooperating each of
 - a. these media for their purpose (if any) behind it.
4. The extent media fulfills criteria of its reliability and suitability.
5. The reasons for the popularity TV/ Radio programs among the people.
6. The availability of mobile phone to people and their use.
7. A piece of advice for the owners and producers of TV and Radio programmes to improve and innovate their future programs.

Method and Procedure of the Study

I. Nature of the Study

The nature of study is descriptive, a popular type of research undertaken in social sciences. It involves collection of data, testing hypotheses, answering of key questions relating to socio-economic, political, cultural and educational issues. This type of research is concerned with conditions, relationships that exist, practice that prevail, beliefs, points of view or attitude that are held, effects that are felt and trends that are emerging.

II. Sample of the Study

Problems in scientific research cannot be solved without sampling tools because most of the educational and social phenomena consist of large number of units. It is not always possible to interview, test or observe each and every one under controlled conditions. Therefore non-probability purposive sampling technique has been adopted for this study.

²⁰ www.mediasouthasia.org taken on 26, September, 2009

²¹ www.aiou.edu.pk taken on 28, September, 2009

III. Characteristic of the Sample

300 respondents have been selected from settled districts of N.W.F.P, FATA and Baluchistan to provide requisite information on questionnaire, designed for this purpose.

Tools of Collection of Data (Questionnaire)

A comprehensive questionnaire designed has been fielded for collection of factual information about the current conditions, and practices in which electronic media is used and exerts impact on people in the selected area of NWFP, FATA and Baluchistan.

Analysis of data:

Table I: Shows the nature of spending leisure time by Respondents

Nature of Spending Spare Time	No. / Percent	Don't Know	Yes	No.	Total	Not responded	Total
Spending time with family	No.	1	212	83	296	4	300
	%	0.3	70.7	27.7	98.7	1.3	100
Spending time with friends	No.	1	178	117	296	4	300
	%	0.3	59.3	39	98.7	1.3	100
Watching TV	No.		205	90	296	4	300
	%	0.3	68.3	30	98.7	1.3	100
Watching DVDs	No.	1	37	258	296	4	300
	%	0.3	12.3	86	98.7	1.3	100
Listening to the radio	No.	1	105	190	296	4	300
	%	0.3	35	63.3	98.7	1.3	100
Listening to music	No.	1	92	203	296	4	300
	%	0.3	30.7	67.7	98.7	1.3	100
Reading Books	No.	1	122	173	296	4	300
	%	0.3	40.7	57.7	98.7	1.3	100
Reading Newspapers/Magazines	No.	1	157	138	296	4	300
	%	0.3	52.3	46	98.7	1.3	100

Table II: Shows TV channels watched by respondents yesterday

		Yes	No.	Don't Know	Total	Not responded	Total
PTV1	No.	128	102	3	233	67	300
	%	42.7	34	1	77.7	22.3	100
GEO NEWS	No.	136	94	3	233	67	300
	%	45.3	31.3	1	77.7	22.3	100
PTV WORLD	No.	91	139	3	233	67	300
	%	30.3	46.3	1	77.7	22.3	100
PTV 2	No.	30	200	3	233	67	300
	%	10	66.7	1	77.7	22.3	100
GEO TV	No.	45	185	3	233	67	300
	%	15	61.7	1	77.7	22.3	100
Aaj TV	No.	67	163	3	233	67	300
	%	22.3	54.3	1	77.7	22.3	100
ARY ONE WORLD	No.	61	169	3	233	67	300
	%	20.3	56.3	1	77.7	22.3	100
EXPRESS TV	No.	84	146	3	233	67	300
	%	28	48.7	1	77.7	22.3	100

Table III: Shows individuals, organizations or countries who sponsor cooperate with each of these channels

Individuals		PTV	Geo News	ARY	Khyber	Express News	Aaj TV	Dawn News
Private funders/Individual Philanthropists	No.	20	94	89	74	92	88	77
	%age	6.7	31.3	29.7	24.7	30.7	29.3	25.7
Religious organizations (Excluding Taliban)	No.							
	%age							

Taliban	No.	2						
	%age	0.7						
NGOs	No.	2	3	2				
	%age	0.7	1.0	0.7				
Charities	No.	1		2	1	1	1	1
	%age	0.3		0.7	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3
Private companies	No.	44	80	74	85	82	83	75
	%age	14.7	26.7	24.7	28.3	27.3	27.7	25.0
CIA	No.	1		1	2			2
	%age	0.3		0.3	0.7			0.7
US embassy	No.						1	
	%age						0.3	
RAW	No.						1	
	%age						0.3	
ISI	No.	22	3	1	6	2		
	%age	7.3	1	0.3	2.0	0.7		
M16	No.							
	%age							
Don't Know	No.	6	6	7	6	6	6	12
	%age	2.0	2.0	2.3	2.0	2.0	2.0	4.0
Total	No.	98	186	176	174	183	180	167
	%age	32.7	62.0	58.7	58.0	61.0	60.0	55.7

Table IV: Indicates respondents' activities associated with mobile at least once a week

Activities		Don't Know	Yes	No	Total	Not responded	Total
Make or receive voice calls	No.	2	254	7	263	37	300
	%	0.7	84.7	2.3	87.7	12.3	100
Send or receive SMS text	No.	2	207	54	263	37	300
	%	0.7	69	18	87.7	12.3	100
Browse Internet	No.	2	8	254	264	36	300
	%	0.7	2.7	84.7	88	12	100
Share pictures, video and music via Bluetooth	No.	2	56	206	264	36	300
	%	0.7	18.7	68.7	88	12	100
Watching video clips	No.	2	86	176	264	36	300
	%	0.7	28.7	58.7	88	12	100
Send receive SMS texts	No.	2	74	188	264	36	300
	%	0.7	24.7	62.7	88	12	100
Listen to the radio	No.	2	32	230	264	36	300
	%	0.7	10.7	76.7	88	12	100
Send receive MMS	No.	2	27	233	262	38	300
	%	0.7	9	77.7	87.3	12.7	100

Discussion on findings

Situational Analysis:

The following situational analysis has been made in the light and spirit of the issues addressed in this article.

a. Problems and Issues

Pakistan had been besetting with many serious problems and issues since its inception, unfortunately, these problems have been multiplied with the passage of time and the conditions have

been moving from bad to worse particularly, in the socio-economic spheres of the country. The nation is still griping in the dark in search of light. It is threatened to be disintegrated. Terrorism and the surge of militancy and religious extremism reflecting such depressing situation in the country.

Moreover, insecurity has become a night mare for people. Their person, purse and property are not safe. Further, people are groaning under the pain of the burden of inflation, unemployment, in home blasts they lose their lives and the absence of basic necessities of life. However, people are not entirely pessimistic. They still hope for silver lining in the dark clouds and a ray of light at the end of a dark.

b. Availability of Media Facilities

People irrespective of area possess modern electronic media gadgets, like TV, Radio, Mobile phones and Computers. However, it depends upon the situation which determines the status of their presence with them. For example, variety of programmes can be watched by people living in urban areas where satellite and cable facilities are available and where more than fifty private TV channels are watched and internet facilities are also available in the prime educational institutions and in internet cafes but such facilities have not been provided in rural areas which constitutes 70.0% of population of the country.

C. Impact of Media

The impact of electronic media on the mind, interest, values, views and attitude of people as already noted, is formidable. The influence of TV and Internet on people particularly on young people as compared to radio is more powerful. The installation of dozens of private TV channels with cable connections, have made the choice for people difficult. They however, watch TV for a few hours daily and for long hours on holdings.

d. Credibility of TV Channels and Radio Stations

The type of TV channels both state controlled and privately managed, are watched by people. Urbanities have developed taste for private TV channels like Geo News, Express News, ARY One World, Aaj TV and Dawn and people in the rural area where cable facilities are not available, are content with to watch PTV and PTV1. These channels are reliable in their view. The private TV channels as noted above are liked by people because they fulfill the conditions to considerable extent. Such as they provide a balanced view of events, these channels are for people like them and are the first with breaking news. Other channels are not so popular among them.

e. Credibility of TV Anchors

TV anchors or presenters of the programmes play important role in providing popularity to the channels. The popularity and credibility of the channels depend upon the credibility, reliability, trustfulness, competence, impartiality, their piercing eyes and deep insight into events. These qualities are attributed to TV anchors listed in the above section.

f. People's Expectations of Media

The owners and producers of TV channels and radio stations have been urged to produce more rich, diversified, innovative, informative and educative programmes consistent with the social, economic, cultural and spiritual aspirations. Media is the most powerful and effective mode of

informal education for people whose literacy rate is still below 50.0% of population in the country. People also expect that public money is not wasted by state on their own controlled media, merely for propagating its hollow achievements and brushing the facts under the carpet.

g. *Sponsoring of Media Sources*

It has been revealed that the media i.e. TV channels and radio stations are generally sponsored by private individuals and private companies. The countries where such facilities have been installed, are sponsored and cooperated with each of these media, under the umbrella of their respective information and broadcasting ministries. The private TV channels are independent in their management but had to follow the policy and code of ethics, so framed for their function. An encouraging indication is that sensitive organizations like CIA, ISI US Embassy, Raw etc are not involved in the affairs of TV channels and do not pursue their ‘hidden agenda’ (if any) through these sources. If such policy is continued in future, it is hoped that a healthy and enabling environment will be created for smooth sailing of media enterprise under the emerging democratic dispensation in the country.

h. *Access to Internet Facilities*

The Internet facilities available to people, particularly to young in the target area, are limited. In backward areas like Baluchistan, FATA and other agencies, such facilities have not been developed. Even at educational institution level, like installation of centralized Internet system, is not available to people. Internet cafes are not existing. Their websites are also limited. They have not page or site that they can regularly update. Development of Internet facilities is a challenging task for the policy makers and planners. It is therefore, urged that first appropriate arrangements be made in educational institutions. Students be given knowledge and skill on their proper, positive and creative use. Internet Café may be developed at accessible centers. Students may also be given financial assistance for arranging Internet facilities at their homes.

i. *A Vision for Media*

Media is a powerful instrument to be used for bringing about change in the interest, views, values, ideals, attitude and aspirations of the people. It is the most attractive and effective mode of informal education. People irrespective of age, and location, have been devoting a major part of their life to watch and listen to it and internalize what they sense and feel. People therefore, expect it to be credible, reliable and trustful institution. Therefore, it should stand firmly and steadfastly on three “Forms” pillars. These pillars are:

- I. To “inform” the people about events based on facts.
- II. To “reform” the society on socio-cultural, moral values and ideals.
- III. To “transform” the society, keeping in view the democratic ideals and the demands of 21st century

Recommendations:

The following recommendations are forwarded for improvement of the situation.

- I. People attach high expectation to media, particularly electronic media which truly speaks from the core of their hearts. Without exaggeration, people look at as the

panacea of their ills and evils. Such role is expected to be made more strong, more powerful, more independent and more impartial in future.

- II. Media may honestly, sincerely and diligently peruse its ideal like informing the people, reforming and transforming the society. These goals may be achieved through engaging competent persons, improving infrastructure and forwarding more rich and innovative programs.
- III. People are aware of the chronic social, political and economic problems. They are anxious about their solution. The media is expected to help search out practical solutions of the problems for stakeholders.

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